

1881/02

DOCUMENT 2807

S E C R E THEADQUARTERS  
UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES IN THE FAR EAST  
OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE  
(WAR CRIMES BRANCH)A.P.O. 501  
9 April 1945

SUBJECT: Report of War Crimes Branch on the Investigation of the Alleged Murder of Filipino Civilians at Dapdap, Ponson Island, Camotes, Islands, Cebu Province, Philippine Islands, by the Imperial Japanese Army on 29 December 1944.

TO : The Judge Advocate General, War Crimes Office, Washington 25, D. C.

\* \* \*

11. EVIDENCE:

Briefly summarized, the evidence adduced by the Investigator-Examiner is to the effect that:

At approximately 9:00 o'clock December 29, 1944, a patrol of about 50 Japanese soldiers, including two officers, entered the barrio of Dapdap, Ponson Island, Camotes Islands, Philippine Islands. On arrival, the soldiers, with the aid of two interpreters, Emilio Angos and Sofio Itaas, who were later killed by the Japanese (R. 4,16), went throughout the village commanding all families to gather at the town plaza immediately. It was explained that the purpose of the meeting was to issue passes to the inhabitants so they could be identified and would not be molested by other Japanese soldiers passing through. At first the people were reluctant to execute the order; however, after being told they would be shot for non-compliance, they readily obeyed. (R. 1,3,5,13,22,24,28,30,32,35,37,38,40,41,45,47,48,50)

Shortly after arriving at the plaza, the people, numbering about four or five hundred, were ordered to group themselves in families and congregate in the church so they would be unobserved from a plane which was heard in the vicinity. The excuse given was that they might be strafed. The people followed out the instructions without delay. One Japanese officer sat near the altar while the second stationed himself at the door. (R. 26) The former then called them to order, and through the interpreters, asked if anyone had seen or knew the whereabouts of three American soldiers who were supposed to have landed on the island that morning. All replied in the negative. He then directed all from Cebu to raise their hands. A few hands, probably not more than five or six, were shown. Likewise, he inquired who was from Loyte and no hands were raised. Finally, he asked who was from Dapdap and practically all signified they were. (R. 2,5,15,23,25,28,32,35,38,40,42,50)

By this time it was almost 12:00 o'clock so, at the request of the people, the interpreters asked permission from the officer in charge to return to their homes for food. He consented but directed them to depart one family at a time, accompanied by soldier guards who would search their homes. Each family was then told to form in line. (R. 2,3,5,6,30,32,38,39,42,45,47)

The Fortunato family (last name unknown) from Cebu, was the first to leave. It was first on a registration list of civilian residents previously prepared by the Japanese. As soon as they passed outside, their hands were tied and they were led away. (R. 1,2,6) Only one son, Perfidio, survived. (R. 7) Shortly thereafter, the Japanese soldiers returned and led another family group away. (R. 3)

DOCUMENT 2807

Mrs. Fabiana Morelos and her three children followed, and about three hundred yards from the church, their hands were tied behind them, except Mrs. Morelos' whose hands were tied in front because she was holding her nursing child. Proceeding a little further, two Japanese guards began bayonetting them one after the other, one bayonet thrust passing completely through the baby's body into Mrs. Morelos' side, she being the only member of the family to escape alive. (R. 32)

Five Japanese soldiers then took out the Candido Rollo family of eight. About five hundred yards from the church they were tied and bayoneted, four being killed and the remaining four receiving many serious multiple wounds. The wife, Dolores, received nine wounds. She was holding in her arms her daughter, Maxima, age three years, when one Jap soldier thrust a bayonet through the child into the mother's left breast. (R. 40-43)

Basilio Gocela's family of seven was conducted to a place about one half kilometer away where they were tied and bayoneted by the Japanese guards. All were killed, except the sixteen year old daughter Perpetua, who was wounded in four different places. (R. 47)

Because the church was filled when seven members of the Lucenas family arrived at the plaza they were taken to a nearby house by six Japanese soldiers, and later to a banana grove, where all were tied and six were killed by bayonet stabs. While the others were being bound the daughter, Paulita, broke away and escaped but was shot at several times. (R. 37,38)

After several families had been disposed of by individual units, groups of three or more families were ordered from the church collectively. (R. 6,7)

