Capitan Juan de Salcedo, founder of Villa Fernandina and the whole Ilocos Region, 1572. At the age of 23, he became Lieutenant Governor of the region. (Zaragoza Archives)
Chapter I

Captain Juan De Salcedo

The story of Vigan is linked forever to the story of Juan de Salcedo, the last conquistador. Born in Mexico City in 1549, of parents, Don Pedro de Salcedo, and Doña Teresa Legaspi, who were Creoles (mestizos of Spanish decent), Salcedo was fifteen when his maternal grandfather, Miguel Lopez de Legaspi, led the 1564 expedition to the Philippines. Three years later Salcedo left Puerto Navidad in Mexico to join his grandfather, the Adelantado Legaspi, in Cebu, from whom he received his first command, that of the Guachinangos, Mexican soldiers and sailors who, following their tour of duty in the colony, would return to Mexico. Tasked, along with Martin de Goiti, the Maestre de Campo (general of the brigade), with the exploration of the island of Panay, with a view to eventually relocating to it the capital of the colony, they had no sooner set out when reports reached them concerning the existence of a wealthy indio settlement, called Manila by its inhabitants, on the island of Luzon, by a river called the Pasig, and facing a magnificent deep bay. This prompted Salcedo and Goiti to set sail in quest of Manila instead. Going ashore at Balayan, Batangas, the point of their first contact with Luzon, they took in, among other things, the breathtakingly beautiful vista of the crater lake of Taal volcano. On their way back to their ship they were set upon by a fierce band of natives. Salcedo suffered the leg wound (from a poisoned arrow) that prevented him from joining his companions in entering and taking possession of Manila following the capitulation to them of Rajah Soliman and his warriors (the invaders had succeeded in torching the wooden palisades that in times past had served to protect Manila from its enemies, as well as a great many dwellings within). In 1571, the Adelantado Legaspi relocated his forces to Manila, and in 1595, the Spanish Crown established it as the capital of the colony.
As soon as he had recovered from his wounds, Salcedo went off with his men on yet another mission, this time to break the resistance to Spanish authority that had been developing for quite some time in the northwestern province of Zambales. Notwithstanding the valiant defense they put up of their territory, the defenders of Zambales, with their lances, bows and arrows, proved in the end to be no match to the Spaniards who came in their steel armor and harquebus. Salcedo next undertook the exploration of the northwestern coast of Luzon, with instructions from his grandfather to establish, if possible, from some point in that as yet uncharted territory, a shorter trade route between the Philippines and Mexico. And so it came to pass that, in the name of Spain, Salcedo formally colonized, Tarlac, Pangasinan, La Union, Abra, Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, the Mountain Province, and the Cagayan Valley. In Los Ylocos, he and his party initially set up camp at the point where the Mestizo River meets the sea. Exploring a little further inland, they came upon a settlement called Bigan (named after the Biga, or *Alocasia Indica*, a species of plant which grew in abundance there). On June 13, 1572, Salcedo renamed Bigan, Villa Fernandina, to honor Crown Prince Ferdinand, son of King Philip II of Spain, and designated it capital of the Ilocos Region.

Following his sojourn at Villa Fernandina, he crossed over to Cagayan, pushing eastward all the way to the Pacific coast. Traveling down that coast on an Indio sailboat, he disembarked at a point immediately west of Polillo Island, in order to hit the Negrito trails that snaked their way across the Sierra Madre Mountains to their ultimate destination on the central plain of Luzon. From that point on it was easy riding to Manila. In Manila, his new assignment was to quell the unrest that was building up among the native populations east and south of the city, particularly in Cainta, which had explicitly rejected Spanish sovereignty. Notwithstanding the role he played in a number of campaigns to quell *indio* unrest, no reports have come down to us of cruelty or vindictiveness on Salcedo’s part toward the *indios*. He was no stranger to the Spaniards’ terrible maltreatment
of the lowly *indios* back in Mexico and had quite possibly promised himself that, so long as he could help it, that sort of cruelty would not be replicated here. Once, in Ilocos, to avoid unnecessary bloodletting among their respective men at arms, he even proposed to the local chieftain that they arrive at the settlement of their conflict by having just the two of them to square it off.

On August 20, 1572, Salcedo received news of his grandfather’s demise, barely two years following his appointment as first Governor General of the Philippines. Instead of hastening back to Manila, Salcedo continued in his assigned task—the colonization in the name of Spain of *indio* villages in Laguna and the Camarines Region. Only upon the successful completion of his mission did Salcedo return to Intramuros. His grandfather had been a poor man at death, with not even enough money in his estate to pay for such a funeral as would have befitted a Governor General of the colony. Governor General Guido de Lavezares, Legaspi’s successor, had no further military assignments to accord Salcedo, although he did give to Salcedo, on behalf of an appreciative Spanish Crown, an *encomienda*, or fiefdom, comprised of the entire Ilocos Region.

On the Feast of St. Andrew, November 1574, the Chinese corsair, Lin Feng (or Limahong, as he was known to the Spaniards), invaded Ermita (in which had consisted the outskirts of Manila), and in the ensuing clash of arms killed Goiti, its principal defender. He then proceeded to lay siege to the walled settlement of Intramuros. Lavezares frantically sent word of the their dire straits to Salcedo who, accompanied by twenty soldiers, had earlier gone up to Ilocos. Lavezares informed him as well of his “battlefield” appointment of him as *Maestre de Campo*, to succeed Goiti as Manila’s defender. Unable under the circumstances to procure the horses or boats that would have facilitated their swift return to the besieged city, Salcedo and his men made their way back on foot. This proved to be a blessing in disguise because as slow moving as they were, they succeeded,
as they moved along, particularly in the towns of Pagsanjan and Pampanga, in rallying scores of people to the defense of Intramuros. At the head of this force, Salcedo repelled the invaders, who beat a hasty path back to their ships, sped across Manila Bay to the relative safety of the Gulf of Lingayen, and from there eventually sailed back to China.

