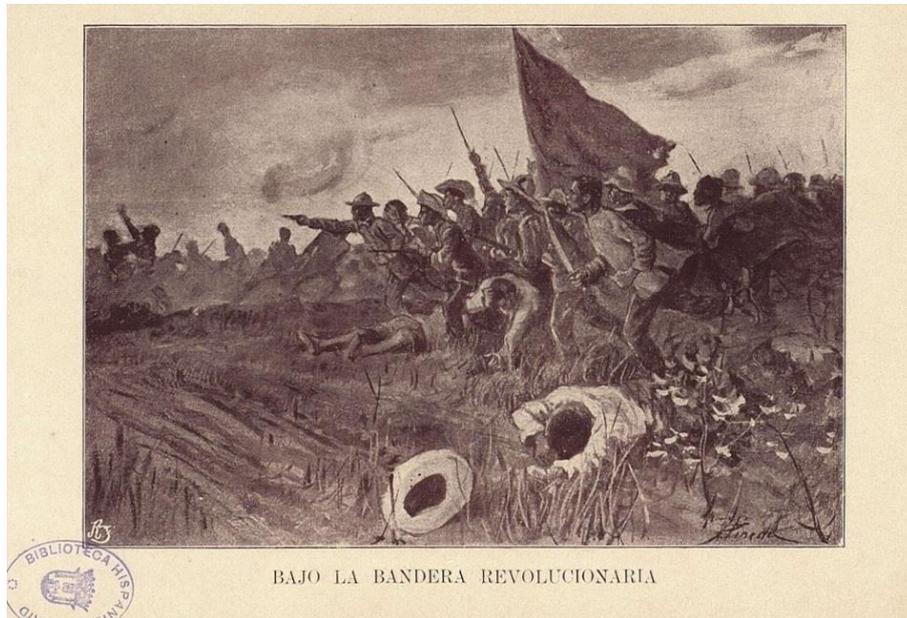


“*Unang putukan*” – the encounter in Banlat, August 26, 1896

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Introduction

Meeting in barrio Kangkong, Caloocan on August 23-24, the Katipunan’s Supreme Assembly decided the revolution should be launched on Saturday, August 29.² Until that day of destiny (“*araw ng tadhana*”), the leaders needed to spend every waking moment on intense, tireless preparation – finalizing strategy; appointing chiefs and commanders; writing letters and circulars; dispatching couriers; gathering and readying weapons.

The skirmish in which the first shots (“*unang putukan*”) of the revolution were exchanged on Wednesday, August 26 was therefore not an encounter the Katipunan sought or wanted. It disrupted the preparations for the offensive.

Nor was a pitched battle wanted by the Guardia Civil detachment that disturbed a thousand or so Katipuneros in barrio Banlat, Caloocan on August 26. The patrol was only about 30-strong – a squad of Filipino troopers led by three Spanish

¹ Jorge Pineda, “Bajo la bandera revolucionaria,” in Claro M. Recto, *Bajo los cocoteros (almas y panoramas)* (Manila: Librería “Manila Filatélica,” 1911.

² Sofronio G. Calderon, “Mga nangyari sa kasaysayan ng Pilipinas,” vol. II (Maynila, 1925), Typescript, 1925, 212.

officers – and risked being routed by the revolutionists, despite having the huge advantage of modern rifles.

“*Unang putukan*” was hence a minor engagement, almost as much avoided as fought. It nevertheless had important consequences. It forced Bonifacio and his ministers to leave their temporary base, and it compelled a multitude of fighters to disperse. Its story, as told by veterans, highlights the difficulties the revolution faced in its very first days, before it had even properly begun.

Kangkong

The Katipunan’s leaders had just five days to organize the attack on Manila, and they had to do so without alerting enemy attention. It was an impossible task, made doubly impossible by the sheer number of Katipuneros who gathered in Caloocan. Whilst the Supreme Assembly was meeting on August 23-24, as many as 2,000 Katipuneros congregated nearby, waiting to hear whether the revolution was to proceed.³ The crowd was far bigger than the barrio’s population. It was equivalent to roughly a quarter of the population in the whole municipality. No matter how many people in the locality were sympathetic to the Katipunan, there were others who would talk, and inform.

As soon as the Supreme Assembly had voted to launch the revolution, Bonifacio addressed the crowd in a field a short distance from the house where the meeting had been held.⁴ He told them the momentous news: “Brothers,” he shouts, “The decision is to go ahead with the revolution.” (“*Mga kapatid, ang pinagkaisaban ay ipagpatuloy ang paghihimagsik.*”)⁵ “Do you swear,” he asked, “to reject the government that oppresses us?” “Yes!” the crowd roared back. “In that case,” Bonifacio urged them, “bring out your cedula and rip them up, as a symbol of defiance!” (“*Kung gayon, ilabas ninyo ang inyong mga sedula personal at punitin, tanda ng pagtalikod sa kapangyarihan!*”)⁶

The Katipuneros, famously, heeded his call. They had heard what they had hoped to hear. They were fired-up, eager to fight. They were in the mood to march on Intramuros at that instant, if so ordered. Five days seemed a long time to wait. Where would they go, in the meantime?

