

# **RETROSPECT**

## **An Eyewitness account of Mr. Aquilino S. Xavier**

### **VIENTE DE OCTOBRE 1898: REBELLION IN CULASI**

In 1897 Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo commissioned Angel Salazar, Head of the Antique Revolutionary Government while acting as a member of the Revolutionary Council along with Apolinario Mabini; Angel Salazar was a fellow Mason and a schoolmate of Aguinaldo at the University of Santo Tomas, College of Law; also acted as a tactical revolutionary planner alongside Gen. Aguinaldo and Apolinario Mabini at the height of the fever for insurrection against the Spanish rule.

Don Juan Xavier, like Angel Salazar, was from Culasi, Antique. He had a lucrative sugar trading business supplying muscovado sugar principally to tabacalera in Manila. In one of his trips he met with Angel Salazar in Manila and was introduced to Gen. Aguinaldo. Angel Salazar appointed him president of the revolutionary government for Antique; at the same time while Alcalde Municipal of Culasi. He was openly leading anti-Spanish regime revolutionary sentiments. This movement has caught the attention of the authorities; was subpoenaed twice for questioning but chose to ignore those subpoenas.

In the early evening of October 19, 1898 Capitan Juancho received a formal summons from a coronel brandets, a Spanish military commander who had arrived earlier that day aboard a naval frigate "Churruca" with a contingent of about 80 Guardia Civiles and military conscripts.

In the initial meeting between the coronel and Capitan Juancho it became known that a dialogue was to take place regarding prior summonses that were disregarded.

So as a welcome gesture, Capitan Juancho invited the coronel along with his men for a dinner-party at his residence, but more importantly for that "dialogue". This arrangement was not acceptable to the Spanish officer; he insisted the venue will be at the convent. At that point Capitan Juancho learned that the Spaniards planned to capture him "dead or alive". A bale of rattan strips was prepared to tie him up to be thrown overboard.

Along with his men, Capitan Juancho has hatched some off-setting strategies to counters the coronels plan and were ready whenever the moment was right.

Capitan Juancho took the gamble; took the food and drinks to the convent. Taking with him his three young daughters, Maria, Modesta and Carmen as food

servers. Towards midnight, the girls were sent home. The haughty and overbearing Coronel was setting ready to do his job.

Whereupon Capitan Juancho Xavier was ordered to stand erect beside the priest and his courier-scribe, Pedro Coronica. His hands were tied behind his back using those rattan strips. A crime of insurrection and rebellion was read to him along with a litany of other crimes which were punishable by death; it was also announced that "Jues de Cuchillo" (martial law) was instantly embodied therewith.

The youthful Pedro Coronica, sensing imminent danger and urgency-darted towards the door and got lost under cover of darkness. That was the signal that the Tiradores loyal to Capitan Juancho to storm the convent and started the slaughter of drunken soldiers, slashed their throats and stabbed their bellies. Blood was all over the place.

They untied the hands of 'Tan Juancho and the priest begged him to stop the massacre. Colonel Brandeis came out from hiding in the rectory and pleaded to be allowed to carry their dead and wounded back to the "churruca" which was anchored at the beach not far from the convent. Before dawn their boat sailed away. The insurrectos and tiradores of 'Tan Juancho along with some people in town stood by the beach until sunrise when the last glimmer of that boat has disappeared. The strategy worked and the mission was fully accomplished.

In the many revolts and uprising listed in the history books this was the first successful and complete victory in the Western Visayas.

Early in the morning of October 20<sup>th</sup> all the town's people gathered at the church courtyard amid great jubilation and cheers of "Viva Filipinas" and "Viva Tan Juancho". The church bells rang all day; the Filipino flag was raised signaling the victory of the first freedom fighters of Culasi against the Spanish regime. A mass was celebrated afterwards and San Miguel Archangel was designated as the town's patron saint.

Capitan Juancho continued to be Capitan Municipal of Culasi until 1901.

At the turn of the century, the Philippines saw the defeat of the Spanish armada by the American naval fleet commanded by Admiral Dewey. In the battle of Manila Bay and with the signing of the treaty of Paris the entire Philippine Territory was ceded to the United States thereafter.

The first civil government under the Americans was set up in Manila and spread quickly to the provinces. Antique was organized by an American-colonel Scott who appointed Leandro Governor Fullon travelled to Culasi along with Colonel Scott on horseback, looking for Capitan Juancho Xavier and Colonel Angel Salazar who went

on to become the fourth governor of Antique. Governor Fullon and Capitan Juancho and Angel Salazar met for the first time.

Don Juan Xavier was renominated as a holdover Municipal President until the end of his term. Colonel Scott who spoke in English had his speech translated to Spanish as it was the official language in those days. He spoke to recognize and extol the heroic exploits of Capitan Juancho against the Spanish regime like no other in the island of Panay. A banquet followed in the town plaza with the people of Culasi in attendance. Governor Fullon likewise spoke recognizing the importance of the occasion in celebrating the new era of civilian government under the Americans and extolling the heroism of Don Juan Xavier and this band of tiradores in that evening of October 19, 1898.