

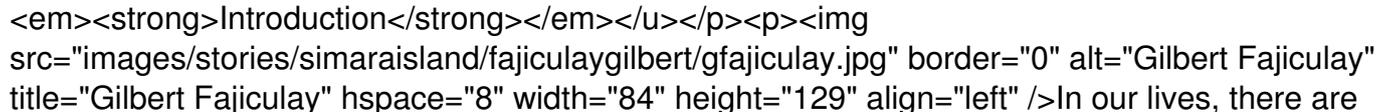
A Coin In The Sand

Written by Gilbert Falceso Fajiculay

Saturday, 31 January 2009 22:37 - Last Updated Thursday, 02 June 2011 23:17

[Top](#) **A Coin In The Sand**
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Introduction

 In our lives, there are places and events that remain more or less permanent in one's memory. Many events are not within our power to change. However, we do have the power to positively react on, adapt to, absorb or assimilate the impact of such events. One could seize the moment or the moment could also seize him.

My goal in writing this story is primarily to present the facts to many or most Simaranhons who have forgotten some history of the land from which they came from. The sources of this work came from available written records, from interviews of older residents, and from my own experiences. The students in our schools can surely gain from the information presented in this story.

Some landmarks or features of the island have disappeared over the years already. With most written records destroyed, the young of today have no clue of what was Simara before their time. This story could help them renew with the past. My hope is that a few more Simaranhons could write about another time in the history of our island.

The Greatness of Gettysburg

In the summer of 1998 I visited Pennsylvania with my family. We toured the most historic places in the state. One of the places that is high on our list is the town of Gettysburg in south central Pennsylvania. There is a quote saying "Pennsylvania where our nation was born ♦ Gettysburg where our nation was saved."

Gettysburg is famous for its Gettysburg Battlefield which is most written about and visited by many tourists. Several movies have also been produced portraying that momentous American Civil War event, the carnage and destruction, and the heroic acts of valor of the combatants. It is said that in July 1-3, 1863, there were 51,000 casualties resulting from the engagements between the Confederate and Union Armies.

When we toured the place, we actually drove through farms that were battlegrounds during that great encounter. Hundreds upon hundreds of monuments and military hardware are shown erected on many sites along the road. In walking along the memorial site and burial grounds, one can only reflect on how much blood was shed upon the hills by those patriotic Americans, all in pursuit of man's indomitable desire for freedom, liberty and independence.

In the town's railroad station, there is now a replica of the train used by President Abraham Lincoln when he went to the battlefield site to dedicate the National Cemetery. In his dedication of the ground, he delivered the famous and immortal Gettysburg Address. I still remember his speech very clearly as I once recited it in high school.

Even to this day, Lincoln's solemn words reverberate throughout the world. "♦this government of the people, by the people, and for the people ♦"; his line is repeated in many revolutionary struggles for freedom and democracy. Its impact is manifested in historic events like the People Power revolution in the Philippines, the collapse of communism and the tearing down of the infamous Berlin Wall. Many dictatorial regimes have been toppled and now replaced by democratically elected governments like those in Eastern Europe, Russia and Latin America.

The City of Liberty

The other place we visited was the city of Philadelphia. This city is a very historic one as it is where America was born. We toured the Independence Hall and saw the historic documents of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. We

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went to the adjoining Congress Hall where the upper and lower houses of Congress first convened. We walked around the Liberty Bell which showed its distinctive and almost vertical crack. The Bell's chime in July 8, 1776 summoned the citizenry to hear the Declaration of Independence.

Then we went to the Betsy Ross House where the first US flag was hand-sewn. I have to mention a coincidence that Flag Day in the US is observed on June 14, my birthday. We also went to the cemetery where a famous person, Benjamin Franklin, was buried. Along its streets and on building facades, the old city is beautifully decorated with all sorts of historic trappings. For many visitors, myself including, the place and mood can evoke a feeling of pride, patriotism and freedom.

The last stop of our visit was at the United States Mint which is just across from Ben Franklin's grave. The US Mint building in Philadelphia is one of several federal facilities that produce various US coins for circulation in the world market. The tour offers the visitor a history of coin making in the US, as well as the chance to watch coins being minted. I have seen different kinds of coins in several shades, denominations and special commemorative purposes.

The Rediscovery and the Connection

This particular visit to the Mint gave me more than the burst of freedom's joy. Walking along the viewing corridors inside the building, I saw a Liberty Half-Dollar coin shown in one of the many display shelves. This coin was minted in 1943. My heartbeat pulsated more than normal that moment. The image of a Lady with the year 1943 shown on one face and that of an Eagle on the opposite face looked familiar to me. I knew I have seen those images in the past, long before I came to America.

