

The Insubordination of Macario Peralta and the Rise of the Guerrilla Movement in Western Visayas

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ABSTRACT

Soon after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 8 December 1941, defense for the Philippines was mobilized. In Panay, the Philippine Army and the Constabulary units were incorporated into the 61st Division of the USAFFE under Brig. Gen. Bradford G. Chynoweth and placed under the command of Col. Albert Christie in 1942 while its provisional composite regiment was under Lt. Col. Macario Peralta, Jr. On 24 May 1942, Col. Christie surrendered his units to the Japanese in Misi, Lambunao following orders from Gen. Jonathan

Wainwright in Corregidor. But Lt. Col. Peralta chose to defy the order, saying that he would rather face court-martial after the war than surrender to the enemy. He organized the Free Panay Force, an anti-Japanese guerrilla movement in Western Visayas. This article examines the insubordination of Lt. Col. Peralta and the role of his Free Panay Force against the Japanese invaders from 1942 until the liberation of Panay and Romblon with the forces of Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

KEYWORDS

Panay guerrilla, Free Panay Force, World War II in the Philippines, insubordination

INTRODUCTION

It is said that the history of humankind is the history of human struggle. At the height of human prosperity and progress, conflicts and wars arose, which resulted in destruction and decay. It is human struggle that has shaped the destiny of history considering that every event of a person's life is a struggle for survival. To survive is either to face the challenge steadfastly or to succumb to that challenge.

The Philippines would face such challenge after the fateful day of 8 December 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, one of the American naval bases in Hawaii. Hours later, Japanese planes began bombing the U.S.

military installations in the Philippines. Major landings took place on December 22.¹

The Japanese forces entered the “open city” of Manila on 2 January 1942. By April 9, Bataan had fallen into Japanese hands. Corregidor surrendered on 6 May 1942. President Manuel Quezon fled to Australia by submarine and from there, he proceeded to the U.S. where he headed the Philippine Commonwealth government-in-exile.

It is in times of war that men in uniform would be challenged to follow “obey first before you complain” order from their superiors, especially if the latter’s decisions are meant to safeguard their ranks or preserve people’s lives. Defiance of orders is sanctioned with insubordination that is often tantamount to expulsion from service if proven guilty.

During World War II, Lt. Col. Macario Peralta, Jr. valiantly defied the orders of his superiors to surrender to the Japanese. He was the Assistant Chief of Staff and G-3 of the 6th Division of the USAFFE and head of its Provisional Composite Regiment that was tasked to check the advances of the Japanese troops in Panay, Guimaras, and Romblon.

Peralta’s insubordination to his American military superiors gave birth to the Free Panay Force, a formidable anti-Japanese guerrilla movement in the Visayas, which fought the Japanese troops on the warfront from 1942–1945. This narrative presents the exploits of Peralta’s Free Panay Force and its link with the U.S. Armed Forces in the

Pacific under Gen. Douglas MacArthur, which hastened the liberation of Panay and Romblon, and ultimately the Philippines in 1945.

PANAY ON THE WARFRONT

The 61st Division of the Philippine Army (Reserve) was organized in Panay with territorial jurisdiction over the islands of Panay, Guimaras, and Romblon. Col. Bradford Chynoweth was the first commander of the 61st Division but his promotion to a Brigadier General and eventually as Commanding General of the Visayan Forces of USAFFE resulted in his transfer to Cebu in 1942. His Chief of Staff, Col. Albert Christie took his place as Division Commander.⁷

The 61st Division was composed of 11 military units with corresponding mobilization centers:

Unit	Mobilization Center
61 st Infantry Regiment	Miagao, Iloilo
62 nd Infantry Regiment	Panit-an, Capiz
61 st Engineering Battalion	Dingle, Iloilo
61 st Division Headquarters	Iloilo City
61 st Hq Svc Tps	Iloilo City
61 st Hq Co	Iloilo City
61 st QM Co	Iloilo City
61 st FA Regiment	Dingle, Iloilo
61 st Med Battalion	Iloilo City
61 st Sig Co	Iloilo City
63 rd Infantry Regiment	San Jose, Antique

