

INTERVIEW

Ramona Baiei

Translator: Lorenza Pedro

Questioner: Donald Shuster

Friday, October 26, 2001, at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Koror

Don Shuster: Ramona, did you know these Japanese officers--Maejima or Sakamoto?

Ramona Baiei: I seem to remember the name Sakamoto. The Army barracks and the Kempei (Kempei Tai) barracks were close to each other. The Army men and Kempei men would often talk about things.

DS: Where did you live in relation to the Ngatpang water falls?

RB: It was near the water falls.

DS: Do you know the place where the missionaries were killed?

RB: No, I don't know. I have no idea why they wanted to kill the missionaries. It happened when I left the military [compound]. When I came back, they were celebrating with songs and dances that the foreigners had been killed. If the invading army lands... they won't find anything because we (the Japanese military) had destroyed all traces of the priests--pictures, savings books--and we're free to die. That's what they were saying.

DS: Ramona, last year you mentioned seeing 2 American POW's and that they were blind folded, wearing shorts, had shovels and their shoes had sand on them. Do you remember anything else about them?

RB: Yes, they had their hands tied behind their backs.

DS: Regarding their shoes... was it sand or soil (mud) on the shoes?

RB: It was sand.

DS: Did they have shirts on?

RB: No. I remember that I saw some Japanese soldiers put shovels and a pick into a Japanese truck. These two men were taken away by the Kempei (Japanese military police).

DS: How tall were these POWs compared to the Japanese soldiers?

RB: I did not see them standing up. They were squatting on the truck, but I think they were big, taller than the Japanese. The soldiers were taking them in the truck to where Miyazaki [a Lt. Colonel] was. Miyazaki gave the Kempei orders. I put cigarette butts in the prisoners' hands but they threw them away. I was completely converted to being a Japanese and I thought the Japanese were doing the right thing. I don't know why I gave the POWs the cigarette butts but I guess I was teasing them... I was angry and wanted to tease them. I can't remember what Miyazaki said to his men. I was busy looking at the Americans. It was the first time I had seen them.

Yes, the Kempei with shovels and the truck... I knew there would be an execution. I remember seeing the second man to Miyazaki. They talked. The second man went with the prisoners and the truck.

DS: Do you remember the places where the Kempei had its headquarters?

RB: Yes. The first office was in Meyuns, then to a building located where today's Palau Community College cafeteria/hall is built, then to Nekken, then to Gaspan, then to Shisuisan.

DS: Do you remember any executions of prisoners when the Kempei office was in Koror or in Nekken?

RB: No. But I remember hearing from Herr Fey that Charlie Smith had been killed.

DS: Do you remember the situation when you heard this?

RB: I recall I was running for safety because of a US bomber attack. I was looking for a shelter and ran into one. Herr Fey and his wife were in the shelter already. I asked them when they had come here, thinking I could get some food from the Japanese for them. But Mrs. Fey insulted me by saying that the Japanese were no good. This made me change my mind about giving them food. You see, I was very Japanese in my psychology.

DS: Why was Charlie Smith killed?

RB: Any Caucasian, any westerner was to be executed as an enemy--a big man tied to a tree.

DS: Do you know if he was considered to be a spy?

RB: I don't know. I think because he was a Caucasian and he could help the US when they landed on Babeldaob. The US had already landed on Peleliu and Angaur. The Feys were not executed because they were Germans and allies to the Japanese in the war.

DS: The prisoners and the missionaries--who was killed first?

RB: I'm trying to remember. When we were in Koror at the PCC area I remember a US plane being hit. At Nekken I saw the truck with the prisoners. I heard from a Palauan about a plane crashing but that may have been just a rumor. The Kempei went there and took the men. The man who told me this--Tadashi--passed away recently. I saw a plane hit and explode. We were happy. I did not see any parachutes. I actually saw only two prisoners, the two I mentioned already. They were killed in Gaspan. We were in Shisuisan when the war ended.

One time when the Japanese officers were having a meeting, I had to leave and was told to go to the river to catch some shrimp for the officers to eat. When I saw the 2 US flyers we were still in Gaspan. When we were in Shisuisan... that's the time the big man, a Caucasian, was tied to a tree. The missionaries were killed before we moved to Shisuisan.

DS: Where is the waterfall?

RB: That's in Gaspan [Ngatpang].

DS: Where did the most bombing take place?

RB: In Koror. On Babeldaob was just shooting by the planes.

DS: After the war, did you ever talk with Roman Tmetuchl or Indalecio Rudimch about the missionaries?

RB: I can't remember.

DS: After the war, 1946-1950, did any US military people contact you to ask questions about the missing US military men or missionaries?

RB: No, not till last year. People were hiding me and preventing me from going to the Americans. Palauans in the police force did this, protecting me as a Japanese. They knew I was with the Kempei and they wanted to protect me. I was Japanese in heart and mind and thought I might be brought to trial.

DS: Who worked for the Kempei first--you or Roman Tmetuchl?

RB: Roman went with them first and I joined later. Rudimch was in Gaspan when we arrived there but he did not work for the Kempei the way Roman and I did. Rudimch would see the Kempei to talk. Rudimch and Roman lived together in Shisuisan. I'm not sure of Rudimch's role. When Rudimch went to see the Kempei, he would go with Roman.

DS: What was Roman's role?

RB: In Meyuns, he was taking care of Japanese prisoners; they had misbehaved.

DS: It was claimed by a Japanese officer after the war that the missionaries' bodies were dug up and burned. Did you ever hear this or think it is true?

RB: When could this have happened?

DS: Supposedly between August 15 and about Sept. 15.

RB: I have no idea about that. I never heard about that. I do not think it's possible. Kempei Taicho Miyazaki I heard was taken to Guam after the war.

DS: Were you hungry during the war?

RB: No. We had rice, bananas, fish, vegetables. I have a confession. The low ranking Kempei asked me to go with them to steal food. Things like banana, papaya, sweet potato, and lastly, onions. So I helped the lower-ranking men steal food. Of course I don't want anyone to know that. The high officers had plenty of food. We stole food from the Okinawan and Korean farms.

DS: Did Katalina Katosang work for the Japanese military.

RB: I don't know. We are related and we both come from Koror. Katalina's father is my uncle.

DS: What is your date of birth?

RB: It is Feb. 26, 1924.

DS: How many years of Japanese schooling did you have?

RB: I had 5 years, all in Koror and my last year was about 1939. You see this small scar on the back of my left hand? We were trained to fight with spears and during exercising the knife at the end of the spear fell and hit the back of my hand, cutting me. This was training we did before the war came to Palau.

When I came back to the Kempei camp after visiting my son, I heard that the priests had been killed. I cried.

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