

REPLYING  
REFER TO NO.



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

28 February 1946

Statement of: Lieutenant Joseph F. Balgenorth, CHC. 374141 USNR.  
Hdqts 1st Bn. 26th. Marines(Reinforced)

On the 27th. of January 1946, I was on the Islands of Koror and Babelthusp, (Palaus), conducting religious services for the Marine personnel and the Natives of these Islands. I was told that one of the Catholic natives had papers that he wanted to give to the Catholic Padre. This native proved to be the chief of the native police, working under the Military Government. The man's name was - *Oukerdem*.

I received the attached papers from this native and was told by him that they had been entrusted to him by one of the Padres, called Father Elias Fernandez. He had been told to give them to no one except a Catholic Padre.

There were two papers along with stubs such as might be issued with a bond. The address of the Padre's brother was also enclosed.

My limited knowledge of Spanish, the language in which the note was written, left me in doubt as to the real nature of the note so I consulted one of the officers in the Military Government who knew Spanish and also with the language officer attached to the Marines at Koror.

The note was addressed to Father Fernandez or could have been written by him. It was not signed. In the light of the paper in Japanese, which seemed to be more in the line of a savings account, the note didn't seem to make sense. Being a priest myself I tried to put myself in the place of the Padre and came to the following line of thought.

It impressed me that the Padre wrote the note, not so much in the sense of a legal paper but with the intention of giving a message. My impressions were that he was trying to tell of what might be termed a shot-gun business deal that he was forced into by the Japanese. My reasons for so thinking are founded on the fact that sale described would mean that the Padres would be selling their home which stands right next to the church-in fact run almost to the doors of the church. I am sure that they wouldn't want to do this no matter how much was offered for the building and land-since the church itself would be useless under such conditions. The only other conclusion to be reached was that they were being forced to sell against their will. The fact that there is no statement showing that they actually did sell further leads to belief that they were putting off the deal as long as possible. The Japanese-if the translation I received was correct, would seem to indicate that the property was taken anyways and that a deposit-no money-was given the Padres in the form of a savings account which may or may not have existed in the bank.

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The above is just a personal impression and should be taken in that light.

It might well be that the above business deal was, at least in part, the cause of the Padres falling into disfavor with the Japanese Authorities.

That they had fallen into disfavor seems to be the common opinion of the natives of both Koror and Babelthuap.

I might further add that I held services for the Catholic Natives in quite a few places on the Islands and that all the natives, I have met, seem to indicate that the Padres never left the Island and that they were killed by the Japanese. Stories given by the natives, however, have much of contradiction about them when it comes to the real facts as to how this killing happened.

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