The Japanese forces under Maj. Gen. Saburo Kawamura landed in Panay at dawn of 16 April 1942 with 4,160 officers and men on eight transports with two destroyer escorts. The first segment landed in Trapiche, Oton; the second in Roxas City, Capiz; and the third, in San Jose, Antique.²

In Southern Iloilo, Col. Peralta assigned the 2nd Battalion, 63rd Infantry Regiment under Capt. Celestino Monroy to resist the Japanese along the shores of Oton and Tigbauan.³ With the Company A of the 61st Engineering Battalion based in Cordova, Tigbauan,⁴ the soldiers destroyed all bridges and fuel dumps in Iloilo City and made trenches along the beaches of Oton and Tigbauan. The brief but bloody skirmish between Monroy's men and the Japanese troops was a fatal blow to the defenders, who retreated because they suffered heavy casualties.

The Japanese troops advanced and occupied Tigbauan, Oton, Arevalo, Mandurriao, Jaro, Molo, and eventually Iloilo City. By mid-1942, Panay, Guimaras, and Romblon were also occupied except the territories in the highlands controlled by the guerrillas.

Almost all USAFFE defenses in Luzon and Visayas collapsed with the exception of Panay. Nonetheless, Gen. Wainwright's instruction to surrender Panay in exchange for the lives of POWs in Corregidor compelled Col. Albert Christie of the 61st Division, and commanders of the 64th and 65th Regiments to surrender to the Japanese in Misi, Lambunao, on 24 May 1942.⁵

Most of the Filipino troops did not surrender. They took to the hills with their arms and formed the guerrilla force. On 1 June 1942, Col. Peralta assumed command of the Free Panay Force with 1,950 officers and men. On July 30, the guerrillas were organized into companies, battalions, and regiments under the reorganized 61st Division, which later became the 6th Military District Guerrilla Forces.⁶

GEOGRAPHICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF PANAY DURING THE WAR

Panay's significance during the War was attributed to its geographical and economic endowments. The island has been blessed with fertile soil and pleasant climate suited for extensive production of agricultural crops.⁸ Just before the war, its largest province, Iloilo, was one of the top rice producers in the country. Surplus rice was even shipped to other Visayan provinces where foodstuff was scarce.⁹ Moreover, sugar plantations abounded especially in the central part of the island supplying the six major sugar centrals. The fishing industry was intensively developed especially among the coastal towns in the northeast like Estancia, also known as the "Alaska of the Philippines" during the prewar years.

Iloilo's economic glory during prewar years were also unprecedented. Outside Manila, it led the air and sea transportation business in the country. The Iloilo-Negros Air Express Company (INAEC), the first commercial airline company owned by the Lopezes, serviced the Manila-Iloilo and Iloilo-Bacolod and Iloilo-Bukidnon air routes. Iloilo was also the home port of the De la Rama Shipping

Lines, the biggest shipping company in the country. Its interisland vessels were eventually commanded by the Philippine Army at the outbreak of the war.

Iloilo also boasted about its railroad line bisecting Panay through several interior towns, which ultimately became the major arteries of trade and commerce in the island. More so, the road networks were so extensive that access to different provinces by motor transportations was generally easy.¹⁰

In February 1942, President Quezon and Gen. MacArthur turned their attention to the island of Panay as a possible source of food for soldiers fighting on the Bataan and Corregidor battlefields. The food problem in Bataan was considered critical. In addition, the transport of arms to the peninsula was also besieged by the Japanese on land and blockaded on sea. But Gen. MacArthur used the existing interisland ships to surreptitiously sail through the Japanese blockade and deliver food and clothing from Panay to Bataan and Corregidor. These ships were also utilized to evacuate wounded soldiers as well as officials of the Philippine Commonwealth government. The *S.S. Mactan* of Compañía Maritima was used as a hospital ship, and made a successful evacuation run to Australia after surviving the attack of Japanese forces. The *M.V. Dona Nati* of De la Rama Lines in Iloilo successfully transported 5,000 tons of rations, arms, ammunition, and medical supplies from Australia to the island of Cebu in March 1942.¹¹ This geographical and economic endowments of Panay made it as a guerrilla stronghold.

