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THE CAPTURE OF THE KOGA PAPERS AND ITS EFFECT ON THE PLAN TO RETAKE THE PHILIPPINES IN 1944

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A little-known air crash off the island of Cebu on April 1, 1944 leads to the capture of Japanese military officials including a high-ranking Japanese admiral by Filipino guerrillas. Along with the capture was a mysterious bunch of papers for which the Japanese military undertook a massive recovery effort. The guerrillas by an American named James Cushing took the prisoners to the interior of Cebu and held them for ten days until a severe Japanese rescue campaign forced them to surrender them to the enemy. The high ranking Japanese officials who turned out to be led by Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukodome, Chief of Staff of the Japanese Imperial Combined Fleet. It appeared that the party was traveling on an inspection mission at the time of the crash. One of those believed killed in the crash was Admiral Mineichi Koga, commander of the Japanese Imperial Navy whose loss was acknowledged with the appointment of his successor in May 1944. The papers which were captured by the guerrillas were sent by American submarine to Australia and were found to contain important information about Japanese defenses in the Philippines and other areas. The papers also revealed the weakness of defenses in central Philippines which were confirmed by American intelligence. The episode led to the acceleration of the American return to the Philippines from December 1944 to October 1944 and a change of landing sites from Mindanao to Leyte. This event which was witnessed by a Filipino guerrilla noted the blunders of the Americans who did not immediately act despite repeated messages requesting for their advice on the developments.

CEBU AND THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

The battles of Bataan and Leyte Gulf have always been remembered as epic events during the Second World War in the Philippines. Both involved raging armies and mighty navies which decided the outcome of the Second World War in the Pacific. The war however, was not decided by big events alone but small ones which are now largely forgotten. One of these small events was the capture of a bunch of papers by Filipino guerrillas which changed the American plans to retake the Philippines from the Japanese in 1944. The guerrillas of Cebu played an important part in this event.

Located in central Philippines Cebu is a narrow island with bald mountains and scattered clumps of trees which offer little con-

cealment for a guerrilla force. It has roads which allow a motorized enemy to move easily from one end of the island to the other. Compared to Luzon it was not immediately invaded by Japanese forces in 1941, though it was used as a staging area to supply Filipino and American troops fighting in Bataan and Corregidor. The first Japanese soldiers arrived only on April 10, 1942, one day after the fall of Bataan. On that day the Kawaguchi Detachment of the 18th Japanese Division landed in Cebu. The unit was supposed to reinforce the Japanese forces fighting in Bataan but was diverted to Cebu upon learning that Bataan's resistance was starting to collapse.¹ By May 17, 1942, all organized resistance in the island had ceased.

Before the outbreak of the war, Cebu and Bohol comprised the 8th Military District of the

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Philippine Army. Based in Cebu was the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) 81st Division. When the order to surrender all United States Armed Forces in the Philippines (USAFIP)² was given, many Filipino soldiers chose not to surrender and instead went home to their families or went to the hills "to literally wait and see." Shortly the Kawaguchi Detachment was pulled out and sent to Mindanao. The Japanese took with them the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines, Jose Abad Santos and his son, Jose Jr. Abad Santos would later die a martyr's death for refusing to abandon his allegiance to the Philippine Commonwealth government and the United States.³

Meanwhile the guerrilla movement in Cebu started to form. The first guerrilla group was organized sometime in August 1942 after an armed group mostly composed of former USAFFE men who chose to hide from the Japanese assassinated a Filipino collaborator in Barrio Tig-baon. The collaborator had squealed on a member of the USAFFE, a certain Captain Carmichael, and a Filipino sympathizer officer named Filomeno Cugay. Many local inhabitants who became tired of betrayals by Filipino puppets of the Japanese and the Japanese demands for half of the farmers' harvests, joined up with the former USAFFE men.⁴ One of the engagements of the group took place in Ligid-Ligid against a large force of Japanese in 1943 which lasted for almost half a day.⁵

In September another resistance group was formed by Harry Fenton, an American radio announcer of Radio KZRC. He teamed up with James Cushing an American mining engineer. Cushing was planning to flee to Mindanao and eventually to Australia when Fenton found him.⁶ A native of El Paso, Texas, Cushing was the seventh son in a closely knit family. Two of his brothers, Walter and Charles became guerrilla leaders during the war.⁷ Walter was one of the first resistance leaders in Northern Luzon. James Cushing on the other hand, became the leader of the Cebu guerrillas following the execution of Harry Fenton by his own men for alleged abuses.⁸

The organization of Cushing and Fenton eventually absorbed most of the guerrilla

groups in Cebu.⁹ By 1944 Cushing's group became known as the Cebu Area Command which was recognized by General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) headquarters in Australia. Cushing became its leader with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Headquartered in the mountains of Tabunan, Central Cebu the Cebu Area Command was designated as the 8th Military District by SWPA. It had four regiments composed of former USAFFE men and armed civilians. Aiding them were civilian volunteer guards (VGs) who were the eyes and ears of the resistance movement who also helped as couriers and cargo haulers.¹⁰ One of the notable achievements of Cushing's group was an attack on Babag in Cebu City on February 23, 1943.

