



Opinion

Bonifacio's war strategy lives on in today's insurgency

By Xiao Chua November 30, 2012 6:45am

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We are celebrating the 149th birthday of the Father of the Filipino "Sambayanan" Andres Bonifacio. This will also be the official kick-off of the Bonifacio sesquicentennial and it must be worth looking forward to as a country as much as we celebrated Rizal's. In many ways, the common man can better identify with Bonifacio than Rizal.

The "Supremo" of the Katipunan is still shrouded with myths. One is the insinuation that Bonifacio was not an able military leader. In fact, this was one of the main reasons why he was ousted in Cavite as leader of the revolution.

At the onset of the revolution, Katipuneros in Cavite were winning. The Battle of Binakayan was their biggest victory with 600 dead, mostly Spanish soldiers. General Emilio Aguinaldo was hailed as a brilliant military tactician and became president on his 28th birthday.

Cavite's admired trenches were made by Edilberto Evangelista, a Belgium-trained engineer. Since many of the Spanish soldiers were in Mindanao during the first months of the revolution, Cavite towns won against the colonizers. But when these troops were recalled and became reinforcements in Cavite, one by one the towns fell.

Historian Zeus Salazar believed that Cavite fell for the simple reason that trenches were designed mainly for a western kind of warfare that the Spaniards knew well. It was also impractical for Filipinos because of the cost, and hard to abandon. It became easy for the Spaniards to surround these trenches and when they did, they were able to use them against the Filipinos themselves. And Evangelista's trenches were so good that the Americans were also able to use them later on during the Philippine-American War!

Bonifacio's alternative war strategy, which was followed by Katipunan generals in many places, was based on the indigenous practice of taking refuge in the mountains, an early application of the insurgency strategy employed by modern rebels.

Before the coming of the Spaniards, many bayans chose a higher ground or natural cover called "ilihan" where they could retreat in times of calamities and attacks. This was the strategy employed by leaders of earlier uprisings such as Tamblot, Bankaw, Sumuroy, Tapar, Dagohoy, Hermano Pule, among others.

Bonifacio called these camps "Real" and established them in Mt. Tapusi (Montalban, Rizal), Balara at Krus na Ligas, Masuyod (Marikina), Kakaron de Sile, Puray, Kamansi, Minuyan, Makiling, and Banahaw. They spread in the mountains of Tayabas, Morong, Bulacan, Pampanga, and Nueva Ecija. These communities near the towns were located in forests, caves and mountains. They were using natural formations so they were not so costly, it was easy to leave and go back to them, and in the mountains and caves there were many escape routes. Spaniards were also unfamiliar with this kind of warfare.

That's why even if Bonifacio forces were defeated in Pinaglabanan, the Spaniards were not able to totally eradicate his forces. I learned from historian Ambeth Ocampo that the Spaniards didn't even bother to pursue Bonifacio and focused on Cavite.

When the Cavite trenches fell, Aguinaldo sought refuge in the "reales" established by Bonifacio, until he reached Montalban and later Biak-na-Bato, where he was able to negotiate peace with the Spaniards.

Therefore, Bonifacio did have a military strategy, which is actually still being effectively used by insurgents around the country. As historian Milagros Guerrero asserts, with the Supremo as chief strategist, all victories and defeats during his term must be attributed to him. She concludes that "the

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claim by some historians that 'Bonifacio lost all his battles' is ridiculous."

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