Symbols of freedom, the Half-Dollar coin, and a visitor from the Island of Simara- the link is very strong and special to me. It gave me chills. Suddenly my mind was wondering with memories from the past. Feelings of nostalgia and excitement competed in my being.

I thought of a nexus that brought me from the shores of Simara to the shores of America. I pondered about the process, about the ultimate sacrifice of a hero in order to provide freedom for his beloved ones. Yes, there were ultimate sacrifices not only from the heroic GI's but also from one close in the family.

My interest on the subject of war, heroism and patriotism never left my thought even after returning home. To quench my thirst for more information, I went to the library and read pages upon pages of the American liberation of the Philippines in 1944-1945. The ubiquity of personal computers and the proliferation of information on the internet have made available to me more snippets of details relevant to the subject.

I shall begin my recollection to an event that occurred one summer morning in 1958. It was the day after another typhoon had devastated our region. It was a day I will never forget. The moment is permanently infused in my brain. I realized in later years that that moment had a relevance in Simara's history as it exposed a part of history itself that many Simaranhons may have forgotten or have never known, the Battle of Simara.

As I reflected on the great battles fought by the Americans like the one in Gettysburg, I also mused about what have happened in Simara in World War II. In my childhood days, I heard stories from the older folks about big navy battleships and other surface ships cruising across Tablas Strait towards Sibuyan Sea. They mentioned about airplane bombardments visible around Simara's skies to the north.

When Storms Come

The island of Simara lies on the northwestern sector of Romblon province. It is one of the 7,107 islands that comprise the Philippine archipelago. It is also in the path of typhoons that travel from the Pacific Ocean through the archipelago towards the China Sea. During the summer months, Simara gets some of these typhoon crossings.

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Following a storm, the southwesterly *habagat* winds blow. The huge waves crest and continuously pound the beaches, depositing seaweed, logs, shells and other flotsam on the shore. The beaten shoreline is constantly re-arranged as wave after wave of the angry sea erodes and re-deposits sand layer on the surface.

After every storm, many local residents go to the beach in early morn and leisurely comb the shoreline. Some people gather shells while others look for rare objects that were washed ashore. A few would try to put their footprints in the sand and play tag with each incoming wave. The wave unloads its weight in a splash and erases any footprints as the water flows back to the sea. Still others would just enjoy strolling along newly formed sand layer, sharing stories and laughs with each other.

I woke up early after a strong typhoon had passed our region overnight. The mighty *habagat* had started. Coming out of the door, I could hear the waves battering the beaches once more. The old *talisay* trees on the plaza swayed their branches in rhythm with the powerful gusts.

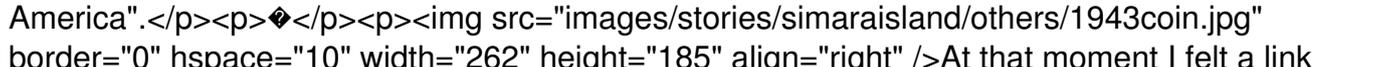
Our house is situated on the eastern corner of the town plaza, to the right of the old *Mercado* (marketplace), about a hundred meters from the beach. From a distance I saw some people, young and old, who were already helping themselves towards the beach. I proceeded to the beach area just behind the old Municipal hall and closest to our house.

The Big Find

The sea was ravaging as ever and its surface teeming with white-decked waves. The undulation of the sea caresses the *timon*, alternately exposing and hiding its presence, as each wave crosses its location. The *timon* is a protruding skeletal frame, remnants of the rudder of a sunken Spanish *galleon* which ran aground east of the coral reefs. The wind was moderately strong and it hummed its own music as it glided on the sand surface and the branches of the trees.

The sun's rays were light and welcoming. The beach sparkled like gold that morning. Each step deposited clear distinct footprints as I strolled towards the rising sun. After walking for about fifty feet, a glint of light coming from close to the water's edge had reached the corner of my eyes just as a five-foot wave receded back to the sea. I imagined it was just an open half shell reflecting the early sunlight. As I drew nearer, I could see a silvery half-moon reflection from the thing that was half buried in the sand, uncovered more by the next receding wave. With curiosity I picked up the metallic object and examined it with excitement.

I have never seen such a big coin before. It was fairly clean and heavy. Philippine coins I have touched were smaller and lighter. I looked at the inscriptions on each face, and one side read "United States of America". Claspng it in my hand like a precious treasure, I ran back home and showed this find to my mother. She confirmed it was an American coin, a half dollar minted 1943. And so I spoke innocently but silently to myself, "Wow! What a find, now I can go to America".



