

The remainder of the interviews in this book were done
by a class in oral history taught by Jeff Fiddler.

Crescenciana Absolon

Oral History Project

I, X Cresenciano Abalón, hereby direct that the interview
recorded Nov. 25, 1975, at U. of Illinois, Hemp. Snack Bar
Date Location

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Elizabeth Balanoff
Director, Oral History Project

X Cresenciano Abalón
Signature of interviewee

THE SURPRISE

In the Philippines there was far less collaboration than in other Axis-occupied countries. The documentary film, THE SORRY AND THE PTTY, showed that there was a significant amount of collaboration with the Axis in France. Other documentaries show that this was the same situation in other countries occupied by the Axis. But the Filipinos were an exception to this rule. Like anyone else that had to endure the Axis occupation, most Filipinos tried to land on their feet and were neither resistance fighters nor collaborators. Still, collaboration was insignificant and not as widespread as in most occupied countries. The small number of collaborators and the large scale of support of the resistance movement was probably the result of the atrocities which were committed in the Philippines. Although there were atrocities in China, they were not as widespread and did not affect the average Chinese. But, the Philippines did not have a large land mass which could swallow an entire army. This, plus the fact that the attack on the Philippines was a last-minute decision.

The Japanese cultural history is similar to that of many countries she occupied. The fact that this was a last-

minute decision and the two cultures are so, utterly different, (4) plus the fact that the Japanese considered themselves to be on a "divine mission" , made it incredibly (2) (4) (6), simple to consider the Filipinos sub-human and to carry out the most detestable atrocities. This was further complicated by the fact that the Japanese were not prepared psychologically for a war in the Philippines and are not aware of the Filipino's values or mores. This further complicated and deteriorated the relations between the Filipinos and the Japanese.

Matters were made even worse by the fact that the U.S. did not think that the Philippines would fall, in the event of a Japanese attack and, therefore, no contingency plans were drawn up.

Although Japanese society, at the outbreak of the war, was highly regimented, the Japanese soldiers showed an incredible degree of independence. The Japanese felt that they would have to fight a poor man's war, and Army units could become isolated and, in turn, defeated. To counter this, the Army soldier was trained to continue fighting even when the chain of command was broken. The book, JAPAN'S IMPERIAL CONSPIRACY, documented instances of insubordination by the Japanese soldiers in China. (8) Apologists for the

Japanese occupation used this lack of control to absolve the Japanese leaders and decision-makers of any responsibility for the atrocities.

The interviewee contradicted this notion by mentioning that officers were present while atrocities were being committed. This made a situation impossible which was already difficult, and the impossibility of the situation was made even more difficult by the fact that the Japanese felt that they were on a divine mission and any opposition was a support of the colonial powers.

Japanese nationalism, heightened by religious zeal, made an utterly impossible situation even more impossible because it completely blinded the Japanese to the nationalism of the Filipinos. The Japanese military success in the previous fifty years made the Japanese even more vigorous in her self-appointed leadership in the greater East Asian co-prosperity sphere. (1)

There was also a profound cultural shock between the Japanese and the-Filipinos. (4)(6) When the Philippines could no longer fight because of lack of ammunition, they saw no disgrace in surrendering. But, the Japanese soldier, would carry a bullet in his shirt pocket. When he ran out of ammunition, he would use this bullet on himself. (3) (7)

At the time of the invasion, the Philippines had 7,107 (10) islands. There were no major military bases, either U.S. or Filipino, in the area of the town the interviewee mentioned, namely, Irica.

The town did not have the resources that were needed for the war effort at the time of the invasion. Agriculture was so primitive at that time, in that place, that it was enough above the subsistence level that a few farmers could reach middle-class status. Plus, the town was quite remote. (10) These characteristics made the town ideal for a sanctuary from the Japanese. It's location is in the southern Luzon area; therefore, it made it an ideal place to originate guerrilla attacks. The interviewee being a child, like most children, very impressionable, and without bias, made her an ideal person for an interview. (10)

Bibliography

- (1) Total War, Volume II: The War in Asia, Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, Ballantine Books, New York, pp 132 and 133
- (2) Total War, supra, pp 132 and 133
- (3) Sword and Chrysanthemum, author and page unknown
- (4) Sword and Chrysanthemum, author and page unknown
- (5) The Soldier and The State, The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, Samuel P. Huntington, Vintage Books, Div. of Random House, N.Y. pp 124 and 125
- (6) The Soldier and The State, supra, 128 and 129
- (7) The Soldier and The State, supra, p 129
- (8) Japan's Imperial Conspiracy, page unknown
The Soldier and The State, supra, p 130
- (10) From Interview with Mr. Nemesis M. Salazai, President of Philippine/American Cultural Institute

Q. I would like to have your name, nationality, the place of your birth, the occupation of the members of your family. I would also like to know; do you have relatives overseas, and the occupation of our family members and their nationality?