³ Tomas A. Remigio, “Ang Sigaw sa Balintawak,” *Taliba*, September 9, 1911; José P. Santos, “Ang kasaysayan sa paghihimagsik ni Heneral Cipriano Pacheco,” *Lingguban ng Mabuhay*, December 3, 1933, quoted by Isagani R. Medina in Carlos Ronquillo, *Ilang talata tungkol sa paghihimagsik nang 1896-1897* [1898], edited by Isagani R. Medina, (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996), 676. [Hereafter, Medina in Ronquillo, *Ilang talata*].

⁴ Santos, “Ang kasaysayan sa paghihimagsik ni Heneral Cipriano Pacheco,” as cited.

⁵ Francisco Carreon, Untitled memoir, in José P. Santos, *Ang tatlong napabantog na tulisan sa Pilipinas* (Tarlac, 1936), extracted in Soledad Borromeo-Buehler, *The Cry of Balintawak: A Contrived Controversy* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998), 158-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Before being betrayed to the Spaniards, the Katipunan had assumed its fighters would remain in their homes until the day the revolution was launched. They would then attack, or win over, the police and Guardia Civil units in their own neighborhoods before mounting a coordinated, simultaneous assault on Manila. Now the KKK's secrecy had been broken, but its leaders wanted as far as possible to stick to the same basic strategy. "Unless you are in danger," the Katipunan's leaders told the men who had gathered in Caloocan, "return to your homes and prepare for August 29 with your *kapatid* in your local branches."⁷

"But we are all in danger!" the men remonstrated.⁸ They knew the Spaniards had already found KKK membership lists, and might soon find more, and might perhaps also find the photographs ("*larawan*") that KKK members had been asked to submit to the Supreme Council.⁹ Some said their houses were being watched by the Guardia Civil, or the Veterana. Going home would be like walking into a trap.¹⁰ The authorities would be able to confirm they were Katipuneros because they bore a distinctive scar on their left forearms from their initiation. And now they no longer had their *cedulas*, which were their means of identification. They might be arrested, or executed on the spot.

Half or more of the 2,000-strong crowd, we might guess, had come from Manila, and the rest were mostly from Caloocan and the municipalities nearby – Malabon and Navotas to the west, and Novaliches and Marikina to the east. Some were obviously in greater danger than others. Many who did not wish to return home would have been able to lie low for a few days elsewhere, with relatives or friends. In general, it would have been safer to go home to a rural barrio than to the city. And so, we might guess, hundreds did leave Caloocan on August 24. But hundreds remained, and there was a stream of new arrivals.¹¹

The Katipunan's leaders thus had not just two pressing concerns - organizing the offensive and evading the enemy – but a third, feeding the multitude. Apolonio Samson, in whose house the Supreme Assembly met on August 23-24, was a generous host. That night, it is said, he opened all his stores and barns so that corn and rice could be cooked for the Katipuneros, and ordered the carabao in his fields to be slaughtered for their meat.¹²

⁷ Damian Gomez, "Ang Sigaw sa Balintawak," *Taliba*, September 7, 1911; Patricio Belen, "Ang Sigaw sa Balintawak," *Taliba*, September 15, 1911; Pedro Delfin, "Ang Sigaw sa Balintawak," *Taliba*, September 22, 1911. These accounts by veterans were written at the request of *Taliba*'s editor, Faustino Aguilar, who assigned the same title to them all.

⁸ Gomez, "Ang Sigaw"; Belen, "Ang Sigaw"; Delfin, "Ang Sigaw".

⁹ Kataastaasang Kapisanan, Record of meeting held on December 24-25, 1895 [Archivo General Militar de Madrid, Caja 5393, leg.4.4]; Tomas A. Remigio, Untitled memoir, n.d., in Borromeo-Buehler, *The Cry of Balintawak*, 165-7.

¹⁰ Gonzalo Cue Malay, "Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 [I]," *Muling Pagsilang*, October 20, 1906.

¹¹ Calderon, "Mga nangyari," 277.

¹² Cue Malay, "Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 [I]".