At that moment I felt a link between the coin and me. I imagined I have touched the hand of the person who spent some of his time in Simara's beach. I knew not his name but I knew who he was. He was an American who landed on Simara's soil, a fighting soldier, a liberator, and one of America's heroes. In his heroics that day of March 1945, he disembarked from the landing craft close to the water's edge and knowingly or unknowingly dropped a coin in the sand.

As a young boy, I really believed then that finding and possessing an American coin was a good omen to me. From that day on, I dreamed of coming to America. The half-dollar coin ignited my desire to come to the land of the free, the home of the brave. Somehow I felt that it was inevitable but I did not know why then. It is my destiny I believed, and God has a plan for

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me.

I learned about America in elementary school. I learned that the old folks also used to sing the American National anthem in flag-raising ceremonies until 1946. The country was once a Commonwealth territory of the United States.

The War at Home

When I was a kid, I remembered some older residents talked about where they were during the war. They said that living under Japanese occupation was hard and dangerous. The Japanese soldiers treated them harshly and contemptuously because of their patronage of America. The great conflagration had resulted in tremendous devastation, hardship, pain and loss of life to the Simaranhons.

Several Simaranhons enlisted in the army prior to the outbreak of World War II. They fought in different campaigns and in different places during the war. These Simaranhons are our local heroes. They are: Col. Inocencio Fondevilla Fallaria, Maj. Hidalgo F. Falceso, [Sgt. Pacifico Fajilan](index.php/articles/50-feature-story/61-pacifico-fajilan-the-journey-of-an-icon), Cpl. Rufo Famorcan Fallurin, Florencio Faminiano, Natalio Fabregas, Arsenio Faner, and [Armando Fallar Falceso](index.php/articles/50-feature-story/62-wartime-memories-of-a-simaranhon-foot-soldier).

The Second World War changed the whole world. Even though I was born after the war, I can say it also changed my world. An important link has been laid out years before my birth, and it was started by a great sacrifice in that war.

During the war, my mother and her two children stayed in Simara and lived with her parents and other relatives. She had to live out the war without the company and support of her husband, the late Rufo Famorcan Fallurin. Corporal Fallurin had enlisted with the USAFFE and saw action in Luzon in 1942. He was the only known Simaranhon soldier to have suffered and died in the infamous Death March. He was the hero in our family.

An Island in the Sun



Simara is strategically located between Tablas Strait and Sibuyan Sea. Shaped like the head of an arrow (*sima*), its terrain is mostly flat with some hills in the interior. The waters around the island are pristine, and the coral reefs are clearly visible on the surface. Many beautiful white sandy beaches abound along its shores. The interior and highlands are teeming with coconut plantation. The highest peak, Tanro-aw Hill, rises to about eight hundred feet above sea level. From this peak, one can scan the horizon in all directions with a fair amount of visibility.

In very clear weather, the outline of Masbate and the Bicol region could be seen from the vantage point of Tanro-aw. Aside from the nearby islands comprising Romblon province, the outlying islands of Mindoro, Marinduque, and Sibuyan are also visible. This peak is a perfect outpost for lookout of any maritime or naval activity in the Sibuyan Sea. It was used during the Spanish period as a signal outpost. The signalman would light a *suyo* (a bundle of dried coconut leaves used as a torch) if he sees incoming Moslem pirate boats approaching the island, thus forewarning the residents.

The surrounding water is part of the shipping lane for maritime traffic between Batangas or Manila ports and the Visayas and Mindanao ports. There is a lighthouse on a promontory southwest of the island, serving as a beckon for navigation across the straits.

The Americans Return

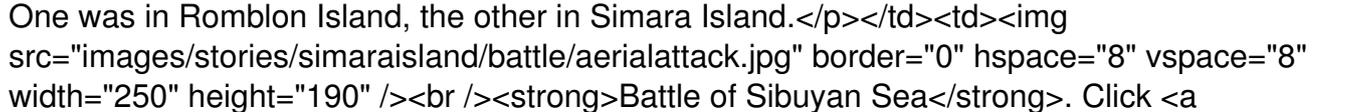
<p>The year was 1944. General Douglas MacArthur, who promised the Filipinos in 1942 with his famous words "I Shall</p>
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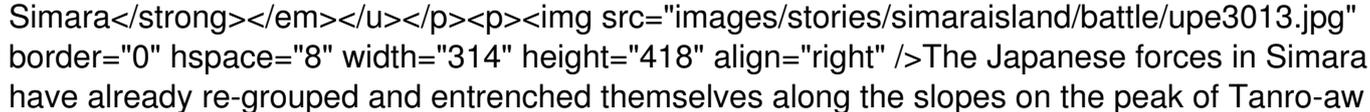
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Return", finally returned to liberate the Philippines from the Japanese aggressors. He landed his invasion forces in Leyte in October 20, 1944. In the ensuing naval battles in Central Visayas, the Japanese 1st Attack Force under Adm. Kurita was discovered cruising through Sibuyan Sea coming within range of the US 3rd Fleet carrier based aircraft under the command of Adm. Halsey. The US planes pounded the enemy fleet for several hours, destroying and sinking its prize battleship, the Musashi. This battle took place north northwest of Simara Island during the day of October 24, 1944. Many local residents have witnessed this historic battle known in history books as the Battle of Sibuyan Sea. In 1944 through 1945, there were numerous amphibious landings and land conquests in which the American and Filipino soldiers fought to drive the Japanese invaders out of the Philippines. In Romblon sector there were only two military engagements recorded in the US Military history. One was in Romblon Island, the other in Simara Island.

