

15 July 1948.

Reverend Vincent I. Kennally, S/J
Civil Administration Unit
Navy 3410, Truk, Caroline Islands

Re: Execution of Catholic Religious in the Palau Islands.

Dear Reverend Father,

In reply to your recent oral inquiry regarding the execution of Catholic priests in the Palau Islands, the records of this office indicate that the four Catholic priests and two Catholic brothers on missionary duty in the Palau Islands were, sometime in September, 1944, taken from the various islands on which they had been stationed and gathered at the home of one Agapite C. Hondonero on Babelthuas Island, Palau Islands.

The names of the religious and their nationalities are as follows:

- (1) Luis Blanco Y. Suarez, Catholic priest, Spanish national, resident of Yap Island,
- (2) Bernardo De La Espriella, Catholic priest, Colombian national, resident of Yap Island,
- (3) Marino De La Hoz, Catholic priest, Spanish national, resident of Koror Island,
- (4) Elias Fernandez Gonzalez, Catholic priest, Spanish national, resident of Koror Island,
- (5) Francisco Hernandez Y. Escudero, Catholic brother, Spanish national, resident of Yap Island, and
- (6) Emilio Villar, Catholic brother, Spanish national, resident of Koror Island.

The Hondonero home was located on Babelthuas Island, approximately one mile from the headquarters of the Japanese Kempeitai (Military Police). This particular organization was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Miyazaki, Imperial Japanese Army. He was apparently under the impression that the missionaries and the Hondoneros were acting as spies for the American forces, and it was therefore decided to execute them. There is a great

likelihood that this matter had been discussed with the commanding officer of the 14th Division, Lieutenant General Inoue, for at an assembly held on the day of the execution, namely, September 18th, 1944, Miyazaki announced that the execution was being performed upon the orders of Headquarters.

On September 18th, 1944, Miyazaki lead an armed party consisting of several officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted men of the Kempeitai to the home of the Hondoneros. The six religious and the four members of the Hondonero family were loaded aboard two trucks and were driven some distance from the Hondonero's house. When they were removed from the trucks their hands were bound behind them. They were lead a short distance into the jungle where a grave had already been prepared. The victims were all forced to kneel at the side of this open grave and were shot with pistols and rifles. Their bodies were tumbled into the grave and the grave was closed. Sometime after the end of the war and prior to the occupation of Babelthusp Island by the American armed forces, the bodies were dug up and cremated.

For the murder of the six religious and the four Hondonero's, twenty of the members of the Kempeitai were tried by the Military Commission convened by the Commander Marianas Area. Eighteen of the twenty were convicted on 25 March 1948 and sentenced on the same day to various terms of imprisonment, ranging from ten years to twenty-five years. It was impossible to try the principal culprit, Lieutenant Colonel Miyazaki, as he committed suicide in Japan.

The execution of the religious will also constitute a charge against Lieutenant General Inoue at his forthcoming trial.

Very truly yours,

M. E. CURRIE,
Commander, U.S.N.R.,
Acting Director of War Crimes,
U. S. Pacific Fleet.