LT. COL. MACARIO PERALTA

Lt. Col. Macario Peralta was born in Manila on 30 July 1913 of Ilocano-Pangasinan descent, but spent most of his growing years in Tarlac. He finished his Bachelor of Laws (cum laude) at the University of the Philippines, in 1936. That same year, he took the bar and placed second to former Philippine President, Diosdado Macapagal.

Peralta's military career also blossomed in 1936 when he joined the Philippine Army as a reserved officer. He was eventually commissioned in a regular force as 2nd lieutenant. His first assignment was his designation as commandant of the Visayan Institute ROTC cadets in Cebu, and later at the Adamson University in Manila. In 1940, he enrolled at the Philippine Army Infantry School, where he finished at the top of his class. When World War II broke out, he was assigned G-3 or Chief of Operations of the 61st Division in Panay.

The first move of the 61st Division based in Iloilo City was to transfer its headquarters from the city to the interior town of Santa Barbara in order to expedite and completely mobilize its elements that were not yet called into the service. The Iloilo branch of the Philippine National Bank (PNB) assisted in the purchase of equipment from civilian stores. Unfortunately, the interisland ship *M/V Corregidor*, carrying guns and ammunitions for the 61st Division struck a mine off Mariveles, Bataan and sunk. The disaster left the 61st Division Artillery without a choice but to settle on available rifles.

The lack of arms and ammunitions, however, did not dampen the spirit of the resistance, especially in engaging the enemy. The troops though partially trained and equipped were in the best position to fight under strong leadership. Operating on protracted resistance, the 61st Division Regiment under Lt. Col. Macario Peralta, built supply caches in the interior area to prepare for the Japanese invasion as well as for the guerrilla warfare that could follow after the attack. The civilian population was also mobilized in the storage of foodstuff to safe places and out of the reach of the Japanese. For instance, the food caches around the Mt. Baloy heartlands could sustain the resistance up to five years.

Lt. Col. Peralta vividly recalled that the transfer to Santa Barbara was necessitated by the limited resources and the impracticality of fighting the Japanese along the beaches of Panay. Mt. Baloy was the most suitable place for defense positions since supplies of all types could be hidden in caches in the mountains. Heeding Gen. MacArthur's directives, the plan was to hold out in the central mountain of Panay against the formidable Japanese force. If defense positions would collapse, the 61st Division would resort to guerrilla tactics as an alternative.¹²

A week after Bataan fell to the Japanese, the invasion of Panay commenced on 16 April 1942. The Japanese troops launched three-pronged landings in the island hitting the beaches of San Jose, Antique; Oton, Iloilo; and Roxas City, Capiz. Iloilo City was seized on the same day forcing the 61st Division to transfer its headquarters from Santa Barbara to Misi (an interior barangay of Lambunao).

When the Japanese troops eventually pushed towards the interior, the 61st Division was clandestinely stationed in Mt. Baloy. Two days later, the 63rd Infantry Regiment under Capt. Julian Chaves fought the numerous and better equipped Japanese in Mt. Dila Dila in Alibunan, Calinog. Chaves troops won the day. The victory inspired the 61st Provisional Composite Regiment under Lt. Col. Peralta to stage its own ambush of Japanese forces entering the town of Alimodian on May 3.¹³

On 10 May 1942, Maj. Gen. William Sharp, Commander of the USAFFE in the Visayas and Mindanao, ordered his units to surrender to the Japanese following the surrender of Lt. Gen. Jonathan Wainwright in Corregidor. His instruction to surrender reached Panay on 19 May 1942. Lt. Col. Allan Thayer, a USAFFE staff delivered it to Col. Christie. Thayer arrived at Tiring Landing Field (now Iloilo International Airport) in Cabatuan on a Japanese plane from Mindanao. Escorted by Japanese soldiers, he reached Col. Christie's place in Mt. Baloy. At first, Col. Christie seemed to be hesitant to surrender. Lt. Col. Peralta recalled that the surrender of Gen. Wainwright to the Japanese in Corregidor even intensified the call for resistance in Panay. When Gen. Sharp received Wainwright's order to surrender, he immediately radioed Gen. MacArthur for instruction. MacArthur responded that Wainwright's order had no validity and that Sharp's forces should break into small guerrilla groups and continue fighting in the hills. MacArthur's message ended with "you have full authority to make any decision that may be required in this emergency."¹⁴

