

1944 NGATPANG MASSACRE BY JAPANESE KEMPEITAI

# Search comes up blank

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.

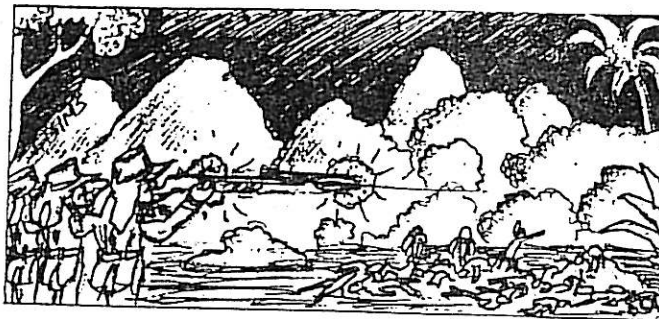
Captain Kevin Upson served as the leader of the Army team with Rick Huston as senior analyst, Greg Fox as archeologist, Sergeant Stan Tolbert for logistics, and Cheryl Udui as culture advisor. Cheryl is the daughter of the late Kaleb Udui, attorney and former member of the Congress of Micronesia and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

Ngatbang 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 Don 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



evidence of a group burial site.

The Army team and helpers

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 Agapito Hondonero, his wife Filomena Untalan and their two small children, Balthasar 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 Borja 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 Chamorros, 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. #