

Betrayal of Trust

Betrayal of Trust – The San Juan Del Monte Bridge Incident

by Quennie Ann J. Palafox Without any single doubt, the Filipino-American War is one of the most unforgettable events in our history because in just one day, the fate of the nation was changed and its impacts are still felt to date and will persist down to the future generation. The following events that happened preceding to the San Juan accident led to the worsening of Filipino-American relations: the American order of the retreat by the Aguinaldo's army of the strategic points along the Manila Bay area; the Filipino soldiers were prevented to enter the city after its capitulation and the areas to be occupied by the Filipino troops were limited; and, the controversy behind the signing of the infamous Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898 without the consent of the Filipinos.

When Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo declared the much-awaited independence of the country on June 12, 1898 in Kawit, Cavite the Filipinos thought that they are completely free at last and they have found new ally in the Americans. However, they never imagined that the alliance will be cut-short as the real intentions of the Americans were unveiled after the American expeditionary contingent under Maj. Gen. Arthur MacArthur arrived in July, completing the estimate of 15, 000, military troops by Gen. Nelson Miles, the overall ranking officer in the US Army. The frank and straightforward warning from the American command to fire on any Filipino revolutionary who would cross the American areas manifested a deception. Aguinaldo, fully aware that the Philippine sovereignty needed foreign recognition, sent Don Felipe Agoncillo to sought audience in Washington DC but failed to win the Filipino cause. On December 10, 1898, the United States and Spain formally concluded the Treaty of Paris, in which Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States for \$20 million. This was followed by Pres. McKinley's declaration of the Policy of Benevolent Assimilation on December 21, 1898, to prevent the adverse reaction of the Filipino people against the American occupation and rule. Another event that aroused the suspicion of the Filipinos was when the first Philippine Commission led by Jacob Schurman set foot on the country to conduct a survey of the islands and come up with a recommendation as to the most appropriate kind of government should be established for the Filipinos. In the last week of January 1899, hostility had worsened between Filipinos and American troops as movements were restricted from both sides in their respective territories. This infuriated the Filipinos and felt that they were being alienated in their own land. Both parties had agreed upon drawing the 'line of demarcation' between the two forces. There were acts of injustice and prejudice committed by American officials, officers, and soldiers against Aguinaldo, his men, and ordinary citizens. On February 1, a group of American engineers was arrested by the Filipino troops. General Otis protested to Gen. Aguinaldo. The latter replied that the five Americans were not arrested but only detained. Furthermore, he explained that the Americans were found within the Filipino lines and that they were detained in accordance with the decree of October 20, 1898 prohibiting foreigners from approaching the Filipino defensive works. This incident was followed on February 2 when General Arthur MacArthur protested the presence of Col. Luciano San Miguel's soldiers within his territory. The latter in order to appease the former, ordered his men to withdraw from the American lines.

Finally, on February 4, 1899, Private William W. Grayson, an American sentry stationed near the San Juan Bridge shot and killed two unarmed Filipino soldiers trying to cross into the American-held sector. After the shot, the Filipinos began firing. Aguinaldo the next day sent a representative to Otis to deliver his message to the American commander to prevent antipathies and that the firing on the side of the Filipino soldiers on that had been against his order. Otis, who was so confident of American victory, answered the "fighting, having begun, must go on to the grim end". It can be concluded that the Americans took advantage of this incident to declare war. Consequently, Aguinaldo sent a telegram to all local chiefs informing them of the start of the Filipino-American hostilities and ordering them to prepare the people for any emergency. Aguinaldo who wanted to find out the origin of the incident designated Felipe Buencamino, Sr. to carry out an investigation. On the other hand, the American military authorities made no attempt to investigate the incident. Instead, they ordered an all-out attack against their former allies. The following day marked the beginning of the Filipino-American War and it took the Americans three years to subjugate the Filipinos.