

LOS MISIONEROS DE YAP Y LOS DE PALAOS FUERON ASESINADOS POR LOS JAPONESES, HACE UN AÑO

La Misión de Carolinas pasa ahora por una dolorosísima prueba con la pérdida de otros seis de sus misioneros: los PP. Bernardo de la Espriella y Luis Blanco y M. Francisco Hernández, misioneros de Yap, y los PP. Elías Fernández y Marino de la Hoz y el R. Emilio Villar, residentes en Palaos. Los tres primeros fueron detenidos y trasladados después a Palaos, donde quedaron encerrados en la misma prisión en que estaban ya recluidos los misioneros de estas islas.

Un joven cristiano, llegado a Saipán, cuenta al P. Tardío que una noche se acercó a la prisión para ver a los seis misioneros, logrando hablarles quedo, por si necesitaban algo, y pedirles su bendición; dióselo el P. Blanco y le añadió muy triste: Váyase pronto, pues si lo sufre el castigo. Huyó de Saipán, saliendo con la impresión de que habían asesinado ya a los misioneros, y así lo dijo en Saipán. Pero hacía falta confirmar esta versión, que desgraciadamente ha resultado cierta, como se ve por la carta que acabamos de recibir del P. Tardío:

"Saipán 21 Nbre. 1945:--R. P. Martín Palma.--Muy amado en Oto. P. Procurador: Ayer ha estado en Chalanbeana un oficial del ejército americano, que viene de Palaos, y ha dicho que es cierta la muerte de nuestros misioneros de Yap y de Palaos, donde estaban presos e incomunicados. Los japoneses los asesinaron bárbaramente decapitando a los seis. Añade que la Iglesia de Koror (Palaos) está deteriorada, no así la casa de los misioneros.

Así, pues, lo que dijo el indígena Mariano Berja cuando llegó de Palaos ha resultado ser verdad: que murieron el 15 de Enero de 1945. De Trek y sus cuatro misioneros no he conseguido saber nada, por vía oficial; escribí además a ellos, y no contestan; por lo que es de temer que también hayan sido

Se teme que a los de Trek y Mortlok haya sucedido lo mismo

muertos, y lo mismo habrá ocurrido a los dos misioneros que quedaron en Mortlok, pues no dan señales de vida; estos seis son los PP. Faustino Hernández, Santiago Estile y Martín Espinal, y los RR. José Santana, Pedro Espuny y Cipriano Martín. Como estas islas están todavía ocupadas por los japoneses, no podemos saber nada cierto.

El R. P. Superior pidió venir a visitar la Misión; nos dijo un Capellán de la Marina que se lo habían concedido por un mes, pero aún no ha podido salir de Tokyo. Con saludos al R. P. Provincial y demás PP. y RR. se encomienda en sus oo. su afm. h. y s. in O. José M. Tardío."

Si desgraciadamente se confirmara también la muerte de estos seis últimos, habría perdido nuestra Misión en la guerra la mitad de sus misioneros, además de muchas de sus casas e iglesias, escuelas y colegios, lo que representa una pérdida enorme, muy sensible y difícil de reparar.

La Misión de Carolinas está, pues, de duelo. Nuevas flores de martirio cubren y hermosean sus islas; son rosas de heroísmo anegadas en las azules aguas del Pacífico; son perlas de aquellos mares teñidas en sangre redentora, semilla de nuevos apóstoles de Cristo, que se disponen ya a sustituir a los que desde el Cielo seguirán siendo los misioneros protectores de Carolinas.

DATOS BIOGRAFICOS

P. BERNARDO DE LA ESPRIELLA Y MOSQUERA.--Nació en Paisa (Colombia) en 1880; ingresó en la Compañía en 1910, en Guayaquil (Ecuador); hizo los votos en 1912; vino a continuar sus estudios a España; hizo el Magisterio en el Colegio de Chamartín (Madrid); estudió la Teología en Granada (Gran-

adana), donde se ordenó de sacerdote; fué el primer Ministro del nuevo Colegio Noviciado de Aranjuez. Marchó a Carolinas en Octubre de 1929, y fué destinado al archipiélago de Yap. Su abnegada y fecunda labor en estas islas, de las más difíciles de evangelizar, y sus trabajos en la construcción de la nueva casa e iglesia, le enfermaron del corazón, sin que esto le hiciera detenerse en sus actividades apostólicas, hasta que la guerra le obligó a la inacción y le llevó a la cárcel primero y al sacrificio de su vida después, como los mártires de Cristo. Pertenecía a la Provincia Jesuita de Andalucía.