Col. Christie questioned Sharp's order to surrender. Without MacArthur's instruction, he considered it an act of treason. Gen. Sharp, however, convinced him that failure to surrender was tantamount to the annihilation of POWs at the Corregidor garrison. He also told Col. Christie that he had already informed Gen. MacArthur of his decision to surrender and that dire necessity prompted such action. The original copy of Gen. Sharp's letter to Col. Christie has been preserved by Lt. Col. William Gemperle, Col. Christie's staff.

It took two days for Col. Christie to decide whether to surrender or not. On May 21, he called a conference of all his staff to discuss the matter. There was no other alternative except to obey the order of his superior. However, among the high-ranking Filipino officials in the 61st Division, the plan to surrender was futile. It was a fatal blow because it meant the end of making a stand against the Japanese on the foothills of Mt. Baloy. Thus, the plan to engage the Japanese in a guerrilla warfare was hatched. According to Col. Leopoldo Relunia, Division Engineer and Commanding Officer of the 61st Engineer Combat Battalion, the Filipino officers were determined not to surrender. They agreed that Lt. Col. Peralta would assume Col. Christie's post if the latter decide to surrender to the Japanese.¹⁵

Lt. Col. Peralta recounted how he was approached by Col. Christie regarding the latter's plan to surrender:

When I reached the Division headquarters, he told me what I already knew; he was issuing an

order to all officers and men of the 61st Division to surrender. I told him that I refuse to follow such order. I was shown the letter of Gen. Sharp. While I did not know at the time of Gen. MacArthur's message to Gen. Sharp, I considered Sharp's letter as one coming from a prisoner and of no binding effect, notwithstanding Sharp's statement therein to the contrary.

We debated loudly till deep in the night. He pointed out the consequences of refusing to obey his order. I told him that I would rather face court-martial after the war than surrender to the Japanese. Division G-2, Lt. Col. Nicanor Velarde and G-4, Lt. Col. William Gemperle, were of the same view, not to surrender.

I told Col. Christie of my plan to engage in guerrilla warfare in pursuance of Gen. MacArthur's instructions on strategy...he told me that he was too old for guerrilla warfare.¹⁶

On the other hand, Col. Relunia recalled that fateful meeting with the Commander of the 61st Division:

I was present in the conference called by Col. Christie on the eve of his surrender. When this point of continuing resistance was presented by Lt. Col. Peralta, in behalf of our group, Col. Christie said: 'If I were in your place, I will do the same. But you will realize that, as commander of the Division and as an

American, I have the responsibility to comply with the order to surrender.¹⁷

Col. Relunia recalled that Col. Christie gave tacit consent to their plan not to surrender and engage in guerrilla warfare. However, the latter cautioned that no active resistance against the enemy be waged within two months after the surrender because of possible reprisal by the Japanese. On his part, Peralta requested his superior to grant him funds to start a guerrilla movement. Though overwhelmed by the futility of continued fighting, Col. Christie praised the determination of his young officer so that he readily handed over Php 60,000 war notes for this purpose.¹⁸

Col. Relunia believed that there were four major reasons for not surrendering to the Japanese: First, the confidence that American aid was just around the corner; Second, the possibility that the Japanese army would not observe the International Law on Warfare (that POWs would be treated with cruelty and made to work at hard labor); third, the unconquerable inborn spirit of the Filipinos to repel/resist, at all cost, the aggressors; and fourth, the Filipinos' ultimate faith and loyalty to America and to the principle for which they fought.¹⁹

On the morning of 24 May 1942, Col. Christie with the 61st Division G-1 Regiment under Lt. Col. Lope Quial, formally surrendered to the Japanese in Misi, Lambunao. According to Doromal, those who surrendered were just a "token force" because the majority of the regiments that comprised the 61st Division joined Lt. Col. Peralta who

fled to the mountains to sustain warfare. Lt. Col. Peralta and his loyal troops conferred at Agbatoan, Calinog on 27 May 1942 to plan for the next steps in fighting the Japanese.