THE UNEXPECTED EVENT

The event that would affect the liberation of the Philippines started as an unfortunate accident. Around two o' clock in the morning of April 1, 1944, Ricardo Bolo, a teniente of the Barrio of Balud, municipality of San Fernando, got up from bed after hearing the sound of sputtering airplane engines. Aside from being a barrio leader, Bolo was also a procurement agent of food supplies for the guerrillas. He was also on the lookout for any information that he could report to the headquarters of the Cebu Area Command. The sound of aircraft engines apparently came from a low-flying airplane flying in the east. The sound faltered and suddenly stopped and he noticed a red glow over the horizon. It could not be the rising sun because it was too early.

Around a kilometer away Cornelio Manugas, a volunteer guard commander in the barrio of Sangat also in San Fernando also heard the sound of airplane engines. He stepped out of his house just in time to see a giant seaplane plunge into the sea and explode. It was followed by smaller explosions followed by flashes of orange light. Meanwhile Bolo accompanied by his younger brother Edilberto and a neighbor named Valeriano Paradero decided to go out to sea and investigate. Other people including Manugas and his men got into their canoes to the crash site. They encountered a group of men around three kilometers

meters from the shore. They were towing a body and chanting in a strange language “*hon cha, hon cha, hon cha.*” Manugab believed that this was a count to coordinate their swimming strokes for more power and speed in towing their unconscious companion. As Bolo and his companions approached, they called for help. Volunteer Guard Feliciano Hermosa recognized that they were the hated and feared Japanese. In his fear, he got out of his canoe and pushed it towards the nearest two men. Hermosa then swam towards the sitio Magtalisay.¹¹

Meanwhile the other Japanese swam towards the other Filipinos. They clung at the canoes but not all of them could be accommodated. Bolo, Paradero and the others had to make several trips to the beach. Two of the survivors managed to swim to nearby Barrio Sangat where they were able to reach the office of Vicente Rabor, the Japanese-supported Mayor of San Fernando. From there, they were taken to the Japanese garrison at Tina-an, Naga town. This was how the Japanese authorities were able to know about the crash.

A total of twelve survivors were recovered by Filipinos at the Magtalisay beach. One of them tried to resist capture which forced the Filipinos to bind the wrists of all the survivors. The Japanese dragged their motionless companion who was badly burned. The man was already dead. The Japanese laid out the body ceremoniously on the beach and the Japanese kept repeating the word “Koga.” This led the Filipinos to think about the identity of the dead man. Was Koga the name of this person? Was he the most senior officer in the group? Was there an admiral in the group? Some of the more educated Volunteer Guards heard about an Admiral Koga. Since it was already light, the Filipinos and their captives moved rapidly inland leaving the body on the beach. The unburied corpse was soon eaten by dogs and the bones were recovered two weeks later by Japanese soldiers.

While the prisoners were being walked inland, one of them attacked one of the Filipino guards. This was the same prisoner who tried to resist capture at the beach. The Filipino,

who had cruel experiences from Japanese soldiers, beat him to death.

Around ten o’ clock the Filipinos saw a Japanese search plane apparently looking for them. The Volunteer Guards and their prisoners quickly hid in the brush. Shortly Teniente Bolo turned over the prisoners to Teopisto Tangub, the Volunteer Guard Commander of Barrio Sangat. Tangub ordered that the prisoners shed off their uniforms and dress in civilian clothes to avoid detection by Japanese forces. Tangub also beat up the guard who had struck one of the prisoners. Because of this gesture one of the prisoners who was apparently their leader became cooperative and did not hesitate to exchange his clothes with the guerrillas. The guerrillas then carried the prisoners on their backs.

Meanwhile the alerted Japanese troops started to search for the survivors of the plane crash. People including old folks were arrested on mere suspicion that they knew the survivors’ whereabouts. Torture and terror were employed to extract information. There was a report that an infant was impaled with a bayonet and held aloft in front of its terrified parents. The Kempeitai or the Japanese military police took more civilians to the Sangat Elementary School for more interrogation. The Japanese also offered incentives for those who would volunteer information. A young girl, who had given the survivors bananas and coconuts when they passed through Sangat, was rewarded with rice for her kindness. Aside from the survivors, The Japanese were also demanding the whereabouts of certain documents which were in the crashed plane. The Kempeitai occupied the house of a civilian named Onyong Abendan and killed his wife on the suspicion that she had some knowledge about the papers.¹²

The guerrillas and their prisoners continued on their way towards their headquarters. Tired and hungry, the prisoners ate with relish bananas and coconuts. Tangub and his group were joined by more guerrillas under Captain Jose Ponce. At this time the guerrillas started to know something about their prisoners. They tried to scare them by pointing a revolver at them. However this did not draw any reaction.

But when one of them drew out his 21-inch *pinoti* blade and pointed it at their leader they cried and bowed low. Some of the prisoners spoke English. Apparently the white-haired Japanese officer was their leader. He said that he wanted to go to Cebu City and pointed to the direction of the Japanese garrison at Tina-an. He had in his possession a picture of Emperor Hirohito. The group moved on and passed by the headquarters of Lt. Salavador Vaga at Aloguinsan-Nailong in Carcar and Captain Marcelino Eridiano at Binabag, Pina-mungajan at nightfall where they rested. By morning the group now under the command of Vaga reached the command post of the Company A at Calapayan.