P. LUIS BLANCO Y CUREZ.--Nació en Las Palmas (Canarias) en 1880; entró en la Compañía en 1915, en Granada, donde estudió humanidades, retórica, filosofía e hizo el 3.º año de magisterio, que continuó en Madrid en el Colegio de Archeros; estudió teología en Granada y Sevilla, donde se ordenó de sacerdote en 1928; fué Ministro del Colegio de Granada y P. Espiritual del Colegio de Villasis (entonces en calle Pajaritos) de Sevilla; hizo la profesión solemne en Gibraltar en 1932, embarcando en este puerto para la Misión, en Diciembre del mismo año, siendo destinado a Yap, donde al cabo de trece años de arduos trabajos apostólicos, un glorioso y heroico finó su vida. Pertenecía a la Provincia de Andalucía.

P. ELÍAS FERNÁNDEZ GONZÁLEZ.--Nació en Vegamian (León) en 1880; ingresó en la Compañía en 1900, en Carrón de los Godas. Después de sus estudios fué destinado, como Profesor, a Santiago de Cuba; en 1920 marchó a la Misión de Palaos, donde se mostró incansable en la evangelización de aquellos indígenas y en visitar las islas, incluso la de los leprosos, mientras se lo permitieron. Preso por las autoridades japonesas en Koror, fué

EL ANGEL DE CAROLINAS

sado leado por los soldados, ofrendando al señor su vida, llena de amores y trabajos. Pertenecía a la Provincia de León.

P. MARINO DE LA HOZ.--Nació en Marilla de la Mata (León) en 1880; entró en el Noviciado de Carrión en 1903; hizo los últimos votos en 1921, y ese mismo año marchó a Carolinas, siendo destinado a los Palaos. Ha sido el misionero que sufrió más naufragios, al recorrer las islas del archipiélago en pequeñas embarcaciones, librándose milagrosamente de la muerte, hasta que vino a encontrarla gloriosa, como sus compañeros de Misión, en

Koror, donde tanto había trabajado. Pertenecía a la Provincia de León.

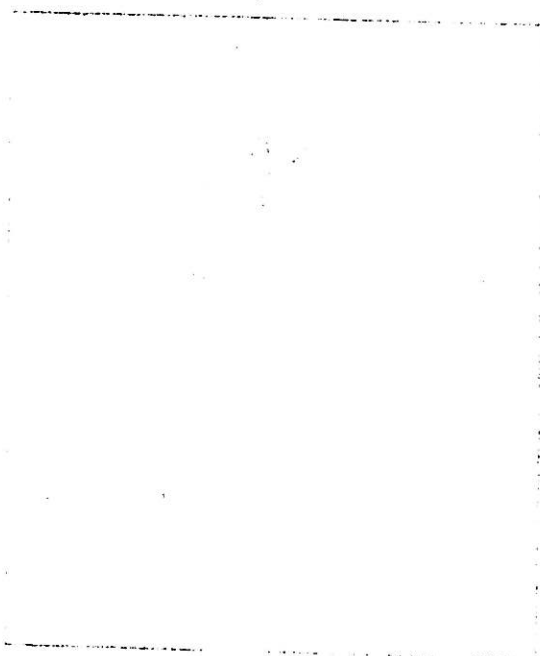
H. FRANCISCO HERNÁNDEZ Y ESCUDERO.--Nació en Santa Eudajoz el 28 de Octubre de 1887, y entró en el Noviciado de Cartuja, en Granada, en 1912; marchó a la Misión en 1921. Estuvo en las islas Marshall y después en Truk, pero fué destinado a Yap, donde hizo los últimos votos en 1923. Se distinguió por la solicitud en cuidar a los Padres misioneros y por sus arriesgadas crónicas de los trabajos del P. Espriella en aquellas islas. Fué detenido con sus compañeros de Misión

y trasladado a Palos, donde, después de muchos sufrimientos, murió acompañado. Pertenecía a la Provincia de Toledo.

