

Excerpt

Guam War Crime Trials. In 1944, when Roman Tmetuchl was 18 years old, he was employed by the *Kenpeitai*, the Japanese military police. The Japanese military had been steadily pushed back to Palau by Admiral Nimitz's forces moving relentlessly across the central Pacific and General McArthur sweeping north from New Guinea, aiming for a victorious return to the Philippines. The Japanese had lost fierce battles on Saipan and Guam in June and July 1944, and braced for an attack on Palau. Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo had dispatched the Fourteenth ("Sunlight") Division, one of the best in the Imperial Japanese Army, from Manchuria to Palau under the command of Lt. General Sadae Inoue. Inoue assigned experienced, hardened battalion size units to Angaur and Peleliu. After U.S. forces took both islands, Inoue moved his headquarters and that of the *Kenpeitai* (Japanese military police) from Koror to Ngatpang, an area on southern Babeldaob. Roman assisted in this move and in numerous investigations, the escape of Joseph Tellei and a group of Chamorros being significant.

September 1944 was a fateful month for the Japanese military in Palau. On September 4, Inoue ordered the execution of three American prisoners of war, apparently flyers. According to Roman, these flyers and two Palauans, one by the name of Mobel, knowing their plan was risky, attempted to escape. The escape failed and the Americans were executed and buried somewhere in Ngatpang. On September 15 and 17, U.S. forces invaded Peleliu and Angaur. On September 18, six Catholic missionaries and four members of the Hondonero family, which included two small children, were executed by shots to the head. The missionary group included Father Marino, Father Elias, and Brother Emilio, all Spanish Jesuits who had served in Palau since the early 1920's. The other three missionaries--two Catholic priests and one brother--were from Yap. According to Commander M. E. Currie, USNR, and Acting Director Guam War Crimes Commission, Lt. Col. Aritsune Miyazaki, head of the *kenpeitai*, believed the missionaries had been acting as spies for the American forces.

In early 1948, Roman Tmetuchl was transported by the U.S. Navy to Guam by ship to participate as a witness for the prosecution at the trial of twenty former Japanese Imperial Army personnel who allegedly were responsible for the deaths of the six Catholic missionaries and four civilians of the Hondonero family. The accused faced two charges: 1) violation of the law and customs or war and 2) murder. The trials were held at Navy headquarters on what today is known as Nimitz Hill, Guam. Roman recalled that he was tired from practicing his testimony over and over again. On the day of the hearing, the officers of the military commission were in their fancy dress uniforms. Roman recalled being taken into a small room and then to the court which was in a huge jumbo Quonset hut. There were nine officers, staff, about twenty defendants, the prosecutors, and defense attorneys. When Roman saw all of this--the officers of the commission in full dress uniforms, staff, the press--he recalled that he was stunned into silence, initially. His testimony, presented in Japanese and translated into English, consisted of a long battery of questions and answers. He identified 17 of the 20 accused former Japanese Imperial Army officers and enlisted men, indicated that he was employed by the *kenpeitai*, stated that he knew the Catholic missionaries and knew of the four members of the Hondonero family and that they were all being held together under guard in a house near the *kenpeitai* headquarters. Roman also testified that he saw about 16 members of the *kenpeitai* assemble and leave the headquarters at about 7 P.M., and heard shots about 40 minutes later. Roman testified that he found what he thought were Fr. Marino's spectacles near the house where the missionaries and Hondonero family had lived.

The 1948 U.S. Military Commission war crimes trial at which Roman testified, seventeen former members of the *Kenpeitai* were found guilty by the commission of the charges levied. Lead defendants former Captain Kazuharu Yamamoto and former Second Lt. Yokichi Ichikawa were each sentenced to 25 years in prison and the others either 20 or 15 years. Former Lt. Col. Aritsune Miyazaki who headed the *Kenpeitai* in Palau committed suicide by taking potassium cyanide after he had been arrested in Japan and before he