The surrender of Col. Christie plunged Panay into chaos. Banditry became rampant especially in the remote areas where civilians evacuated after the Japanese invasion. Because of the state of lawlessness, many inhabitants returned to their respective towns and cities. The Japanese forces were quick in setting up puppet governments and threatened the people with beheading or death by bayonets if they failed to cooperate with them.

THE BIRTH OF FREE PANAY FORCE

On 4 June 1942, Lt. Col. Peralta with a group of 15 officers and enlisted men left his bivouac at Agtugas Mountain in Calinog and went to the command post of Capt. Francisco Offemaria in Daanbanua, Lambunao. Capt. Offemaria was a former USAFFE official who once served as commander for Iloilo City and its environs. Under him were 400 officers and men, mostly former members of the 61st Division Motor Transport Company. With the help of Offemaria's men, the former USAFFE officers in the lowlands and those in their mountain hideouts were connected.

On 10 June 1942, Lt. Col. Peralta issued his General Order No. 1, which legitimized his assumption as the supreme commander of the newly-formed Free Panay Force. This was followed by an officers' conference in Daanbanua

on June 18 attended by Lt. Col. Relunia, Capt. Jose Alvior, Capt. Offemaria, Capt. Pedro Serran, Lt. Segundo Mapa, Lt. Concordio Orlanes, Lt. Sofronio Brasileno, and Lt. Jose Castigador.²⁰

The birth of the Free Panay Force was instrumental in rallying the commanding officers of various small independent units in the island to Peralta's call for continued resistance. Peralta himself earned the respect of his men for having risen from the ranks. He started as a reservist of the Philippine Army and became ROTC commandant, instructor at the Infantry School in Camp Murphy, and finally as officer of the 61st Division, USAFFE. His sterling military leadership was recognized and respected especially for his being an indefatigable plans and training officer and as commander of the 61st Provisional Regiment.

The Free Panay Force worked hand in hand in its recruitment activities with the Emergency Provincial Guards (EPGs) organized by Iloilo Governor Tomas Confesor. The province was divided into 9 administrative districts, each placed under a deputy governor whose primary function was to organize the EPGs in his jurisdiction. These EPGs were absorbed into Peralta's command and synergized guerrilla activities against the Japanese. Ultimately, the Free Panay Force assumed an integrated command by appointing town officers that organized former USAFFE soldiers and reservists into regular army platoons or companies. As a result, almost all towns in Iloilo had an operating well-organized mobile force before the end of July 1942. The town units were further organized into military districts which, in turn, were grouped into sectors. For instance, the

province of Iloilo was divided into four sectors consisting of 11 districts.²¹

The Free Panay Force had to deal with matters one at a time. First, it had to get rid of the bandits who did not only menace people's lives and properties but also wreak havoc on the budding guerrilla unit. The bandits stole guns, destroyed ammunition, and even raided garrisons. Second, it had to contain the Japanese-appointed puppet officials who were not only collaborators but who also served as spies to suspected guerrillas. This adversely affected the recruitment of members and participation of civilian volunteers in the delivery of arms and foodstuff to the guerrillas. Third, it had to ensure rapid delivery of services to the civilians. Lt. Col. Peralta worked hard to establish a resistance civil government in towns and cities to put things in order.

The most important contribution of the Free Panay Force was the waging of guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. On 30 July 1942, Lt. Col. Peralta assembled his troops in Moroboro, Dingle and formalized the assignment of provincial military commanders, who called themselves "61st Division (Free Panay)." ²² Eventually, Gen. MacArthur officially called the Free Panay Force as the "6th Military District, Philippine Army."

The Iloilo Military Command under Lt. Relunia was divided into four sectors. The first sector was headed by Maj. Rafael Almacen who took control of the Oton-Maasin Line. The second sector was placed under Capt. Offemaria covering the town of Zarraga and Iloilo City. The third

sector consisting of Central Iloilo towns was under Maj. Santiago Imperial. Lastly, the fourth sector was headed by Capt. Marcial Capinpin whose area covered the Dumangas-Carles line. Capiz and Aklan were also reorganized under Lt. Col. Peralta.