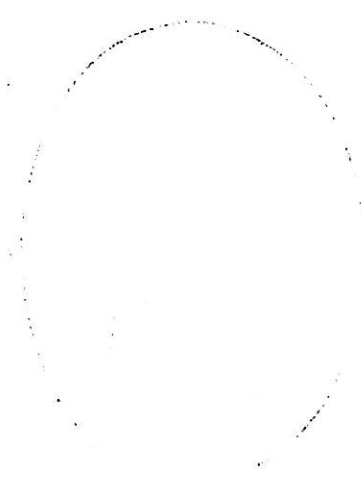
H. EMILIO VILLAR.--Nació en Villaraja del Valle (León) en 1888; entró en el Noviciado de Carrión en 1914, y fué a Carolinas en 1921, donde hizo los últimos votos dos años después, en Koror de Palaos, donde ha encontrado tan gloriosa muerte. Se distinguía por su vida retirada; no escribía a nadie, y servía para todo en la Misión. Pacífico en extremo, nadie se quejaba de él; obedeciendo siempre, supo encontrar el tesoro escondido que lo ha llevado al Cielo. Pertenecía a la Provincia de León.



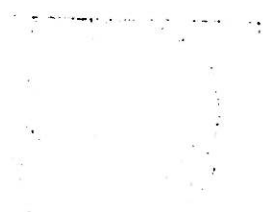
P. Bernardo de la Espriella, misionero en Yap



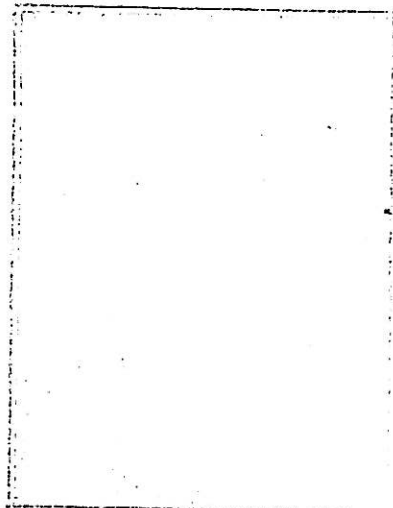
El P. Blanco, misionero en Yap



H. Francisco Hernández, misionero de Yap



P. Marino de la Hoz, misionero en Palaos



P. Elias Fernández, de Palaos



H. Emilio Villar, misionero de Palaos

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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 Babelthuas, (Palau), 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 - *Oukherden*.

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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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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Lieut. CHC. USNR.

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 Agapito 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,
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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

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Original to Adm. Murphy - War Crime Trials - Com Mar - June 26, '47

Information concerning events connected with the deaths of four Spanish Jesuit Priests and two Spanish Jesuit Brothers in Palau at the hands of the Japanese given by Mr. Rodin [Indalesio Rudimch], Korrer.

In 1941 the Japanese desired the fathers to live with the Protestant minister [Pastor Wilhelm Fey who had a wife] in another place and leave the Parish house and church. The Fathers requested that instead the Protestant minister be moved to the Priests' house and be quartered in part of it. The Japs also wanted to use the church and the Fathers suggested that part of it be cut off for use of the people for Mass and devotions.

Later the people were forbidden all access to the church and the Fathers were not allowed to go out. The Civilian police accused the Fathers to MPs of not being willing to cooperate with the Japs.

In March 1944 came the first U.S. bombardment. [In] May, the natives were forced to go to the Big Island [Babeldaob] to live. The fathers had to leave the Mission House and live in a native house. Later, they too were moved to the Big Island.