On April 3, the group was attacked by a column of Japanese troops. The party had passed through the headquarters of the 87th Infantry Regiment. The group had to make a detour to avoid the enemy before finally reaching headquarters of Colonel Cushing at barrio Tabunan. Information from the field started to filter about the whereabouts of the Japanese forces. The enemy made a seven-point drive into the interior of the island. One of the Japanese columns was the Ohnesi Butai, a highly trained and well equipped Japanese regiment named after its commander, Col. Seito Ohnesi. Most of its members were veterans of the campaigns in Manchuria. The Ohnesi Butai and other units attacked simultaneously and overran all guerrilla defenses and more civilians were captured for interrogation. At the same time Japanese planes dropped leaflets demanding the return of Japanese prisoners and the documents. A prisoner was conditionally released to deliver a letter to Cushing ordering him to surrender the prisoners.

By April 8 Cushing made his first radio message to General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Australia.¹³ He said that his men have in custody 10 Japanese prisoners and that he was facing constant enemy pressure which made their situation precarious. He asked MacArthur for advice and said that more information from the prisoners would follow.

On the following day, Cushing sent another message identifying the prisoners.¹⁴ They were: General Twani Furomei, said to be command-

ing officer of land and sea forces in Makassar; Yoji Yamamoto, Marine officer bound for Makassar; Matsutare Okanura, aviator; Keis Okkjesimi, aeronautical engineer; Tomido Olasogi and Nasa tusi Yusito, both operators; Tushido Okada and Takashi Tanika, engineers. The rest were Yasukichi Yamagata, and Ushikisa Inanishi. He said that the prisoners came from a plane reportedly shot down by anti-aircraft fire from a submarine. He also reported the personal belongings of the prisoners including a memorandum notebook with Japanese scripts.

THE MYSTERIOUS PAPERS

At the same time of the crash, in Sitio Bas, Barrio Perilos in Carcar town, a villager named Pedro Gantuangko remained wide awake. Gout in his left foot was causing him excruciating pain. He also heard to the sound of airplane engines but unlike the other villagers he did not venture out. Looking out to the sea he noticed that there was something bobbing up and down in the waves. He called out to his neighbor, Rufo Wamar who fetched him the floating object. It was a wooden box blackened by oil and when it was opened it contained a leather portfolio. The portfolio contained a thick file of Japanese documents one of which was thick as a school dictionary. There were also papers held by fasteners. There were around six or seven batches of them. All of the papers were written in Japanese characters. One batch had only blank sheets of paper. Gantuangko suspected that these blank sheets might be filled with writings made in invisible ink that may become readable when heated.¹⁵

Along with the papers was an elongated silk yellow and blue pouch. It was probably a sleeve to contain a samurai sword because one end was open with a golden silk thread to close it. There was also a cloth bag containing six rubber condoms. The last item in the portfolio was a small silk pouch containing what looked like white pieces of gold the size of corn grains. Gantuangko weighed the pieces and tried to estimate their worth. It took two days for all of the papers to dry. By this time the Japanese were combing the area for the lost documents. Gantuangko put the portfolio with the papers

back in the box and buried it. He marked the spot with dried coconut leaves. Gantuangko also kept the portfolio's wooden box hoping to use it as a nest for his ducks.

On April 3 the Japanese troops entered the village and rounded up all the civilians numbering around a hundred and herded them in front of the chapel. Fortunately Gantuangko was not present because he was out fishing. The Japanese through an interpreter repeatedly asked about a box with some contents. Then they entered the houses and searched the cabinets and chests, poking at the clothes with bayonets. Not finding the papers, the interpreter addressed the people saying "The general is thankful that we did not catch anyone." The Japanese left leaving the people with their ransacked houses and belongings.

The following night the Japanese returned and searched the houses again. They believed that the boxes from the crashed airplane had drifted toward Sitio Bas. Fearing that he might be caught with the papers, Gantuangko dug up the box and turned over the portfolio to the guerrillas. Eventually, the documents reached Cushing's headquarters in Tabunan. Cushing had the documents inspected by someone who might know Japanese. A Chinese-born guerrilla was called in to read the documents but could not decipher its contents.

The next evening the Japanese returned to Sitio Bas and arrested all the civilians. They were kept awake at the chapel throughout the night and by morning the interrogations began. They offered to give a truckload of rice and bales of cloth to anyone who could show them the smallest piece of paper from the plane. No one talked but Gantuangko feared that his companion Wamar might be scared into revealing the whereabouts of the documents. When they were released in the afternoon, Gantuangko gave some money to Wamar and told him to leave for Bohol.¹⁶

The Japanese returned for the fourth time in the evening and again arrested all the inhabitants. This time they were accompanied by a Filipino collaborator working in the Japanese Bureau of Constabulary. Since at that time Gantuangko's gout-stricken foot was swelling, he was allowed to remain at his house. The col-

laborator said that all of the arrested villagers will be taken to Villadolid town where their bones will be broken. At this point Gantuangko feared that his neighbors might eventually squeal on him. When the Japanese were not around, he collected provisions and gathered his family. He sailed out to the sea and spotted several Japanese patrol boats in the area. He was told by other fishermen that the Japanese had killed many of them for giving the wrong answers.