An "Agreement of Cooperation" among the guerrilla units was signed by Gov. Confesor, which called for coordinated engagement of Japanese patrols and intensified activities against spies and puppets to be undertaken by the military and EPGs. It also emphasized civilian cooperation regarding food supplies for the guerrilla units and the formation of home guards to provide labor. Coordinated ambushes of Japanese patrols and trucks were also discussed by military district commanders and town officers.

The initial guerrilla strikes against the Japanese were sweepingly massive and destructive. On 24 August 1942, 20 Japanese soldiers were killed and 1,000 rounds of ammunitions were captured in the garrison attack in Janiuay. A week after, a suburban train was blown up in Dueñas by the guerrillas killing the 20 Japanese on board. Numerous ambush operations of Japanese patrols and trucks as well as surprise attacks of Japanese garrisons in Tigbauan, Dumangas, Calinog, Pavia, and Santa Barbara were also successfully mounted by the Free Panay Force from September 1942 to the early part of 1943.²³

The tide of war, however, became favorable to the Japanese in 1943 when it initiated counter-attacks against the guerrillas in their mountain bivouacs, and punitive

operations that led to countless massacres and beheadings of both civilians and guerrillas. The Japanese realized that guerrillas increased their numbers daily and there were indications of underground resistance in many towns and cities. They became hostile against civilians especially those who were suspected to be coopting with the guerrillas. They fielded Filipino collaborators to monitor civilian mobilizations. These collaborators were also extortionists who divested frightened inhabitants of their money and properties. The Chinese businessmen in the city had to bribe these collaborators to save their own skin.

From 1944–1945, the Free Panay Force directly connected with the U.S. troops in the Pacific. The latter updated Lt. Col. Peralta's lair in the mountains of Leon, Iloilo about the victories of the air and naval forces, as well as the coordinated plan for the liberation of the Philippines.

After the war, the U.S. Government awarded Peralta the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star for his exemplary leadership, competence, and gallantry in action in the resistance campaign against the Japanese in Panay during the war years. He was eventually sent for further studies to the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas where he got a special commendation for his brilliant scholastic record.

Upon his return in the Philippines, he was promoted to brigadier general, and was designated Deputy Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army. He resigned from the Army in 1946 and was appointed by then President Manuel Roxas as Chairman of the Philippine Veterans Board. At 36, he

ran for the Philippine Senate and was elected in 1949 under the Liberal Party. Among his accomplishments in the Senate were the exposé of the Tambobong-Buenavista estate deal, procurement of supplies and equipment for the Filipino troops in Korea or the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK), and the legislation giving veterans priority in employment and others.

Peralta was married to Natividad Kasilag of Batangas with whom he had three children: Macario III, Cecilia, and Engelbert. He died on January 7, 1975 and was buried at the Balantang Memorial Cemetery in Jaro, Iloilo City.

CONCLUSION

The insubordination of Lt. Col. Peralta to his USAFFE superiors proved to be beneficial to the emergence of a formidable guerrilla unit, the *Free Panay Force*, which not only continued the struggle against the Japanese but also provided the groundwork for a concerted and well-planned resistance. Eventually, it linked the Filipino people to the Philippine government-in-exile in the U.S. as well as with the American troops fighting in the Pacific. In the long run, the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese was achieved through the resistance on the hills by the brave fighters of Panay, Guimaras, and Romblon.

Significantly, the birth of the Panay guerrilla unit exemplified the collaboration between the provincial resistance governments and the guerrilla groups in fighting one common enemy. At the same time, it managed to safeguard the welfare of the civilian population who were

caught in the crossfire and fell victims on various conditions when fear and misery were prevalent. But overall, the presence of military officials like Lt. Col. Peralta, whose wit and bravery were commendable, showed to the world that efficient guerrilla warfare tactics played an important role in saving people's lives and in the attainment of freedom.

NOTES

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