August, 1944. Fr. Elias sent a note to Rodin [Rudimch] that he was in "Caspan" a place of the Jap soldiers and civilians. The note requested Rodin to try to visit the Fathers and bring some comotes, salt, and fish as they had no food.

After about a week, Rodin went. He was not allowed to see the Fathers who were very near the military camp. However, R. [Rodin] heard the Fathers praying in Latin. The Brother, Emilio Vilar heard the signal R. gave and spoke through the window and Fr. Marino called R. into the house. This was possible, because when US planes began a raid all the Jap soldiers and civilians went into caves and left the Fathers alone in the house. R. saw Fr. Elias, Fr. Marino and Bro Vilar with the two Fathers and the Brother from Yap. Also present was a Filipino from Yap with his wife and two children.

Fr. Marino:- Things are very bad here now and we will die here. You know that in Korrer the Japs were seeking reason to kill us. The MPs said that we would go to the P.I. but the air raids prevented it.

My last word to the people. They will be a long time without priest, so find a place to meet and pray the Rosary. Work to prepare fields for

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food since it will be scarce and take care of your clothes as they will be hard to get. Saludos a todos les Catholicos porque ese es ultima palabra.

Fr. Elias:- The things we have not brought with us are in the house of Francisco: santonas, blankets and money of the Mission. 3,000 yen and 50 pesos to pay the native working for the Mission. We do not know where he is. Take care of the things of the Mission, a clock, typewriter and the 3,000 yen. He gave R. a can of coffee and salt and beans and one can of rice and twelve bottles of pig grease. He asked R. to bring them a hammer and knife and axe and saw to help them prepare fire wood.

Fr. Elias asked [Jap] MPs to allow them to live with the natives but was refused. R. [Rudimch] asked Fathers to give him permission to request authorities to allow him to visit them, but the Fathers said no, too dangerous.

Rodin [Rudimch] finally got permission from Jap authorities to come to mission house to look for things, Sept, 1944, 9:00 A.M. He found typewriter and clock, but money and other things of the Fathers not there. R. returned to Big Island with the things and asked natives to find comotes for the Fathers.

Sept. 14, 1944. American troops enter Pelelieu. All movement of natives forbidden by Japs. After some time, about two weeks, when things got quite, R. went again to place of Fathers. No one there, no house. As the Japs had been in the habit of moving the Fathers from one place to another, R. kept looking. R. found a boy who had worked for the Jap MPs.

R. - Where are the Fathers?

Boy - I know, but I am afraid to tell because the MP will kill us.

R. - Don't be afraid. I will not tell.

Boy - MPs killed them.

R. - What day?

Boy - Sept 18, 1944 6:00 P.M.

R. - How do you know?

Boy - I wrote in my notebook. I have hair clippers and eyeglasses of the Fathers.

R. - I want to see.

Boy - My father has them

R. - Take care of them until the end of the war

Later I saw them and recognized the glasses as those of Fr. Marino. The boy gave them to Lt. Ebiling, USN of the MG [Military Government] Education Office about February, 1946. Boy is Roam [Roman] Tmetuchel now in Teachers' Training School, Guam.
June 18, 1947

In 1945 while Japs were still on Korrer the MPs called Rodin and asked if he knew the names of the Fathers. R. said he did.

Japs: - Where are they?

R. - I do not know.

Japs:- They went to the P.I.

Testimony taken by the Rev. Vicnet I. Kennally, S.J. at Korrer, June 12, 1947.

INTERVIEW

Katalina Katosang

Translator: Lorenza Pedro

Questioner: Donald Shuster

October 27, 2001 at Katalina's home

Katalina mentioned that she was very disappointed last year when the U.S. Army was not able to locate the burial site of the Jesuit missionaries. Today, she thought we were driving out to Ngatpang and was ready to continue the search.

Regarding seeing U.S. prisoners of war (POWs), Katalina said she had heard that the Kempei (Kempeitai) had taken them and they were executed near the location of today's Nikko Hotel in Ngermid. She said Tadashi knew the place. However, he passed away a few months ago. She has no information or recollections about any other U.S. POWs.

Don Shuster: Did you work for the Japanese military?

Katalina Katosang: No.