Around a kilometer from the shore, Gantuangko was stopped by Japanese soldiers aboard a launch. They searched his boat and opened the suitcases and chests onboard. Finding only clothes they asked Gantuangko where he was going. The Japanese officer asked him in broken English, "Where you from?" "Si-bonga," Gantuangko replied deliberately giving the wrong information. "Where go?" asked the officer. "Go to Cebu City." "Why?" "Cebu City, Japanese very good. We live there." When the Japanese left, Gantuangko pretended that he was going in the direction of Cebu City. When the Japanese boat was out of sight, he changed his course and headed for Pangangan Island off Bohol. He reached the island around noon and hid there. The Japanese suspected his presence in that island and tried to look for him there. While searching for him and the documents the Japanese were said to have murdered 70 civilians.¹⁷

THE JAPANESE PURSUIT OF CUSHING AND THE PRISONERS

In the afternoon of April 9, guerrilla runners reported that two Japanese columns were approaching Tabunan and that a third column appeared to be heading Tupas Ridge. Tupas Ridge provides a commanding view of all the surrounding areas. Cushing and his men prepared to move the prisoners to Kamungayan across the ravine opposite the ridge. Before leaving he sent another radio message stating that the prisoners were from Palau and that the Japanese knew of their position.¹⁸ He said that he is staging a fake withdrawal from Cebu by trying to appear that he was heading for Bohol. Cushing hurriedly dispatched another radio message saying that the prisoners were "too

hot to hold,” and that he only had twenty-five men facing a Japanese force of around 500. With news of the enemy killing many civilians he contemplated negotiating with the Japanese. He then shut down the radio transmitter to avoid detection.¹⁹

Cushing received word that the Japanese were a few hundred meters away from his new position. He and his men immediately dropped everything. All their equipment including the guerrillas' portable generator, waterwheel and telephone lines were stashed behind a waterfall. Bullets started flying as the Japanese approached. The guerrillas quickly carried most of the prisoners on their backs. The enemy was also firing from superior positions in Tupas ridge. The guerrillas could only respond with inaccurate fire. One of the guerrillas was killed and two others including a woman were seriously wounded. A Japanese float plane also appeared and fired its machinegun at the guerrillas. It dropped several small fragmentation bombs. After learning that his men suffered several casualties, Cushing ordered the summary execution of two prisoners. Lt. Pedro Villarreal a former member of the Japanese-sponsored Constabulary who spoke Nippongo, was designated executioner. A firing squad was ruled out because the volleys would give away their position. Two prisoners were led away to an isolated spot and the doomed men sang a song called “Miyo Tokai” before meeting their death by the blade.

The intense Japanese offensive made the guerrillas wonder about their lead prisoner. The Japanese columns left burning houses in their wake and executed many civilians. Was Fuomei an important person in the Japanese armed forces? At one time he called himself a general and at another time, an admiral. Was he the cause of the Japanese fury on the helpless civilians? Who was that unidentified dead Japanese left at the beach at Magtalisay? Could that be Koga mentioned by the prisoners? Could this admiral called Koga be using another name? It was also learned that the Japanese forces had rounded up over a hundred civilians in Tupas Ridge. The Japanese were holding the civilians as a guarantee for the safe

return of the prisoners. They also confiscated their pigs, cattle and carabaos.

Another thing which bothered the guerrillas was why they have not received any reply to their messages. Was MacArthur too busy to reply? Was this Japanese general who seemed so important to the Japanese of no importance to MacArthur? Are the lives of 10 Japanese prisoners worth the lives of over one hundred civilians?

Cushing called a meeting with his men and they decided to negotiate with the pursuing Japanese forces. They agreed to free their prisoners in exchange for an end to the wanton killing and torture of civilians. Cushing also called for General Fuomei and had a long talk with him. It was decided to send a message to Colonel Ohnesi proposing that the Japanese stop their attacks on civilians in exchange for the prisoners. They also demanded the return of the confiscated livestock. Hoping that a message would be received from MacArthur's headquarters, Cushing stalled for time and proposed to release four prisoners and the rest at the boundary of Cebu City. The message was first written in English and written in Japanese characters with the help of Fuomei and Yamamoto. This was delivered by courier bearing a white flag.

Col. Ohnesi balked at this proposal demanding “All or none at all.” After getting Ohnesi's word that no civilians would be hurt, it was reluctantly agreed that all prisoners would be freed. By noon of April 10, the prisoners were freed. General Fuomei was borne on a makeshift sedan chair supported by bamboo poles carried by a platoon of guerrillas. Villarreal and his men acted as escort. As the party of prisoners approached the Japanese, the Japanese soldiers bowed very low. This Fuomei must be a very important person, the guerrillas thought. The former prisoners happily mixed with their comrades. After leaving the prisoners, Villarreal and his men retraced their steps to Cushing's location.

In the late afternoon, Cushing received a message from MacArthur ordering him to detain the prisoners. The message said that the prisoners should be taken to southern Negros or southern Bohol where a submarine would

take them to Australia. It said that Cushing should be alert to the use of assumed names and ranks by the prisoners who might pose as junior officers. The message also said that Cushing should keep the prisoners safe and prevent their recapture by the enemy.²⁰

Upon receiving this message Cushing wept unashamedly. He also received a message from President Manuel Luis Quezon praising him for his feat. On April 13 Cushing sent a message saying that he has two Japanese operations maps detailing the Japanese bases, landing fields and other facilities in Indo-China, Hainan, the Philippines and Southern China.