But perhaps that was still not enough for everybody. And the Katipuneros did not just need to be fed and watered. They would want weapons, tools, materials for making weapons, basic medical supplies, clothes, and cigarettes. They began to raid Chinese stores in the nearby barrios.¹³

Banlat

The Katipuneros left Kangkong in the morning of August 24. Apolonio Samson guided them first to the house of Felix Oropa in the barrio of Bahay Toro, about two kilometers to the north-east. They stayed there for a few hours whilst Bonifacio and Jacinto wrote letters, but Bonifacio did not feel at ease (“*hindi mapanatag*”) and the house was small.¹⁴ Samson then led the crowd three kilometers or so further in the same direction, to a large farmstead near barrio Banlat on the vast Piedad estate. This was the place of Melchora Aquino, renowned today in history books as “Tandang Sora,” old Sora. She was not as old as the books say. The KKK veterans describe her as a short and stout woman (“*pandak na babae, mataba*”) in her fifties, and the *vecindarios* (tax lists) confirm she was then 56 or 57.¹⁵

Close to the farmstead was a small hill or knoll, which Pio Valenzuela and others later recalled was known as Pugad Lawin. A newspaperman who visited the spot with Valenzuela in 1940 described the hill as “about 30 or 40 feet higher than the surrounding territory....It was a good observation point from a military point of view because it commanded an excellent view of the whole country to the south and west, the only directions from where the Spanish forces could be expected to come.”¹⁶ On the slopes of the hill stood a large, tall sampaloc (tamarind) tree, from which lookouts could see people coming from as far as two kilometers away.¹⁷

Among those who arrived in Banlat on August 24 were six of the seven members of the Council of State - Andres Bonifacio (President); Pio Valenzuela (Vice-President); Emilio Jacinto (Minister of State); Teodoro Plata (Minister of War); Aguedo del Rosario (Minister of the Interior); and Enrique Pacheco (Minister of Finance).¹⁸ The Katipunan’s core leadership group was thus still almost intact at

¹³ Pio Valenzuela, “Ang Sigaw sa Balintawak,” *Taliba*, September 11, 1911; Belen, “Ang Sigaw”.

¹⁴ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 294; Belen, “Ang Sigaw”.

¹⁵ The history books say Melchora Aquino was born in 1812. That is indeed the date given on her death certificate, but it cannot be right. She had her first child, Juan Ramos, in 1855 (when she would have been about 43, had she been born in 1812), and then five more, bearing the last, Juana Ramos, in 1873 (when she would have been about 61). Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”; Gomez, “Ang Sigaw”; Provincia de Manila, Pueblo de Caloocan, *Vecindarios, Año de 1896* [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Microfilm Reel No.007860116]; Medina in Ronquillo, *Ilang talata*, 676-7.

¹⁶ Luis Serrano, “Event observed on wrong date,” *Manila Times*, August 26, 1962.

¹⁷ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 279.

¹⁸ The only minister not present was Briccio Pantas (Minister of Justice), who had returned to Manila. Pio Valenzuela is not usually listed as a member of the “Council of State,” but there is little doubt he was. Valenzuela affirmed in testimony he gave under oath in 1917 that Vice-President had been the last position he had held in the Katipunan. The veteran Sinforoso San Pedro also recalled that Valenzuela had been Vice-President. Briccio Pantas, Undated declaration [c.1935] given to José P. Santos and included in his unpublished manuscript, “Si Andres

this point. Bonifacio and his ministers were able to exercise their authority both collectively and individually, and to give orders to the men and military commanders directly, in person.

In Kangkong, just after the decision to launch the revolution had been taken, Emilio Jacinto had asked Bonifacio how the Katipuneros who did not wish to return to their homes were to be organized (“*makapagtatag*”). Without hesitating, Bonifacio asked the men themselves who they wanted to lead them, and the name shouted in reply was Andres Tamparong, a former captain of the Tondo municipal police (*cuadrilleros*). His nomination unopposed, Tamparong was instantly appointed “*jefe de operaciones*,” with the rank of second lieutenant. So energetic and competent was he in the exercise of his duties, though, that a day or so later in Banlat he became a colonel. He must have been promoted, the men joked, four times in a single night - to first lieutenant at 8 o'clock, to captain at 9, to *comandante* at 10, and to colonel as he slept.¹⁹

Tamparong posted guards on the approaches to the farmstead, armed with long-handled machetes (*itak*) and bamboo spears (*sibat na bukawe*). Two guards were posted in the tall sampaloc tree, one as a lookout in the upper branches, the other sitting in the middle branches ready to relay any warnings from the lookout down to the men down below.²⁰ Bolos were collected and stockpiled, weapons fashioned from wood, and stones gathered to throw or sling at any attackers. A set of signals was devised using the *tambuli*, a bugle made from a carabao horn. Repeated blasts meant “Assemble!”. In battle, a long, single blast meant “Advance!”; two shorter blasts meant “Beware!”; and three meant “Retreat!”²¹

For nearly 48 hours there was no sign of the enemy. Bonifacio and his ministers continued to write and dispatch messages to KKK branches, and to attend to the practicalities of managing the crowd. How many Katipuneros were in Banlat is not known, and estimates vary wildly, from “hundreds” to “thousands”. A reasonable guess might be around 1,000 – many fewer than in Kangkong, but still a hefty logistical dilemma.