DS: Where did you grow up?

KK: I grew up in Koror and completed Japanese school here. Then I moved to Ngatpang and stayed there for a while before moving to Koror when I was 20.

DS: Do you remember the bombing?

KK: Yes, I recall the bombing. We ran to the rock islands and later I moved to Ngaremlengui where there was not much bombing. It was mainly shooting.

DS: Did you see or hear about any POW's other than the ones killed near the Nikko Hotel?

KK: No, I did not hear about any U.S. flyers being in Ngaremlengui. But I remember U.S. planes shooting near our village.

DS: Do you speak Japanese?

KK: Yes, my Japanese is good.

DS: Did you go hungry during the war time?

KK: No. My mother had a very big taro patch and gardens. Sometimes we lived in a cave. The planes did not attack all day. When the planes dropped jelly bombs that burned the bush, the Japanese planted food plants there right away.

DS: Did anyone steal food from your family?

KK: Yes. Both the Japanese soldiers and civilians were stealing food from us.

DS: How long did you live in the cave?

KK: Till the time we heard that the U.S. had invaded Peleliu and Angaur. It was after Joseph Tellei and the Chamorros had escaped to the US ships off northern Babeldaob. The Japanese

knew the U.S. troops were coming and I heard some of the younger soldiers wanted to use their big guns to hit the US ships. Some of the older officers advised their men to cool down and think about surviving the war and getting back to Japan.

After the war, the Japanese were digging holes and burying things. I asked some people to go there and observe. Some people checked on this, but they did not find anything.

DS: When did you know about the killings of the padres?

KK: It was during the war. One day we had a very big rain with thunder. I thought the priests were being tortured. About 4 days later, a Japanese soldier asked me if I remembered the bad weather. He then said the priests were taken away. This soldier said he did not follow the Kempei because he was afraid. I was very surprised that this Japanese soldier would show concern for the priests. After he left, I looked for him but could not find him.

After the war... I saw a cross but it had no name on it. It was a small wooden one, about the length of my arm. I know the place where the cross was. Last year, I showed the place to Fr. Felix. The place was not on top of the hill where the Army was searching. I did not go to the top of the hill because I knew the place I saw the cross was not up there. I think the cross marked the areas of the priests' grave. There were also two wooden stakes. The cross and stakes were some 2 feet apart. The first stake marked the place where two Chamorros from Saipan were buried. The second stake marked the place where a Japanese military man and his assistant were buried.

After the war I and another woman searched for and found the cross. We also found a shack which had some bones and a very bad odor.

DS: When did you do this searching?

KK: We did it after the Japanese had left Palau.

DS: Why did you do it?

KK: To find the priests. It took us about a half to full day. The jungle was not thick then. we searched around the *Wakuei boyen* (Japanese hospital) in Koksai. There was a river near by.

DS: Was the shack you found with the bones and bad odor (smell) called Nantaku barracks?

KK: Yes, I think so. That reminds me... a woman wrote me a letter and said she had seen the priests on a boat. She later went to the shack and found a black umbrella. She took the umbrella and noticed that it had the smell of the priests. The woman's name was Matilitei. She looked for some of the priests' things. She said she had seen Fr. Elias. He asked her why she had come and told her it was a dangerous place because the soldiers were checking the place every 15 minutes. Fr. Elias said he would write a letter to Rudimch, telling him to bring some food for Fr. Marino--some smoked fish and sweet potatoes. He was sick and needed food.

Yes, I know the location of the house [Nantaku barracks] where Matilitei saw Fr. Elias. It is near the place where we were looking last year.

I mentioned these things to Fr. John a long time ago [late 1940s]. He was the only priest in Palau then. I suggested to him that we look and try to find the bones. He said to never mind. Yes, the house or shack was the Nantaku barracks. It's near the river and near the road.

Last year it was confusing with Ramona and Techitong because we had different ideas and memories.

Date transcribed: October 29, 2001

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.