Cushing received a reply that the documents maybe of extreme value and should be sent to Negros for delivery to Australia. The Japanese also learned that the documents were in the possession of the guerrillas and tried to force their return. Japanese airplanes dropped leaflets offering rewards for its return and at the same time threatening severe action. Suspecting that the documents were in Bohol, they sent 3,000 men to scour the island. The news of the missing Japanese papers also reached Mindanao, Ismael Engeniero, one of Cushing's men learned from Col. Wendell Fertig, commander of the guerrilla forces in Mindanao that the Japanese were willing to pay 50,000 pesos for the portfolio and the papers.²¹ The Japanese continued to demand for the return of the papers as late as May 17. Leaflets signed by Colonel Takeshi Watanabe who was the commander of the Japanese naval garrison of Cebu demanded that Cushing surrender unconditionally the papers and all the belongings of the passengers of the crashed plane which were "robbed" by the guerrillas. He warned "of severe method" against Cushing if this demand was not met.²²

The papers were actually still in Cebu and placed inside two empty mortar shell containers and were sent to the submarine rendezvous point in Tolong, Negros Oriental. The documents were sent to Gen. Charles P. Willoughby who was MacArthur's Intelligence Officer or G-2. He forwarded the papers to the Nisei section in the SWPA headquarters in Brisbane where American-born Japanese translated the precious documents into English. Willoughby

turned over the translated documents to MacArthur.²³

It was found out that the documents were a part of the "Sho" or "Z" plan of the Japanese naval and air forces in the Pacific. It revealed that Leyte was the soft underbelly of Japanese defenses and it was meagerly defended. Before the discovery of the documents the Americans planned to retake the Philippines by landing first at Sarangani Bay, Cotabato in southern Mindanao in late December 20, 1944.²⁴ It was changed to a landing in Leyte on October 20, 1944, two months ahead of schedule, fulfilling MacArthur's famous promise, "I shall return."

As for Cushing, it was reported that he was severely reprimanded for releasing his prisoners. Calling his actions "reprehensible" the US command said that it doubted his judgment and efficiency and that Cushing is relieved of command of the 7th Military District.²⁵ A communication signed by "RKS" who was presumably Lt. Gen. Richard K. Sutherland, was dispatched to other guerrilla leaders. It said that Cushing was discharged from his duties as commander of the 7th Military District.²⁶ After MacArthur had landed in Leyte, Cushing was summoned and it was not known what had transpired. It was rumored that Cushing was stripped of his rank and demoted to a mere guerrilla chieftain or even a private. It was doubtful that Cushing was actually demoted for he was still wearing a colonel's insignia.²⁷

More details became evident after the war, "General" Furomei turned out to be Vice Admiral Shigeru Fukudomei²⁸, the Chief of Staff of Admiral Mineichi Koga of the Imperial Combined Fleet. Koga had succeeded Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto after the later was killed in Bougainville in April 1943. Radio Tokyo announced Koga's death only in May 1944 after his successor, Admiral Soemu Toyoda, was appointed. On his return to Japan, Fukudomei commanded the 6th Base Air Force which covered was responsible for the defense of southern Kyushu, the Ryukyu Islands and Formosa.²⁹

Certain doubts however still remain. Whose body was it the Japanese survivors insisted on taking after the crash and why the name Koga was repeatedly mentioned when the survivors

asked the guerrillas to take it with them. The official version of Koga's death was that Koga was lost at sea in a storm and the second plane carrying Fukodomei crashed off Cebu. Retired colonel Manuel Segura who was an actual participant in the Koga affair believed otherwise. Both planes were said to have taken off from Palau for Davao in Mindanao. Segura believed that the two planes which were giant "Emily" flying boats flew together and collided in mid-air off Cebu. He said that in bad weather it was standard procedure for airplanes to tighten their formation to retain visual contact. Planes flying in close formation are known to collide and crash. He said that the guerrilla shore watchers saw a ball of flame at sea as an evidence of the collision and crash. It could also be surmised that the first explosion heard by Bolo and Manugas was the collision of two big aircraft which was followed by other explosions and a fire.

As for the flight path of the two doomed airplanes, it was quite hard not to miss Davao since it is directly west of Palau. Cebu island was certainly way off with the existing navigational instruments.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The capture of the Koga and Fukodomei papers was the crowning achievement of the guerrillas of Cebu. Though not well-mentioned in the annals of the war in the Pacific, it was Cebu's contribution the allied military war effort. Despite its importance the event is largely left unremembered. The release of the prisoners to save the lives of helpless civilians showed the humane side of Cushing and his guerrillas. For this act of compassion, Cushing had to suffer the humiliation of being relieved of his command and investigated by people who were not at the battlefield.

Today, only an obscure marker in San Fernando mentions the exploits of the guerrillas. However it does not state the actual historical events. Local politics had a hand in this deliberate neglect. In 1991 veterans groups proposed to set up a proper historical marker in San Fernando but it seemed that the incumbent Mayor did not favor this undertaking believing it was a gimmick of his opponent in