Melchora Aquino was just as hospitable and magnanimous as Apolonio Samson had been in Kangkong. She made available to the Katipuneros all the *palay* in her storehouse, over 100 *cavans*, and her cattle, carabao, pigs and chickens. Together with some of her adult children, she personally helped in grinding the rice, and in butchering and cooking the meat.²²

Bonifacio at ang Katipunan,” 1948, in Borromeo-Buehler, *The Cry of Balintawak*, 144; Pio Valenzuela, Testimony in the case of U.S. vs. Vicente Sotto for libel, September 12, 1917, reproduced as Appendix W in *Minutes of the Katipunan* (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964), 226; Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 209.

¹⁹ Gonzalo Cue Malay, “Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 (II),” *Muling Pagsilang*, October 27, 1906.

²⁰ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 279.

²¹ Gonzalo Cue Malay, “Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 (III),” *Muling Pagsilang*, November 3, 1906.

²² Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 278.

But there was still a need for other supplies (“*iba pang pakikinatibangan*”), items a farmstead could not provide. Again, orders were given to raid Chinese stores in the area. Aside from commonplace items, veterans recalled, the raiding parties were specifically told to get firecrackers (*reventador*).²³ Did the Katipuneros hope to extract the gunpowder to make ammunition? Possibly, but then they would also need empty cartridge cases, which would be much harder to obtain. Realistically, the firecrackers could be used only as a subterfuge or ploy, to simulate the sound and flash of gunfire.

The most wide-ranging forays were mounted on August 25, when bands sortied out from Banlat to at least three barrios - Balintawak, Balong-bato and Masambong.²⁴ About 100 men went to Balintawak, and perhaps the other bands were similar in size.²⁵ The Chinese shopkeepers naturally tried to defend their premises and their stocks, but were overwhelmed. Twelve were killed, according to a Spanish source.²⁶ They were the revolution’s first victims. Others were taken prisoner, and taken back to Banlat. Veterans recall that a small number of Chinese community leaders (*cabecillas*) were also detained, and two Tagalogs. The *cabecillas*, it was said, had reported the Katipuneros’ raids to the Guardia Civil, and the Tagalogs were suspected of being spies. One had been carrying a long sword, and was said to be a *teniente* of the provincial governor.²⁷

After being interrogated by Bonifacio and Tamparong, the Tagalog prisoners were pardoned and released.

But not the Chinese. Initially nine in number, they were held under guard in a barn. The guards were negligent, however. Perhaps they fell asleep. The Chinese escaped and fled, but were quickly spotted and pursued. One managed to get away, but two were killed and the other six recaptured.²⁸ Brought back to the farmstead, they were tethered together to ensure they did not escape again. Later, it seems, three new prisoners were added to the group, bringing the total back to nine.²⁹

August 26

The morning of August 26 was overcast, with a steady drizzle.³⁰ The men were eating *sinigang na kalabaw*, and the leaders were deciding the fate of the Chinese.³¹

²³ Cue Malay, “Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 (II)”;

Belen, “Ang Sigaw”.

²⁴ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 296.

²⁵ *El Comercio*, August 27, 1896.

²⁶ Manuel Sastron, *La insurrección en Filipinas*, Tomo 1, (Madrid: Imprenta de la viuda de M. Minuesa de los Rios, 1897), 197.

²⁷ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 296; Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”.

²⁸ Valenzuela, “Ang Sigaw”; Belen, “Ang Sigaw”.

²⁹ Rafael Dimla, “Ang Sigaw sa Balintawak,” *Taliba*, September 16, 1911.

³⁰ Cue Malay, “Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 (II)”.

³¹ Dimla, “Ang Sigaw”.

The decision was taken. Bonifacio gave the order for the prisoners be taken to a nearby ravine and killed (“*ay dalhin sa bangin upang bigyang wakas*”).³²

Their guards led them away. But just as they were leaving, the Chinese were fortuitously saved. There was a shout from the lookouts in the sampaloc: “Civiles!” Troops in black had been spotted in the far distance, coming from the south-west. Not wishing to leave Banlat unless forced to do so, the KKK leaders told the men to prepare to confront the Guardia, and to be ready to fight if necessary. The Chinese prisoners, Bonifacio ordered, should be placed in the front line, still tied together.³³



todocollecion

There were about 30 men in the Guardia detachment. They had come from Tambobong (Malabon). They were led by a Spanish lieutenant, Manuel Ros, and the sergeant and corporal (*cabo*) were also Spaniards, but the troopers were all Filipinos.³⁴ Informers had presumably told the Guardia that the *insurrectos* who had attacked the Chinese stores were encamped somewhere near Banlat, and may have told them precisely where to look. Named by veterans as the leading informer was Mariano Amato, the *teniente del barrio* of Balintawak.³⁵ The very next day, August 27, Amato was awarded the “Medalla del Mérito Civil” by the governor general for his loyalty to Spain and the valuable help (“*buenos servicios*”) he had given the Guardia.³⁶

Whilst the Guardia were still in the distance, the Katipuneros assembled. Bonifacio designated one of the men, Isidoro Hernandez, as the standard bearer (*abanderado*), and ordered the troops to walk past the flag and swear not to falter in their defense

³² Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sastron, *La insurrección en Filipinas*, 195.