At about one o'clock in the afternoon the Teofila Gocela family of nine members, and three other families, all living in the hills adjacent to the town, were brought down and placed in the church, at which time it was half-filled. They were accorded the same treatment as the others they joined. Shortly thereafter the family was taken therefrom, their hands tied behind their backs, and led to a shed in the near vicinity, where all were tied to one post and nine Japanese soldiers began their work of carnage by bayonetting the victims in their backs. The mother saw her eighteen months old daughter killed by a bayonet thrust which disemboweled her. She saw them kill her son Dominador, aged four. They also bayoneted the remaining seven, after which the ropes tying them to the post were cut and Mrs. Gocela fell to the ground unconscious. (R. 8,9) Later, one of the soldiers placed a lighted cigarette on her right temple to determine if she were still alive. She did not move and feigned death. The guards then wiped their bloody bayonets on the victims' clothes, covered the bodies with banana and coconut leaves, and departed. Her son Francisco, seventeen years old, who was wounded in eleven places, roused himself and untied the hands of the six who were living, hid them in the thick grass, and went in search of a house, but upon returning found that two had died. The remaining four went with him to a nipa hut where they subsisted for four days on unripe bananas and without water. Francisco died two days later, the others remaining two days longer when the stench of his decomposing body forced them to move. (R. 9) The survivors went to Babay, Leyte, and were hospitalized. Mrs. Gocela also saw the bayonetting of her brother's family of seven, named Lucenas, all of whom were killed except the seven year old daughter Victoria. (R. 9)

The Laeson family of six members and three other families were formed into a group of about twenty, whose hands were tied together, and led to a house in the barrio. Arriving there the Jap soldiers fixed their bayonets. The victims knelt on the floor

pleading for mercy, the father even begging to be a servant for the Japanese, but their supplications were ignored and they were set upon and bayoneted. Of this family only the thirteen year old daughter Norma and her brother Nicolas, age eight, survived. The father was severely wounded and died eight days later. (R. 6,7,10-12)

The Cornelio Tanza family group of twenty-five, including several nursing babies, was conducted to a bushy area and bayoneted. Of this entire group only four survived, each of whom suffered numerous wounds. Cornelio crawled into a coconut grove, and because of his weakened condition was forced to stay for four days subsisting on water alone. (R. 30,31; P. 2, Ex. 6 of Ex. 4)

The third group of approximately twenty, including the Jorge Mari family of four, was led into the woods about one hundred yards away to a house where the soldiers ordered the men to come forward and be tied. Likewise, women and children were then brought forward and the entire group was bayoneted. Only two escaped alive, Jorge Mari and an old lady by the name of Cornelia, last name not known, and they too had been bayoneted and severely injured. Mr. Mari witnessed the killing of his wife and two children, the latter aged 3 years and 2 months respectively. (R. 23)

Magdaleno Jaballa and four of his children were in a group, all of whom were tied a short distance from the church and then taken about three hundred yards further where they were halted and bayoneted. Two of these children were killed and another died later of his wounds, while four of his other children, apparently in another group, were killed on the same day. Magdaleno received eleven wounds. (R. 38,40)

When the church was about half emptied (R. 13,45) the remaining people became apprehensive of their lives. Some saw blood running out of a nearby shack (R.2), a few noticed the soldiers washing their bloody bayonets at the artesian well nearby (R. 25), and others observed that as soon as the families were taken outside they were shackled with ropes. Eutiquio Lucenas then urged those remaining to fight for their lives and attempt an escape whereupon he picked up a rock, hurled it at the door guard, hitting him on the head, and knocking him to the ground. He also rushed another guard but was killed in his bid for freedom. Many then made a break for the door and were machine-gunned indiscriminately or stabbed with bayonets. (R. 25) Several pleaded and begged for mercy, but to no avail. The church resounded with the wails and cries of the wounded and those who feared death was imminent. (R. 45) Some escaped and were killed by rifle and machine gun fire while running toward the beach. A very small number escaped unscathed and found safety in the sea and swamps. (R. 49) Most of the victims showed numerous stab wounds, some babies in their mothers' arms were run through and the blades passed into the bodies of the mothers. One woman was found who had given premature birth to a baby and its dead body was beside her. (R. 49-51) Another victim, while pleading for mercy from the Jap officer at the altar, was struck by a sabre wielded by him, severing his shoulder and resulting in immediate death. (R. 13-16, 27-29, 46-51)