politics.³⁰ It happened that most of the veterans who served with Cushing and participated in the Fukodomei episode were his political enemies. Thus without the cooperation of local authorities an important historical event lay in oblivion.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Fernando R. Reyes and Leonardo Q. Nuval, *World War II in the Philippines The Visayas, Palawan, Mindoro, Masbate, Mindanao and Sulu* (Manila: Veterans Federation of the Philippines, 1996), pp. 178-179.
- 2 After the fall of Bataan, the remaining USAFFE forces were called United States Armed Forces in the Philippines or USAFIP.
- 3 Jose Abad Santos (1886-1942) was Chief Justice of the Philippine Supreme Court when the war broke out. He was to serve as acting President of the Philippines if President Quezon or Vice President Osmeña were captured by the Japanese or were not able to escape to the United States. When he was captured in Cebu, Abad Santos was the highest official of the Philippine Commonwealth government to be fall into the hands of the Japanese. The Japanese asked him to convince other Philippine Commonwealth officials especially General Manuel Roxas to stop resisting their administration. In refusing the wishes of the Japanese, he said "To obey your command is tantamount to being a traitor to the United States and my country. He was executed on February 19, 1942 in Malabang, Lanao del Sur.
- 4 National Historical Institute, *Filipinos in History*, Vol. I (Manila: 1989), pp. 1-2.
- 4 Among this group were USAFFE Captain Leoncio Minoza, Epifanio Guillermo, Marcial Tabal and Juan Opesinar. The engagements and casualties of this force were unrecorded.
- 5 Reyes and Nuval, *op. cit.* pp. 180-181.
- 6 Cushing was personally known to Jesus Villamor, an ace pilot during the early years of the war who headed the Philippine branch of the Allied Intelligence Bureau. According to him Cushing had a dual personality, cold, hard and unforgiving on one hand, soft, sentimental and childish on the other. He easily blows up but just as quickly repents. He cusses hard but is fond of quoting the "Good Book." Partly Mexican, he speaks English with a slight accent and pronounces the suffix "ed" distinctly, as "attacked-ed." He hated the Japs as much as he

loves his “Cebu patriots” whom he refers with tear-filled eyes. He was courageous and leads his men in combat but lacks administrative ability. He regarded civil government as not feasible. Villamor believed that “all of Cebu was behind him and all the Japs were after him.”

From Interview transcript of Col. Jesus Villamor, October 1943, In: Fernando Reyes and Leonardo Q. Nuval, *World War II in the Philippines, Mindoro, Masbate, Mindanao and Sulu* (Manila: Veterans Federation of the Philippines, 1996), p. 316.

- 7 The eldest of the Cushing brothers was George Jr. a mining engineer who was the first to join the profession. He died in Mindoro in 1936. The second brother was Fred, a mine equipment salesman who lived a peaceful life in the United States and died in 1949. The third brother, Charles, joined the US Army in New Mexico at the age of 14 and served under General John J. Pershing. He was in the Philippines in 1941 and when the USAFFE surrendered he became a guerrilla leader in Central Luzon. In 1943 the Japanese captured Charles and brought him to Cebu to force his brother James to surrender. The fourth brother, Frank, joined the Navy at the age of 16. He was noted for jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge in New York. Not satisfied he gained the distinction of the only man at that time to jump off the San Francisco Bay Bridge and survive. While in the Navy he survived a Kamikaze plane attack where all of the men around him were killed. He returned to the Philippines with his wife Marjorie and started a stunt carnival for the benefit of the Boy's Town. The venture however did not prosper. Walter Cushing, the fifth brother was a mining engineer. He led the first ambush of a Japanese truck column in Candon, Ilocos Sur where only one Japanese was left alive. Considered as the “Granddaddy of the guerrilla movement in the Philippines, he urged the USAFFE units in Abra to meet the Japanese forces landing in Northern Luzon but was dismissed as a fifth columnist. On January 1, 1942 he ambushed a Japanese truck in Tagudin killing twelve out of 14 Japanese. Not satisfied he and handful men tackled a 60-man force in Abra later that month forcing the Japanese to send hundreds of their men to track him down. Cushing's force was credited for killing at least 500 Japanese before he and six or eight men were cornered and killed in Tagudin, Ilocos Sur by a 150-man enemy force. His bravery and

courage impressed the Japanese commander that he gave Cushing a burial in his religion in the nearest churchyard at Jones, Isabela.

- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 186.

The details of Fenton's death at the hands of the guerrillas could not be reliably confirmed due to lack of direct testimonies since the main witnesses including Cushing were already dead. Other sources regarding Fenton's death include Uldarico S. Baclagon, *Philippine Campaigns* (Manila: Graphic House, 1952), pp. 267-268. Fenton was said to have become ruthless in dealing with soldiers and civilians and Cushing disapproved most of his actions. In the middle of 1943 Cushing left for Negros to ask for aid for his guerrillas. Before leaving he asked his Chief of Staff, Col. Ricardo Estrella to arrest Fenton and detain him until his return. Fenton was arrested together with 14 of his followers. He was tried on the charge of ordering the execution of an American missionary named Patrick Drumm and other violations of the Articles of War. Found guilty, Fenton and some of his aides were summarily executed on September 15, 1943. When Cushing returned from Negros in October, he was angry Estrella's treatment of Fenton. He also learned that Estrella who was in actual command of the Cebu guerrillas, was planning to turn him over to the Japanese. Cushing immediately had Estrella arrested and subsequently executed.