³⁵ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 213.

³⁶ *El Comercio*, August 27, 1896.

of the country (“*walang tatalikod sa pagtatanggol ng bayan*”). The flag was completely red (“*pulos na pula*”; a “*banderang kundiman*”).³⁷

Andres Tamparong led the men in reciting a brief prayer, or incantation. “Repeat after me, and follow what I do!” he shouted. “*Isip, Santo Ukam, Santo Lukam, de los herejes...*” As instructed, the men prayed for saintly intercession. Tamparong then stamped his foot down hard on the ground, to give the invocation added potency. The men did the same, even ministers like Pio Valenzuela and Enrique Pacheco, all at once, and everybody got splattered with mud. So much mud, in embellished retellings, that they could barely recognize each other (“*ang labat halos ng tao ay hindi makilala sa putik*”).³⁸

Another shout came from the sampaloc. “The Guardia are getting closer!” The lookouts scrambled down, but one slipped and fell, gashing his leg on a wooden stake below. Pio Valenzuela, who was the Katipunan’s physician as well as vice-president, hastily treated the wound.³⁹

Valenzuela then got a further responsibility. Bonifacio had been looking for Teodoro Plata, the secretary of war, to help direct the commanders and troops, but for some reason Plata was nowhere to be found. Valenzuela was appointed acting secretary of war.⁴⁰ He and Bonifacio divided the men into three big groups. They themselves would head the group that would take the right flank when they confronted the Guardia; Andres Tamparong would lead the middle group; and a commander known as Lucino would lead the group on the left flank.⁴¹ The Katipuneros planned to surround the Guardia.

Now on horseback, Bonifacio and Valenzuela led the men away from the farmstead so that the Guardia could be intercepted before they arrived. The three groups took up their positions in the fields beside the road.⁴² Through the fields

³⁷ Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”.

³⁸ Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”; Dimla, “Ang Sigaw”. Another veteran told a similar story, but remembered the invocation as “*Santo, Santo Kasis! Santo, Santo Kob! Sumuko ang kalaban!*” Santiago V. Alvarez, *The Katipunan and the Revolution: Memoirs of a General* [1927], translated by Paula Carolina S. Malay (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992), 256.

³⁹ Calderon, “Ang nangyari,” 279.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Cue Malay, “Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 (III)”. The commander remembered as Lucino may have been Lucino de la Cruz, alias “Ipo-Ipo,” who fought at San Juan del Monte on August 30 and was subsequently promoted to the rank of general. Another commander recalled by veterans was Pedro Nicodemus, who, like Andres Tamparong, had once served in the Tondo *cuadrilleros*. Some veterans also remember a Katipunero named Gregorio Tapalla, alias “Laon,” as being a commander in the Banlat encounter. Other sources, however, indicate that Tapalla had already been killed by the Guardia Civil Veterana a day or two previously near Diliman, some distance from the main force of Katipuneros. Salvador Artiaga, a medical student at the time, vividly recalls being in the dissecting room at the San Juan de Dios Hospital on August 26 when Tapalla’s body, “already in a state of putrefaction,” was laid out there for autopsy. Santiago Artiaga Sr., “The Revolution’s First Blood,” included in his “Brief History of San Juan del Monte, Rizal,” Typescript, 1951, 37 [National Library of the Philippines]; Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 214; *El Comercio*, August 27 and 28, 1896.

⁴² Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 213. The precise location of the encounter is not known, but judging from the contemporary sketch map shown at the end of this piece the road that veterans recalled was the one later known as

ran a meandering creek, along whose banks were thick reedbeds (“*canaverales espesos*”).⁴³

It was now about noon. As they waited, Bonifacio rode between the groups. The Filipinos in the Guardia detachment, he stressed, were not the enemy. They were brothers (“*kapatid*”), and not to be feared: “*Huwag masisira ang inyong loob at kapatid din natin ang mga sibil na iyan!*”⁴⁴ It is hoped they will switch sides, or at least shoot high, above the Katipuneros’ heads.

When the Guardia first saw the Katipuneros, they did not open fire. They halted, about 70-100 meters away.

“Kill the Spaniards and join us!” the Katipuneros shouted.

“Lay down your weapons!” the Guardia shouted back. “We can come to an understanding!” “If you are good people, lay down your weapons, and walk over here, two at a time!”⁴⁵

The Katipunan standard-bearer, Isidoro Hernandez, volunteered to walk over. He had previously served in the military – perhaps in the Guardia – and said he would talk to the Filipino troopers and find out whether they really were “brothers”. If they were, he would tell them the three Spanish officers should be killed at once.

