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Biography of Pedro de la Llana

Pedro de la Llana, a member of the *Times* business staff, sometimes contributed pungent and caustic articles which raised eyebrows among Filipino readers. He had edited *The Independent*, a militant weekly published by Vicente Sotto, before he came to the *Times*. Later he was appointed member of the House of Representatives by Governor General Leonard Wood. In addition, he edited *The Flash*, the newspaper in Tagalog, English, and Spanish in Iloilo. The latter published news stories about the war and editorial articles denouncing the Japanese Military Government. Ironically, its editor was executed by uninformed guerillas because he was mistaken as a collaborator.

Pedro de la Llana was born in Philippine Islands in 1895. The father was employed by the San Miguel Corporation. He was just a young boy and determined to run away from home because his father was very mean and a strict disciplinarian. The family lived near the coast so as a boy he saw many passenger ships docked close by. One day he boarded a ship and became a stowaway. A crewmember discovered young Pedro very hungry and thirsty hiding in the cargo area of the ship.

Nonetheless, the captain of the ship took a liking to young Pedro and offered him a position on the ship. He became a cabin boy for the duration of the voyage. Two American elementary school teachers were also on board the ship. The teachers befriended young Pedro and decided to take him in. The teachers provided Pedro an education and exposed him to many of the classical writers of the time i.e., Emerson, Twain, Hawthorne, Whitman, Hemingway etc. After several years, the teachers left to return to the United States. He later attended the University of the Philippines and finished a degree in Law.

He started working as a reporter at 18 years old. Pedro later drifted from paper to paper; Manila Times, Manila Daily Bulletin, El Debate, Philippine Herald, Philippine Free Press and the American Weekly.

Even the manner in which he became a member of the Lower House of the Philippine Legislature was characteristic of the man that was Pedro De la Llana.

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Probably because he was always attacking Senate President Manuel L. Quezon, especially in *The Independent*, which Pedro edited at one time, Governor General Leonard L. Wood appointed him representative of Bukidnon and Agusan (at that time representative for non-Christian provinces were appointed by the governor general). Only in 1939 Quezon and De la Llana brought together by mutual friends. Previous to that year, Pedro was a real thorn on Quezon's side.

Besides working as a reporter and an editorial writer, De la Llana authored, co-authored four books. "Book of Comment and Criticism (1926), printed in the Sugar National Press, was his own exclusive with ex-representative Franco Varona, he wrote "Ada." A graphic of the late Librada Alino, founder of Centro Escolar Senioritas (now Centro Escolar University). The late F. B. Icasiano (editor of the Sun Tribune Magazine) collaborated with Pedro in publishing "Quezon in His Speeches" and "Philippine Commonwealth Handbook." A novel "The Politician" is unpublished. It was as a columnist or commentator on topics of the day to Pedro De la Llana was best known. The earliest of this was titled "Tagore's" Vision of a Great World and came out in *The Independent* on November 3rd, 19th. One of his last magazine article and was an interview with Frank Murphy, last American governor general and first American High Commissioner in the Philippines. It was published in the *Philippines Free Press* on November 20, 1935, only a few days after the establishment of the Philippine Commonwealth.

As mentioned earlier, De la Llana jumped onto the Quezon bandwagon in 1939, after plastering him year in and year out before that. He digested news articles and editorial opinions for Quezon and edited the Malacanang Palace News Digest from December 1940 to July 1941. But Pedro was more than just an appendage in Malacanang Palace press office. He was a confidential agent, sporting badge No. 33. He wanted to ferret out Japanese nationals who were posing as parlor operators and vendors but who were in reality spies of the Japanese Government. How successful Pedro was on this espionage mission was known only to his former whipping boy, Quezon, to whom he reported directly. De la Llana's close connection with Malacanang Palace saved him from brutal treatment after he had knocked down a Manila police officer during the Japanese occupation.

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Pedro was walking on Blumentritt when outside a police outpost he witness a seven-year-old boy kneeling, his outstretched arms loaded with weights. The boy Pedro found upon inquiry had stolen some bread and had been under punishment for three hours already. Unable to contain himself, he approached the outpost and inquired for what crime the boy was being punished; in the unusual fashion. "That boy is a thief; that's why we are punishing him," a police officer replied. Pedro saw red and struck the officer so hard that two of his teeth flew out. Three policemen grappled with him, but Pedro put up a terrific fight. They finally hogtied him and threw him in jail, the perspiring cops later admitting, "Dam him he fought like a tiger."

The cold, dirty cell did not deter De la Llana. He immediately started on a harangue against the Japanese, Emperor Hirohito, and Filipino policemen who were allowing them to be the tools of the Japanese masters. The jail officers themselves got scared as Pedro's denunciations became more vitriolic. Finally, they sent for Mrs. De la Llana to pacify him. Next morning De la Llana asked that he be allowed to call up Jorge B. Vargas, chairman of the Philippine Executive Commission. Mr. Vargas managed to get him out.

The fiery newspaperman was not cowed. He spoke contemptuously of the conquerors and collaborators, went on publishing *The Flash* (anti Japanese occupation newspaper).

When he decided to evacuate to Ilocos Sur, he found the civilians cowering between two terrors: the Japanese and some Filipino guerrillas who were behaving worse than the Japanese. These guerrillas' tortured civilians they suspected of collaboration. Sometimes the collaboration issue was not involved at all. A personal grudge was enough for one to be brought to the municipal hall of Sta. Lucia, Ilocos Sur, which had been converted into a torture chamber.

De la Llana could not stand the abuses perpetrated by Filipinos on their own countrymen. He grumbled against it and wished that he could talk with the American commander to see if the latter could stop the senseless killings and maiming. Suspicion that he was pro-Japanese was the inevitable result, although Pedro was a familiar figure at guerrilla meeting and even in their dances. One day

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in late 1944, in the nearby town of Baugen, Pedro heard a guerrilla officer say, "We are going to see Major Barnett." It was the occasion he was waiting for, for he had plenty to say. Pedro asked for a horse, thinking that the journey would be far into the mountains. "A horse isn't necessary, Mr. De la Llana," the officer replied, because Major Barnett is just around the corner."

When the march proceeded towards the cemetery of Baugen De la Lana's suspicion was aroused. "Boys," he asked, alarm in his voice, "where are you taking me?"

The guerrilla group did not answer him. They led him to a freshly dug pit and began hacking and clubbing him. With Pedro in the pit, it was hastily covered and the "Stormy Petrel of Philippine Journalism was silenced forever."

Many unanswered questions still linger to this day, sixty-six years after Pedro De la Llana's death. It was never verified that US Army Major George M. Barnett signed the execution order. De la Llana was never given a trial and never heard the chargers levied against him. His death was "most un-military."

A poem "To the 1922 U.P. Graduates"

Whose creeds of social service shall outlast
The pow'r of tyrants and the Thrones of Might,
March on beneath the banner of the free,

.....

As soldiers of your country's liberty,

.....

Whose hearts that throb with patriotism grand
Subdue the very forces of despair.

~Pedro de la Llana*

References:

Manila Times article by Armando J. Malay

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