Date transcribed: October 30, 2001



Richard Flores Taitano
Micronesian Area Research Center
M • A • R • C
University of Guam • Unibetsedât Guahan



Fr. Felix Yaoch, S.J.
Superior
Sacred Heart Church and Mission
Koror
Republic of Palau, 96940

April 10, 1999

COPY

Dear Father Felix.

As you know, the circumstances of the deaths of the six Jesuit missionaries--Fr. Elias, Fr. Marino, Bro. Emilio, Fr. Luis Blanco Y Suarez (assigned to Yap), Fr. Bernardo De La Espriella (Yap), Bro. Francisco Hernandez Y Escudero (Yap) and 4 members of the Hondonero family (also from Yap) in Palau in September 1944 have been unknown since that tragic event happened.

While searching for evidence of Roman Tmetuchl's participation in the Guam war crimes investigations, I found in the U.S. National Archives not only the record of Roman's testimony, but also statements made by Japanese Imperial Army soldiers who were involved in the executions of the six missionaries and the Hondonero family. Enclosed you will find statements and affidavits of:

1. Sugimoto, Takeji -- affidavit, 17 March 1946?
2. Sugimoto, Takeji -- statement, 19 April 1947?
3. Ichimiya, Masao -- statement, no date
4. Uchida, Fumio -- statement, 9 September 1947
5. Nakamura, Jiro -- statement, 13 November 1947
6. Okamura, Gintaro -- statement, 20 December 1947
7. Ezure, Shigeru -- statement, 13 September 1947
8. Yokoyama, Kyohisa -- affidavit, 5 May 1947

While examining these records, it came to mind that the sketch maps that some of them have, particularly that of Sugimoto's affidavit, Ichimiya's statement, and Uchida's statement might provide sufficient information to identify the general area of the grave site. If that could be done, then proper Church rites and ceremonies for the deceased could be carried out. Perhaps a simple monument memorializing the sacrifices these missionaries made could be constructed. I am hoping Roman Tmetuchl could assist you in this effort and I am also writing to him.

I hope these documents and ideas might be of use to you in your important work.

Sincerely,

Donald R. Shuster

c.c. Mr. Roman Tmetuchl

Notes
David Ramarui
1982

By 1943 the priests could not function. After the war Father John blessed our marriage.

Mass? Yes, the priests said mass in private. At 4 am we would sneak into the church to receive communion. Later the Japanese used the church as a warehouse.

The restrictions were put on right after Pearl harbor. The priests were under house arrest at the mission area.

Herr Fey...he visited us in Ngaraard. He was especially close to the Ngarchelong people who he stayed with.

Ngaraard... there was not enough food and we were cultivating hills it night. I had plenty of dynamite from Peleliu. The Japanese let me take it to Ngaraard. We used it for fishing. That's how we lived. We did it between 9 am and 3 pm fighter runs. Ngardmau... a Japanese officer asked be to get fish one day after the 3 pm second raid.

The Japanese culture and the Palauan culture are similar in that both value discipline. Your clan and lineage have to train you. I never met hardship.

During the Japanese period, if you made friends with a Japanese girl you would be beaten. This kind of discrimination made us hate some Japanese.

The Palau junkie were very severe. Sho (Joseph Ucherbelau) was very severe. I think he took revenge against some of us from Koror and Babeldaob because he was from Angaur, a low ranking island.

Sho beat me twice because I had a Japanese girl friend. I told the head of NBK and he spoke to a higher ranking policeman. It worked. Sho apologized to me after my wife and I were married.

• Notes taken by Don Shuster in Palau about 1982. Transcribed from hand notes into this typed version in March 2000.