Hernandez’s idea was not approved, for fear it would be a suicide mission.⁴⁶

Two other Katipuneros suddenly ran over to the Guardia, not on orders from above but on their own impulse. They too wanted to kill the Spanish officers, but the instant they reached the detachment they were surrounded and disarmed by the Filipino troopers. One was detained, and the other was told to go back to the Katipunan lines to give his commanders and comrades the message that had already been shouted – that they should lay down their weapons and calmly walk over, two by two. The Katipunero returned, and delivered the message. But, he warned, the Guardia would inspect the forearms of those who walked over, and might try to detain those who (like himself) bore the scar of their Katipunan initiation.⁴⁷

Another Katipunero, probably a minister or senior commander, walked towards the Guardia surrounded for protection by the Chinese prisoners, still tied together.

the Upper Banlat Road. The veterans referred to the general location not as Banlat, but by the better-known name of the adjacent barrio, Pasong Tamo.

⁴³ Sastron, *La insurrección en Filipinas*, 195.

⁴⁴ Gomez, “Ang Sigaw”; Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”.

⁴⁵ Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

The Spanish lieutenant detailed one of his men to approach the Katipunero and his human shields as they drew nearer, and to find out what the Katipunero wanted. Their exchange of words, however, did not go well. The Katipunero probably said the Spaniards should be killed, and the trooper probably disagreed. The Katipunero got angry, according to a Spanish source, and beat the trooper.⁴⁸ The Katipunero then headed back to his ranks, the Chinese around him.

The shouting resumed, and the stand-off continued until the mid-afternoon. Finally, the Katipunan contingents on the left and right flanks were given the signal to attack. They advanced across the wet fields.

Hugely outnumbered, the Guardia Civil hastily retreated to avoid being surrounded, firing as they withdrew. Some of the Filipino troopers might have aimed their rifles high, but some might not, and the three Spaniards certainly would not. Eight of the Guardia carried modern rifles, according to a KKK veteran - seven Remingtons and one Mauser.⁴⁹

Pedro Nicodemus, a commander with a revolver who was riding a *carabao*, was ordered by Bonifacio to shoot any man who ran away in the face of enemy fire. None did.⁵⁰

As the bullets snapped and hissed around them, the only weapons the Katipuneros had in reply were three shotguns (which had a limited range); a few revolvers (likewise of limited range); spears fashioned from wood, cane stalks and bamboo; some stones they had gathered to hurl; and a barrage of noisy but harmless firecrackers.⁵¹

They also carried bolos, daggers and other blades, but on this day there was no hand-to-hand fighting. The Katipuneros pursued the retreating Guardia Civil, but could not catch up. They were slowed down not only by the rifle fire, but also by the terrain. Whilst the Guardia were on relatively firm ground – perhaps on a road – the Katipuneros got bogged down in thick mud and flooded rice fields. In the course of the vain and sodden pursuit, the order was given to release the Chinese prisoners because they had become an encumbrance.⁵²

The Guardia halted when they were about 500 meters away, and for a while continued firing. But at about 4 o'clock they moved off, heading towards Caloocan.

⁴⁸ José Ripoll (*Juez Instructor*) to Pio Valenzuela, September 6, 1896 in Wenceslao E. Retana (comp.), *Archivo del bibliófilo filipino*, vol.III (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de M. Minuesa de los Rios, 1897), 228.

⁴⁹ Belen, “Ang Sigaw”.

⁵⁰ Dimla, “Ang Sigaw”; Delfin, “Ang Sigaw”.

⁵¹ Cué Malay, “Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 (III)”; Belen, “Ang Sigaw”.

⁵² Gomez, “Ang Sigaw”.

Bonifacio and his commanders surmised that the detachment was running low on ammunition, would call for reinforcements, and would sooner or later return. Rather than continue the pursuit, Bonifacio decided, it would be prudent for the Katipuneros also to leave immediately. The brief skirmish thus ended with both sides in retreat at the same time. The Guardia Civil, in their haste, left behind two capes and a leg of ham. The Katipuneros, more seriously, lost a suitcase (*maleta de viaje*) containing about 1,000 pesos, which was almost all the cash they had.⁵³

Three Katipuneros were killed in the encounter, two captured, and about eight injured.⁵⁴ The Guardia Civil, it was reported, had suffered not even a scratch.⁵⁵

Aftermath

Where were the Katipuneros to go? They could not stay in Banlat, and a crowd of 1,000 was likely to be located by the enemy wherever they went. Even if they could evade the enemy for the next three days – until August 29 – where would they get food and supplies? They had been fortunate in Kangkong and Banlat to be welcomed by hosts who had the means to feed them, and who could shelter at least some of them in barns. But finding another place for 1,000 men to stay was likely to prove difficult.

As in Kangkong, therefore, each Katipunero had to make their own decision about where to go, but staying together, “not parting from the Supremo”⁵⁶ was no longer an option. All those who could return home, Bonifacio urged again, should do so, and prepare for August 29. Others would have to hide until that day with relatives, friends or *kapatid*.