Each time the soldiers returned from escorting a family to its doom they talked with the officers and all laughed as if it were a gala occasion. The officer at the altar kept smoking while the massacre was going on and gave orders from time to time. One officer participated in the bayonetting. (R. 3,6,23,27,31,46; Ex. 13 of Ex. 4)

About three or four o'clock in the afternoon, after covering their victims with banana and coconut leaves, the Japs departed. (R. 2,7-9; Ex. 12 of Ex. 4)

DOCUMENT 2807

The wounded, both from the church and family groups, after recovering some strength, went to the surrounding swamps and jungles. Some were so weak they had to crawl. They contacted friends and relatives and by various and devious means crossed the sea individually and in groups to Babay, Loyte, Philippine Islands, where they were hospitalized. Later, some of the wounded died. (R. 2,3,5-9,11,13,16, 23,26,28,31,32,36,39,40,42,45,47,49,51)

On 30 December 1944 Ciriaco Labiste and his brother, Sergio, were at San Juan, Pilar, Ponson Island, and hearing of the massacre, proceeded immediately to Dapdap to look for their family. On the way they met their father, two sisters, and three brothers. One sister was in much pain caused by two bullet wounds in her back. Proceeding alone to the barrio, Ciriaco saw many dead bodies in the church piled on top of each other and the remains of approximately one hundred lying outside, among which were the bodies of his mother and one brother. (R. 43, 44)

On 16 January 1945, Captain Gonzalo R. Sievert, Executive Officer of the 94th Regiment, 92nd Division, P.A., accompanied by Major Pete W. Scott, PC&J No. 15 Detachment, Captain Henry L. Guire, 5th Air Force, and a Sergeant William Young, photographer of the 7th Infantry Division, were ordered by a task force commander, Colonel Walker, 182nd Infantry, 7th Division, U. S. Army, to proceed to Dapdap, make an investigation, and dispose of the dead bodies. Before arriving at the town they met three survivors of the debacle, all of whom gave evidence of numerous wounds. Approaching the town the foul odor of dead bodies filled the air. They looked in two huts and saw approximately 30 to 50 and 15 to 20 bodies respectively in a bad state of decomposition. Dogs and other animals had eaten away large portions of the bodies making it difficult to ascertain whether they were men, women or children; however, the presence of long hair and small skulls indicated that there were some of the latter in the groups. Proceeding further into town they inspected huts en route and found similar conditions existing. Arriving at the church they saw about 100 bodies scattered on the ground in and around the building, about half of which were inside, and visible from the doorway. Here too, the dogs, hogs and other animals had devoured parts of the bodies. About 500 yards north of the church they observed approximately 50 to 60 dead bodies under an acacia tree, all in an advanced state of decomposition. Several dogs and pigs were eating the remains, and chickens picking the bones. They counted 230 dead and estimated there were 500 dead bodies in and around the barrio. (R 17-19) The photographer took various pictures, one of a shack where dead could be seen in the doorway, others showing the conditions inside and outside the church, one of numerous dead bodies in a lane a short distance away, and one of a decomposed body tied to the trunk of a tree and identified as Quentin Morelos. (R. 9, 20, 21; Ex. 2,3,4 of Ex. A)

One of the bodies shown in Exhibit 19-1 of Exhibit A was identified as that of a man known as "Masoy"; in Exhibit 19-7 of Exhibit A another body was that of a man named "Pecong". (R. 4, 6)

Exhibit 1 of Exhibit A is a translation of an undated company order captured on Ponson Island on or about 18 January 1945, which directs that the town of Pilar be exterminated at 2400, and sub-paragraph 5, paragraph IV recites the platoon formations. Opposite the 2nd Platoon appears the name "Kurazawa." This exhibit also contains a translation of a diary, belonging to either an officer or sergeant major, 4th Company, organization not stated, showing the following entry: "29 Dec 44 - Dapdap 900 men. Esperanza 150 men. Completion of subjugation. Departed San Isidro."

Witnesses testified that there were two officers with the Japanese soldiers at the church. The one at the altar was tall, large, with a long face, heavily bearded, clipped hair and about 40 years of age. He wore spectacles, a long sabre, revolver and a uniform with a patch on each breast with stars set upon a background of red lines. (R. 27, 33) The other, a Captain Cruzawa or Kurazawa, was of regular height, beardless and wore a cap with flapping back, common to the Japanese soldiers, a sabre and stars upon his uniform. (R. 26) One officer was killed by a civilian at the church. (R. 7)

\* \* \* \*