Salcedo chose not to give Limahong chase, mindful of the colony's much depleted economic and manpower standing. His perceived inaction cost him his job. Francisco de Sande, Lavezares' successor as Governor General, who had wanted for Limahong to be hunted down and destroyed, stripped Salcedo of his command. This left Salcedo feeling very much betrayed. He sought and obtained a formal two-year leave from his contractual obligations to the Crown, and made ready to return to Mexico. But because his sister, Elvira, was in need of a dowry, he returned to Villa Fernandina, accompanied by his widowed mother and sisters, to collect and establish as Elvira's dowry, the tribute due him. As fate would have it, during that visit, Salcedo ingested some water drawn from a contaminated village spring on the outskirts of Villa Fernandina, which immediately caused him to become severely ill with dysentery. Three hours later, on March 11, 1576, at the age of 27, four years subsequent to his formal founding of Villa Fernandina, Salcedo was dead.

It then came to light that, in his will, Salcedo had left the ownership of his entire economienda to its inhabitants. The grateful Ilocanos established a monument to honor him on the main Plaza of Vigan, directly across the Cathedral of Saint Paul. Upon the exhumation of his remains a year later, preparatory to their transfer to the ossuary in the chapel of San Fausto in San Agustin Church in Intramuros, where he would be laid to rest next to Miguel de Legaspi, it was discovered that his skull was missing. It has been conjectured that, in keeping with ancient Ilocano practice, in regard especially to individuals, invoked by
the Ilocanos as revered Apo or god, the Ilocanos had somehow been able to obtain it and transferred it to some secret chapel where it could be properly venerated. That skull has never been found, notwithstanding the threats and cajolments directed by the Spanish authorities at the natives. Quite understandably, the skull of the Apo has become the stuff of legend. Two centuries later, during the British invasion of 1762-64, Salcedo's remains, along with those of Legaspi and of other city notables, were scattered by British soldiers who, in their quest for buried treasure and other artifacts, had torn up the floor of the Church of San Agustin. To preempt their further desecration by the British soldiers, the Augustinian Friars gathered what they could of those scattered remains, and reinterred them as one.

Recent archival research has brought to light a number of beautiful stories and legends relating to this young conquistador, who died a bachelor. There is, for instance, the story of the love he shared with Dayang-Dayang Candarapa, a native princess and niece of Rajah Lakandula of Tondo, who had taken her name from a melodious lark of the rice fields. She, unfortunately, had been promised in marriage to a chieftain from Macabebe, Pampanga. It is said that if Salcedo had embarked upon more than his fair share of oftentimes risky exploratory expeditions, it was partly so he could get over thoughts of her. Dayang-Dayang, for her part, was reputed to be have been so deeply love with Salcedo that when the nasty and false rumor got to her that Salcedo had married an Ilocana, the pain it caused her motivated her to take her own life. With her death ended one of the most beautiful love stories of the early history of Villa Fernando, Ilocos Sur.
Brass signal canon, stone and musket balls used by the Spaniards in the Ilocos Region (Zaragoza Collection).
The Bigan is from the family of the gabi plant, which grew abundantly along the region's riverbanks and brooks (ZA).
The Biga, Bigaa or Bigan plant (*Alocasia Indica*), originally from India, from which Vigan derives its name (Blanco, *Flora de Filipinas*) (ZA).
Explicacion de las islas:

- Pueblo de Cristianos
- Pueblo de Invierno de quatreinta vi-
  butos en adelante.
- Id. de veinte en adelante.
- Id. de ocho en adelante.

Map of Abra de Vigan in 1885 showing Bagan, or Vigan as an island facing
the South China Sea (National Archives of the Philippines).
MAPA
Geográfico
DEL CENTRO DE LA ABRAS
en la
Provincia de Ylocos.
Plaza Salcedo with the monument at its center to honor its founder, Capitan Juan de Salcedo (El Oriente, 1876) (ZA).
Plaza Salcedo today, its monument, pond, and the Vigan Cathedral (Zaragoza Archives).
A panoramic view from the Bantay Tower of the Cordillera Mountains with the Abra River at their base and a barrio and small cemetery in the foreground (ZA).
Map of the historic district of Vigan (ZA).

- The now moribund Govantes River, which used to form part of Vigan's natural protection against its enemies (ZA).

- A remaining portion of the Mestizo River in Cabalangengan, Vigan. Together with the Govantes River, it encircled the city to create La Isla de Bigan. On this river once stood a vibrant trading port (ZA).
- The Bantay bell tower located on top of a hill. It served as a Spanish outlook post, to safeguard Vigan (ZA).

- A Spanish watch tower along the coast of Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, 1925 (ZA).

- A Spanish lighthouse in Cape Bojeador, Burgos, Ilocos Norte. It was built to protect Spanish boats, called naos, and settlements, from foreign attack (ZA).
A bell of the Bantay Tower, overlooking the city of Vigan (ZA).

The bells of Bantay Tower alerted the people of Vigan to the presence of mauroaders from elsewhere (ZA).
The rough waves of the Ilocos Norte Coast of Burgos, such as Salcedo would have encountered during his expedition (ZA).

Coastal scenery of the Narvacan-Santa seascape, first come upon by the Spaniards in the 16th century (ZA).
Coral formations along the Narvacan Coastal Highway (ZA).

Waves course through a underwater from the ocean and end up in a natural lagoon in Burgos, Ilocos Norte (ZA).