The vast majority then departed, going their separate ways. By nightfall, not many remained (“*hindi na marami ang mga naiwan*”).⁵⁷ The leaders, now with perhaps between 50 and 100 men, went back briefly to the farmstead to thank Melchora Aquino and her family for their selfless support, and then headed off east, towards Balara.⁵⁸

Lt. Ros, as Bonifacio had anticipated, telegraphed Manila as soon as he got back to Caloocan, and the governor general sent reinforcements to the area that same evening – another section of Guardia Civil; two companies of infantry; 50 cavalry;

⁵³ Pio Valenzuela, “Bonifacio no fue malversador,” *El Renacimiento*, August 31, 1906; Cué Malay, “Ang pagkilos ng mga nangahihimlay, 1896 (III)”.

⁵⁴ Gomez, “Ang Sigaw”; Sastron, *La insurrección en Filipinas*, 196-7. One of those killed, the veterans recalled, was Simplicio Acab (or Acabo), the son of a constable (*alguacil*) in Balintawak. Among the injured were Ismael Vitan, who had been one of the KKK’s guards (*bantay*) in Kangkong and Banlat; and Juan Bakal.

⁵⁵ *El Comercio*, August 27, 1896.

⁵⁶ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 213.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁵⁸ Valenzuela, “Ang Sigaw”. According to another veteran, they spent the night of August 26/27 in Bago-bantay before going to Balara. Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 282

and even 140 sailors and marines (*infantería de Marina*), who rode on the tram (*tranvía*) to Malabon.⁵⁹

The Spaniards found nothing untoward in the *poblaciones*, but began to post Guardia Civil and infantry units in Malabon, Caloocan, Novaliches and Marikina as part of an “external line of defense” around Manila.⁶⁰ The night of August 26-27 passed “without the need even to fire a single shot”. The sailors and marines were told they were not needed, and they went back to Manila. The cavalry reconnoitered around Balintawak, Pasong Tamo and Banlat, but “without any results,” and they too returned to the city.⁶¹

A detachment of Guardia Civil led by Col. Francisco Pintos combed the zone around Banlat more thoroughly, on foot. Near the site of the previous day’s encounter they saw five men heading towards them, one carrying a large bolo. They fired warning shots, and the men threw themselves to the ground. The Guardia questioned them, and found that one had no *cedula* and three had incision marks on their left arms. All five were arrested, and later taken to Manila. Nearby, the Guardia found the body of a young man, shot through the chest. His fatal wound had been bandaged. He did not have a *cedula* on his person. In the fields, a horse was roaming, saddled but without a rider.⁶²

Not far away, five men and a woman were arrested. The woman was named in *El Comercio* only as Sora (“*una tal Sora*”).⁶³ Almost certainly this was Melchora Aquino, “Tandang Sora,” the Katipuneros’ generous host. She was later deported to Guam, and held there until 1903.

Dilemmas

The veterans who shared their memories of the skirmish in Banlat were proud to have been Katipuneros. Not one disavowed the ideal of independence, or regretted the revolution, or was directly critical of Bonifacio, his ministers and commanders. But they were honest. They acknowledged their deficiencies. They acknowledged their mistakes. They did not try to justify or excuse the killing of Chinese shopkeepers in the Caloocan barrios, or the killing of two Chinese they had taken prisoner and who had attempted to escape, or the maltreatment of the other Chinese captives. As one veteran said, the Chinese had not been the enemy (“*hindi kalaban*”). What had happened was shameful (“*kahiyabiya*”).⁶⁴

⁵⁹ *El Comercio*, August 27, 1896.

⁶⁰ Ramón Blanco, *Memoria que al Senado dirige el General Blanco acerca de los últimos sucesos ocurridos en la isla de Luzon* (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de “El Liberal,” 1897), 83-4.

⁶¹ *El Comercio*, August 27, 1896.

⁶² Francisco Pintos (Coronel del 20º Tercio del Guardia civil) to Capitan general, August 27, 1896, in *El Comercio*, August 28, 1896.

⁶³ *El Comercio*, August 28, 1896; “Croquis de las operaciones practicadas”.

⁶⁴ Pio H. Santos, “Ang Sigaw sa Balintawak,” *Taliba*, September 25, 1911.

Nor did the veterans inflate the importance of the encounter on August 26, or portray it as a victory.

The problems the veterans described sprang from the circumstances under which the revolution began. They were largely unavoidable, and in the short term largely irremediable. The same dilemmas, we know with hindsight, were to prove decisive in constraining the revolution in the Manila area in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Bonifacio had long predicted that the revolution would begin prematurely. The Katipunan, he had warned the Supreme Assembly in May 1896, would be like a pregnant woman forced to deliver before she was due.⁶⁵ In the past few months it had grown enormously, a hundredfold, and its discovery was only a matter of time.

