

BENEDICTO P. NIJAGA

(ca. 1856-1897)

Bagumbayan Martyr

In the waves of arrest that followed the discovery of the Katipunan in August 1896, 41-year-old Benedicto Nijaga y Polonio was among those picked up and thrown into jail by the Spanish authorities. After several months of incarceration he was executed with 12 of his companions on January 11, 1897. These 13 patriots, some of whom were also Masons, would later be known as the martyrs of Bagumbayan, after the name of the field where Dr. Jose Rizal met the same fate less than two weeks earlier.

The initial raid on the printing shop of *Diario de Manila* triggered the arrest of suspected Katipuneros. The workers in that shop, except one- Teodoro Patiño – were all Katipunan members. An internal intrigue over an expected promotion led to bad blood between Patiño and his fellow workers. This drove Patiño to reveal the existence of the Katipunan to his sister who, in turn, urged him to inform a Spanish priest, Fr. Mariano Gil, about it.

Nijaga must have been arrested because his name appeared in the list of Katipunan members kept by one of the *Diario de Manila* workers. Or, a prisoner who had been tortured to inform on his compatriots could have incriminated him. Either way, the authorities must have been shocked to learn that Nijaga belonged to the heretofore-clandestine radical organization out to foment a bloody revolution, for he was supposed to work for the preservation of the state and the Spanish crown on the islands.

Born to Andres Nijaga and Maria Polonio in Calbayog, Samar, Nijaga was actually a soldier – a second lieutenant in the Spanish army, a position rarely achieved at the time by Filipinos (This, according to Isabelo de los Reyes, when the latter recommended a street to be named after him). He was officially assigned to an infantry regiment of the Visayas command; Agoncillo cites him as a “lieutenant of carabineers”. According to Mariano Ponce, he was a good soldier of commendable character, and was well liked by his comrades. He, too, was a friend of Emilio Aguinaldo.

He took an active part in the organization of the Katipunan and was once tasked to solicit support from the millionaire Francisco L. Roxas, who refused.

In June 1913, to memorialize his martyrdom, the Manila municipal board named a street after him.

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