1944 NGATPANG MASSACRE BY JAPANESE KEMPEITAI

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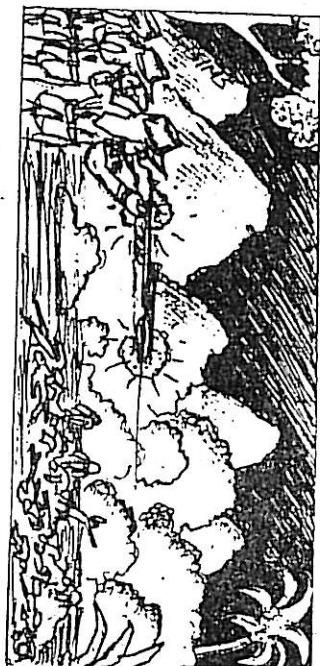
A U.S. Army team from the Central Identification Laboratory, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, was recently in Palau for about ten days to search for the burial place of three American B-24 airmen, six Jesuit missionaries, and a family of four who were executed-murdered in Ngatpang State in September 1944. The visit was brought about because of the discovery that the remains of these people are in the same burial site in Ngatpang.

Captain Kevin Upson served as the leader of the Army team with Rick Huston as senior analyst, Greg Fox as archeologist, Sergeant Stan Tolbert for logistics, and Cheryl Udui as culture advisor. Cheryl is the daughter of the late Kaleb Udui, attorney and former member of the Congress of Micronesia and Palau O.E.K. The Army team was assisted by Father Felix Yaoch, S.J., Ramona Baiei, Katarina Katsong, and Techitong, a Ngatpang rubak. These elders were interviewed by the Army prior to the search in Ngatpang. They also accompanied the Army specialists during the first visit to Gasupan hill on Monday, October 9 when the search began.

Ngatpang State Executive Officer, Gilbert Demei and Chief of Labor Henaro Antonio provided important support to the Army team during its exhausting week-long search.

Also assisting the Army team

was Professor Donald Shuster, U.O.G. While working on a book about the life



of Roman Tmetuchl, Shuster found documents from the 1946-49 U.S. Navy war crimes tribunal held on Guam regarding the execution-murders in Ngatpang in September 1944. These court documents confirmed that Mr. Tmetuchl testified for the prosecution but also yielded sketch-maps and testimony that the searchers relied on in identifying Gasupan hill. However, this information did not contain sufficient details in terms of landmarks, distance, and direction, for the Army team to identify a specific spot on the huge hill. Therefore the search process involved the clearing of five possible areas, large ones. Once the vegetation was removed by cutting or burning, the team examined every square foot of ground, looking for depressions which normally form after a deep hole had been dug. The archeologist used a special probe to bring up samples of soil to see if they showed signs of being disturbed. This back-breaking work over five days did not turn up any

from Ngatpang State also looked in the jungle on Gasupan hill because four of the soldiers in the killing group stated that the executions were carried out in the jungle. This search was also negative. The army team found bombs, communication gear, batteries, rods, and barbed wire which the Japanese clearly wanted to hide under the cover of the jungle.

The execution-murders were committed by the Kempeitai, the feared and even brutal Japanese military police. The American airmen parachuted from one or possibly two B-24's that the Japanese anti-aircraft guns had hit, one on 25 August and a second on 1 September, 1944. The B-24 bombers normally carried ten to twelve men so most of the men went down to their deaths with their crashing planes. The remains of some of these planes have still not been located in Palau's lagoons and land. Of the six Jesuits, three were Palau's Padre Marino, Padre Elias and Brother

Emilio and the three others were from Yap. The Japanese military transported the Yap Jesuits to Palau in July 1944 with Agapio Hondanero, his wife Filomena Urtalan and their two small children, Balhasar and Caroline. It is likely that a certain Charlie Smith, a British national who was born in Hong Kong and came to Palau as a businessman, is also buried with the 13 others. Smith had married a woman from Palau's Boria family and they had five children. In December 1944, Smith helped his wife and children escape from Ngarchelong to a U.S. ship. Joseph Tellei and other Palau Chamorro, maybe as many as 100, escaped about the same time. This greatly worried the Japanese military and Smith was executed because he was suspected of communicating with the enemy. Smith has relatives on Guam who wish to rescue his remains.

The evidence from the U.S. Navy war crimes tribunal concerning the deaths of the six Jesuit missionaries was the first certain evidence that Father Yaoch has received regarding the tragic deaths of these good men. He sent the evidence to the Vatican in Rome and was hoping the Army specialists could find the burial site. Although this did not come to pass, the search may be resumed in 2001 if additional evidence can be found. #