- 9 The other guerrilla groups in Cebu were led by Jose Amadora, the Mayor of the town of Demanjug which was a composed of about a hundred men. In the town of Tuburan former members of the 81st Division formed their own guerrilla unit. It was lead by Lieutenants. Ricardo Mascarinas, Manuel Allego, Columbus Parilla and Sergeant Maxilom. In November 1942 it joined up with Fenton and Cushing. Other guerrilla units were formed in the towns of Dalaguete, Liloan, San Fernando, Madrideojos, Malabayoc, Bogo and in the area of Tabogon and Borbon. These were eventually absorbed by Fenton and Cushing's force. There was also a women's resistance unit called the Ladies Loyalty Society which supplied the guerrillas with food, medicine and other supplies. By the time the Americans landed in Leyte in October 1944, the guerrillas in Cebu numbered 8,000 who opposed a combined Japanese force of 14,500. By the time the Americans landed in Cebu in March 1945, the Japanese force was increased to 21,000.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹¹ Manuel F. Segura, *The Koga Papers Stories of WWII Cebu, Philippines* (Cebu City: M.F. Segura Publications, 1992) p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The message read:

SECRET

TO: GENERAL MACARTHUR

FROM: CUSHING

NR7 8 APRIL

WE HAVE 10 JAPANESE PRISONERS NOW ENROUTE TO OUR HEADQUARTERS PLEASE ADVISE ACTION TO BE TAKEN. CONSTANT ENEMY PRESSURE MAKE THIS SITUATION VERY PRECARIOUS. FURTHER INFORMATION FROM PRISONERS WILL FOLLOW.

SECRET

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The April 9 message read:

TO: GENERAL MACARTHUR

FROM: CUSHING

MR8 9TH APRIL

REFERENCE TEN JAP PRISONERS—THEY CAME FROM FOUR MOTORED PLANE WHICH CRASHED OFF SAN FERNANDO AT TWO O' CLOCK IN THE MORNING THIS 1ST APRIL THEIR NAMES GENERAL TWANI FUROMEI, COMMANDING OFFICER OF LAND AND SEA FORCES IN MACASSAR

YOGI YAMAMOTO, MARINE OFFICER BOUND FOR MACASSAR

YASUKICHI YAMAGATA

MATSUTARE OKANURA, AVIATOR

USHIKISA INANISHI

KEIS OKUJESIMI, AERONAUTICAL ENGINEER

TOMIDO OLASOGI, OPERATOR

TUSHIDO OKADA, ENGINEER

NASA TUSI YUSITO, OPERATOR

TAKASHI TANIKI, ENGINEER

THEIR PERSONAL EFFECTS, A PAIR OF SHOULDER STRAPS FROM MARINE OFFICER YAMAMOTO, ONE MEMORANDUM NOTEBOOK WITH JAPANESE SCRIPTS, ONE WRAPPED PACKAGE OF JAPANESE RELICS, THREE HOSPITAL CASES, INCLUDING GENERAL FUROMEI AND MARINE OFFICER YAMAMOTO. RUMORS THAT PLANE SHOT DOWN BY ANTI AIRCRAFT FIRE FROM SUBMARINE HOWEVER WE ARE

CHECKING. DUE TO GENERAL CONDITION OF PRISONERS AND SITUATION AS IT IS FURTHER INFO MAY BE SOMEWHAT DELAYED.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

It read:

TO GENERAL MACARTHUR

FROM CUSHING (VIA WAT)

NR 11 9 APRIL

JAP CAPTIVES FROM PALAO. ENEMY AWARE OF THEIR PRESENCE HERE. WE ARE CATCHING HELL WE ARE STAGING A FAKE REMOVAL FROM THIS ISLAND TO WITHDRAW PRESSURE WHILE AWAITING YOUR FURTHER ORDERS PD SOUTHEAST COAST CEBU IMPOSSIBLE NOW. WILL MAKE EVERY ATTEMPT TO HOLD JAPANESE GENERAL AND NEXT RANKING OFFICER. PLEASE RUSH ADVICE; NORTHEAST COAST STILL CLEAR FOR SUBMARINE.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

The message read:

TO GENERAL MACARTHUR

FROM CUSHING

NR 12 09 APRIL

JAP PRISONERS TOO HOT FOR US TO HOLD. DUE TO NUMBER OF CIVILIANS BEING KILLED I MADE TERMS THAT NO CIVILIANS ARE TO BE MOLESTED IN FUTURE, IN EXCHANGE FOR THE PRISONERS. ALTHOUGH THE ENEMY DID NOT KNOW IT, WE HAD ONLY 25 SOLDIERS BETWEEN THE ATTACKING FORCE OF APPROXIMATELY FIVE HUNDRED AND OUR POSITION. ENEMY NOW WITHDRAWING TOWARDS CITY IN SOUTHERN CEBU- JAPS WERE REPORTED TWO THOUSAND STRONG, LOOKING FOR PRISONERS.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

The message read:

CONFIDENTIAL

REFERENCE YOUR MESSAGE NUMBER 8 DESIRE IF POSSIBLE EVACUATION TO THIS HEADQUARTERS OF THE SENIOR PRISONERS WITH AS MANY POSSIBLE CMA SELECTED IN ACCORD WITH RELATIVE IMPORTANCE PD NORTHEAST COAST CEBU IS NAVIGATIONALY IMPOSSIBLE PD CAN YOU

SEND THEM UNDER SAFE CONDUCT TO A RENDEZVOUS SITE SOUTHERN BOHOL OR SOUTHERN NEGROS CMA PREFERENCE OF RENDEZVOUS AREA IN ORDER NAMED PD HOW SOON COULD PARTY BE AT SITE PD PARTY DELIVERED OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE BE ALERT TO USE OF ASSUMED NAMES AND RANKS UNDER WHICH SENIOR PRISONER MAY POSE AS JUNIOR PD DO ALL POSSIBLE TO KEEP THEM SAFE FOR EVACUATION AND PREVENT RECAPTURE PD TO GIVE MATTER UTMOST SECRECY.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

