

DOMINGO T. FRANCO
(1856-1897)

Bagumbayan Martyr

Born on August 4, 1856 in Mambusao, Capiz, Domingo Franco was the third among the six children of Juan Franco and Ciriaca Tuason. His father worked as *procurador judicial*, or solicitor, in the local justice of the peace court. His mother was born to a family of successful realtors residing in Quiapo, Manila.

Franco spent most of his growing years in Manila. He studied at the Ateneo Municipal in Intramuros where he obtained a *perito mercantil* diploma. He studied to become a notary public at the University of Santo Tomas, where he struck close friendships with Numeriano Adriano, Apolinario Mabini, and Jose Rizal. Later, Rizal -whom he admired deeply - was to task him with the organization of *La Liga Filipina*.

In 1881, Franco married Concepcion Gonzales, a daughter of a captain of the Spanish Guardia Civil. They first resided on Ylaya Street and then settled down in a house on Nagtahan Street, close to the Pasig River. There, the Francos had as neighbors other notable Filipino reformists, like Ambrosio Rianzares Bautista, Moises Salvador, and Benedicto Nijaga. Apolinario Mabini lived just across the street from them.

To support his family, Franco engaged in the purchase and cutting of tobacco leaves for the making of cigars and cigarettes. He later became one of the main suppliers of such large tobacco companies as *La Flor de Isabela*, *La Yebana*, and *La Insular*. With his keen business sense, he soon earned the business community's respect.

The outbreak of the French Revolution greatly influenced some liberal Spaniards, who organized Masonic societies in the Philippines with "liberty, equality and fraternity" as a rallying cry. These attracted many young men. Domingo Franco was initiated in the Nilad Lodge. Afterwards, he transferred to the Balagtas Lodge, a branch of *El Gran Oriente Español*, and the mother organization in Madrid. He became "venerable master," and was conferred the 18th degree, then the highest rank attained by Filipino Masons in the Philippines during those times. Most of the Filipino propagandists who were seeking reforms from Spain during that time were Masons.

Franco and Rizal wrote each other regularly while the latter was taking his licentiate in medicine in Spain. Whenever Rizal was in the country, the two of them would meet to discuss the current affairs of Philippine society. When Rizal formulated the guiding principles of *La Liga Filipina* in Hongkong, he entrusted Franco with the document containing these for safekeeping and dissemination in Manila.

On July 3, 1896, *La Liga Filipina* was formally organized in the house of Doroteo Onjungco on Calle Ylaya in Tondo. In that gathering, its Supreme Council, headed by Franco, was created. The other members were Numeriano Adriano, Apolinario Mabini, and Moises Salvador.

Franco chose "Felipe Leal" as his alias in the Liga – the name that fellow Liga member Apolinario Mabini used when referring to him in his letters to Marcelo H. del Pilar.

Franco lived up to his assumed name. He remained loyal to the reformist cause until his death on January 11, 1897 at Bagumbayan Field where, together with 12 others, a squad of Filipino soldiers shot him. These patriots were to be remembered only as "Los trece martires de Bagumbayan".

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Photo: Domingo Franco (commemorative booklet, NHI library)