 Battle of Sibuyan Sea. Click [here](index.php/articles/36-others/65-battle-of-sibuyan-sea) to read its full story and view more photos of the historic battle.

[The Battle of Simara](#)

 The Japanese forces in Simara have already re-grouped and entrenched themselves along the slopes on the peak of Tanro-aw hill. In March 10, 1945, elements of "B" and "C" Co, 19th Inf, 24th Div, US 8th Army, and a few Filipino soldiers, had disembarked from Mindoro aboard a troop transport. The task force was led by a Butler-class destroyer escort, the USS Haas, skippered by Lt. Cmdr. A.M. White. The destroyer USS Haas was named after a valiant hero of the US Navy who was awarded posthumously with the Navy Cross; and with another coincidence, his birthday also falls on June 14.

The "B" company was assigned to assault and retake Simara Island, and the "C" company, Romblon Island. Company "C" landed unopposed on Romblon shortly after midnight of March 11. The task force then proceeded to Simara.

The Battle of Simara started in March 12, 1945. Very early that morning the USS Haas trained its big guns on Simara and begun naval bombardment of enemy positions. A diversionary aerial attack by an escort aircraft was made also on another part of the island.

At dawn, three assault landings were made by the 532nd boat crews under the command of 1st Lt. David B. Bernard. Elements of "B" Company landed without opposition in Ilijan beach. While at anchorage at Ilijan the boats were fired upon by Japanese machine gunners but no casualties were inflicted.

Informed by local residents that there were no more Japanese soldiers in Poblacion, the "B" Company moved overland across the hills of Ilijan towards Mabini by way of Gobon. They encamped and rested in Mabini overnight. The following morning, the American GI's proceeded towards the hills of Tanro-aw.

On March 13, a platoon of American soldiers disembarked from a Landing Barge at the Poblacion beach behind the old Municipal hall. They unloaded a battery of mortars and positioned them in front of the old Mercado. The Americans fired salvos after salvos of mortar barrage on the hills of Tanro-aw. After the bombardment, the soldiers of Company "B" assaulted enemy positions.

It took four days of heavy fighting to subdue the enemy. After mopping up operations, the campaign to liberate Simara Island was successfully ended on March 20. The casualties of the battle were heavy. There were 118 Japanese soldiers killed in this encounter. One Japanese soldier managed to escape by boat to nearby Banton Island

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where he was captured and subsequently put to death by the Bantoanons.

Company "B", 9th Infantry had lost 10 of its gallant men, and 20 more GI's were wounded in action. The only known Filipino casualty in this battle was a guerilla who came with the American forces. Lt. Casiao was felled by a Japanese sniper's bullet on the slopes of Tanro-aw hill.

Reflections

The Battle of Simara Island is part of our local history, of Philippine history, and of US history. I hope that the American soldiers who gave their lives to liberate Simara will not have died in vain. And so are our own Simaranhon soldiers who lost their lives during the war to defeat aggression and injustice.

The ultimate sacrifice of the American and Filipino soldiers in the war have given us the precious freedoms that we enjoy today. On a more personal note and more important to my family, Cpl. Rufo Fallurin's heroic sacrifice had ushered to his loved ones an opportunity. He did not die in vain. To his family and descendants, he gave a new home and a new beginning. He died so that we could live and share in the blessings of liberty in the land of the free, America.

During Memorial Day observed every month of May, Americans remember the men and women in uniform who served in all of America's wars. We Simaranhons should and must render also the same reverence and honor to the men of Company "B", 9th Infantry, and to all soldiers who liberated Simara. They have permanently put the name Simara Island in the books of US Military history. They have signed the leaf of that history with their own blood.

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