The leaflet read:

17 MAY 1944

TO MR. JAMES CUSHING

I, AS COMMANDER OF THE IMPERIAL NAVAL GARRISON OF CEBU, AM SENDING YOU THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO YOU:

- (1) THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY IS TAKING THE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION AGAINST YOU IN VIEW OF THE GUERRILLAS AIM LIKE AN INHUMAN TREATMENT BY YOUR MEN OF THE PASSENGERS AND THE CREW OF OUR SEAPLANE WHICH MADE A FORCED LANDING OFF SAN FERNANDO, CEBU ON 1ST APRIL 1944. THEREFORE WE STRONGLY DEMAND THAT YOU IMMEDIATELY CARRY OUT THE FOLLOWING:
- (2) RETURN UNCONDITIONALLY UNTIL THE NOON OF 30TH MAY, ALL DOCUMENTS, BAGS, AND CLOTHINGS EITHER PICKED UP FROM THE SAID AIRPLANE OR ROBBED OF THE PASSENGERS AND THE CREW, TO THE MAYOR OF SAN FERNANDO FOR SAFE KEEPING.
- (3) WE NOTIFY YOU THAT IN CASE WHEN YOU FAIL TO FULFILL OUR DEMAND STATED IN THE SECOND CLAUSE, THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY WILL RESORT TO DRASTICALLY SEVERE METHOD AGAINST YOU.

(SIGNED) TAKESHI WATANABE
COMMANDER OF THE IMPERIAL
JAPANESE NAVAL GARRISON OF
CEBU

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁴ There were at least three war plans for the retaking of the Philippines. The first was "Reno V" which called for the invasion of Morotai Island between New Guinea and Mindanao followed by a landing on Sarangani Bay in southern Mindanao on October 25, 1944. Bases will be quickly established. More landings were to be made at Leyte and northern Mindanao with a side landing in Samar on November 15. This will be followed by a landing at the Bicol peninsula in January 1945. The full reoccupation of Luzon will be accomplished by April 1945.

The second plan was Granite II which was produced by Admiral Chester Nimitz. It consisted of island-hopping from the Marianas to the Palau islands on September 8, 1944, Mindanao on November 15, followed by the China coast and Formosa and back to Luzon

The third and more detailed was "Musketeer," which contains 12 phases. The first phase dubbed "King I," called for a taking of a toe-hold on the Philippines by taking Sarangani Bay. "King II" was a big landing on Leyte. "Love I" involved a landing on Bicol; "Love II" was a landing on Aparri, Cagayan in Northern Luzon; "Love III" involved the landing and establishment of airfields in southeast Mindoro; "Mike I" called for a massive landing at Aparri by April 1945; "Mike II" involved a diversionary landing at the eastern coast of Luzon and Dingalan Bay, Tayabas; "Mike III" was a landing on Batangas, western Luzon; "Mike IV" involved landings in Zambales and Bataan to prevent a Japanese imitation of the USAFFE defense in Bataan in 1941-1942; "Mike V" was a mop-up of Luzon. The final phase called "Victor" called for the liberation of bypassed islands in the Visayas and Luzon. From the analysis of the events of the liberation of the Philippines, "Musketeer" with some changes of dates and deletion of some operations, actually took place.

See "It was Almost not Leyte," *Philippines Free Press*, December 12, 1953, pp. 46-47, 114.

²⁵ The undated communication obtained from the US archives in Washington, D.C. read: YOUR ACTION IN RELEASING IMPORTANT PRISONERS AFTER NEGOTIATION WITH THE ENEMY IS MOST **REPREENSIBLE** (underscoring mine) AND LEADS ME TO DOUBT YOUR JUDGMENT AND EFFICIENCY. YOU ARE HEREBY DISCHARGED FROM YOUR FUNCTIONS AS COMMANDER OF THE 7TH MILITARY DISTRICT

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

The communication read:

THE COMMANDER OF THE 7TH MILITARY DISTRICT CAPTURED A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT PRISONERS AND WAS DIRECTED TO MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO REMOVE THEM TO A PLACE OF SAFETY. CAPT. CUSHING HOWEVER, AFTER NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE ENEMY, RELEASED THE PRISONERS. HE HAD THEREFORE BEEN **DISCHARGED** (underscoring mine) FROM HIS FUNCTIONS AS COMMANDER OF THE 7TH MILITARY DISTRICT.

RKS

²⁷ Manuel Segura, who fought alongside Cushing believed that the order to relieve Cushing was never given. He noted two errors in the communication: Cushing was addressed as "Capt."

when he was supposed to be a Lt. Colonel and the 7th Military District referred to Negros not Cebu. Cebu was the 8th Military District.

After the war Cushing confided to a former guerrilla leader named Col. Abel Trazo who was commander of the 87th Infantry (guerrilla) regiment that he was about to be court-martialed for releasing Admiral Fukodomei to the Japanese. It turned out however that the documents were more important than the Admiral himself.

²⁸ It should be correctly spelled as Fukodome.

²⁹ Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations World War II Leyte Vol. XII* (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1958), p. 222.

³⁰ Veterans Federation of the Philippines, *Minutes of the Meetings, Calendar Year 1992*. Copy in the possession of the National Historical Institute.

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