Acutely aware that the association was not yet ready to launch the revolution, the Katipunan's leaders nevertheless had neither the resources nor the opportunity to make the vital preparations. Above all, they knew the Katipunan lacked guns and ammunition, but they managed to acquire hardly any. The encounter in Banlat demonstrated the consequences, immediately and starkly. The Katipuneros did not have a single modern rifle that day, and the few firearms they did possess were limited in both range and reliability.

The best way to get rifles quickly, the Katipunan's leaders had hoped, was to persuade Filipinos serving in the Spanish army, the Guardia Civil, and the Veterana to join the revolution, bringing their vital weapons with them. In Banlat, such hopes were dashed, for the first time but not the last. The troopers in the Guardia Civil detachment had neither turned against their Spanish officers nor deserted.

Unpropitious also was the betrayal of the Katipuneros' location. Even where support for the Katipunan was strong, as it was in Caloocan, it was obviously not universal. The Guardia had been directed to Banlat, the veterans believed, by the *teniente del barrio* in Balintawak. It would not be long before other local officials came to act as the enemy's eyes and ears.

Prior to the revolution the Katipunan's leaders had identified potential safehouses, and potential hideouts in the hills, but nowhere that 1,000 men could be sheltered, fed and provisioned, or be concealed. As soon as they left Melchora Aquino's farmstead, even the small group of Katipuneros who headed towards Balara immediately found it tough to live off the land. Either unable or unwilling to turn to local people for support, they had scarcely any food, and scarcely any money. Bonifacio sent a message from Balara to the Katipunan council in Mandaluyong,

⁶⁵ Alvarez, *The Katipunan and the Revolution*, 11.

saying they lacked “everything” and asking for help to be sent urgently (“*na humihingi ng tulong dahil sa kanilang kalagayan na dabop sa labat ng bagay*”). The council quickly sent a small group of couriers with basic supplies – a cavan of rice; three sacks of meat (*ulam*), sweets (*matamis*), *sigarilyo*, and a little cash.⁶⁶

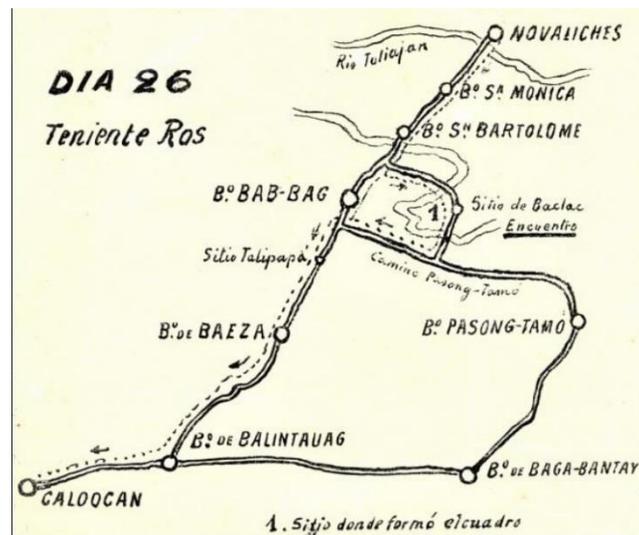
Having to leave Banlat, and then having to keep on the move, made it even harder for the Katipunan’s leaders to organize and co-ordinate the attack on Manila set for August 29-30. In many localities around the city, Katipuneros did not assemble that night in the numbers that had been hoped. Four large columns, it was planned, would advance towards Intramuros from the outskirts and surrounding area. But when the day came the two columns that were supposed to march on the city from the north – one from roughly due north, the other from the northeast – did not materialize.

What went wrong? Why was the mobilization abandoned or aborted? We will never know for sure. The most likely deterrent was the Spanish response to the Katipunan’s discovery – the deployment of troops in the towns around Manila, additional patrols, tighter surveillance, and the first arrests.

And word must have quickly spread. The men who had stood with bolos in the soaking wet fields of Banlat, facing the Guardia Civil’s rifles, had already found out that the revolution would be a hard and bloody fight.

⁶⁶ Calderon, “Mga nangyari,” 282.

Maps



Emmanuel Encarnacion⁶⁷

The sketch map above shows approximately where the encounter took place, but not the exact location. Unfortunately, the sketch map cannot be easily correlated with the 1885 cartographic map below, which locates “Banlac” (Banlat) on the Camino Pasong-Tamo (now Tandang Sora Avenue), does not show the minor roads, and traces a different course for the creek near Banlat.



The British Library⁶⁸

⁶⁷ “Croquis de las operaciones practicadas,” *El Español*, August 1896, reproduced in Emmanuel Encarnacion, *Ang pamana ni Andres Bonifacio* (Quezon City: Adarna, 1997), n.p.

⁶⁸ Enrique d’Almonte y Muriel, *Provincia de Manila*, 1:100,000 (Litografia de M. Perez hijo, 1885).