A. My name is Crescenciana Absalon. Our family, at the time of invasion, was composed only of four of us children, -and my mother and my father. My father is a farmer, and my mother is a housekeeper, and we are all Filipino natives. We don't have any mixture of blood - American, Chinese or any other Oriental blood. We have two basic colors in the family one is lighter and one is a little darker. My father is lighter and my mother is a little darker. We do claim to be natives of this particular country, The Philippines. I know from my mother, she has a cousin, my distant uncle, was serving in the U.S. Navy. I don't know how long, but I know that he died in the service and his corpse was brought back to the Islands. In fact, I didn't even see him. I saw his coffin, but not his face. I don't even know how he looked. I was born in our community and my father was born in the community, as well as my grandparents on my father's side. And, the

community itself and the town was composed of approximately, 28,000 people at that time.

Q. How long has your family been in that community?

A. I was born there, my father was born there, as well as my grandfather, so I don't know how many years was that.

Q How about your mother?

Q. My mother was born - well, in the same town, but in a farther place, farther neighborhood than what we have.

Q. How old were you when the war broke out?

A. I was about -- I was in the second grade when the war broke out. I was six years old, seven, something like that.

Q. How did the war affect you personally?

A. The war affected me personally because it delayed my studies, and opportunity of going places, seeing things, seeing places, and like movies, you know, shows; we did not have a chance to see them.

Q. Eventually, upon returning to-school, and completing it, which I assume you have done, what career did you enter into?

A. When I finally went back to school, I became a registered nurse, and presently am a head nurse at the

University of Illinois Hospital.

Q How close was your community to any major city or industrial center?

A. It was very far. If you take a train, it's about a day's travel by train.

Q. How many kilometers would you say? 1,000 Km.?

A Gee, I don't know, it's very far.

Q. What was the livelihood of those in your community? What was the main source of income?

A. Farming is the main source of income.

Q. In your opinion, from what you have heard, what was the attitude of your community towards the Americans before the invasion by the Japanese?

A. The attitude of the people towards the Americans before the invasion was very good, I think. The Americans were very good. I understand they were teachers teaching in schools. They were very good, that's all I can say.

Q. I mean is this your opinion, was it of others, or what?

A. Generally, this is the opinion of others and myself.

Q. I mean, this attitude that you have picked up that the Americans were liked in: your community, is this something you just felt, or something you overheard from comments, or what?

A. I overheard; it is what I overheard, but what I think about them, too.

Q The Filipinos at the time of the invasion, how much did they want independence?

A. At the time of the invasion, I don't think the Filipinos were ever concerned about independence in the first place. It's only the people that were holding big positions in the government that are really concerned about independence. Generally, people did not care. They thought that when the Japanese came over to the country, they thought that this would be just another colonization.

Q. Was there Japanese living in the Philippines at the time of the invasion?

A. Yah, as far as I know there was. In my community there was a Japanese living over there. They had a store, I think, three or four families lived there. They were mainly merchants. They had a store of various items and they established businesses just like the Chinese.

Q. That's sort of going into my next question -- how did they act?

A. They act -- they act just like any other foreigners that have a business there. They are friendly in a way, but they more or less keep to themselves. They get together among

themselves more often. The only dealings that they do with Filipinos is when it comes to business.

Q Did they marry Filipinos?

A. I didn't see any. I don't think so; there was none in there that I know of.

Q. Was there a traditional animosity, between the Filipinos and, the Japanese?

A. No, I don't think so. There was none. We looked up to these people as merchants and we go to their store to buy goods. We thought they were very friendly.

Q. In 1941 there was a war in Europe and there was also, a war between China and Japan in Asia. Did the Filipinos at that time expect to get into that war?

A. I don't think the Filipinos expected, to get into war. Because, well, I think, it's just that, I mean, you Americans probably wanted to be involved in war, but not us. Because we feel it's too far in Europe, that we should be affected.

Q. Why did you think the Americans wanted to be in war?

A. Well, we thought that Americans would be at war, maybe, probably not by in our country.

Q. But where?

A. I don't know; overseas.

Q. Where, overseas?

A. In Europe.

But you did not expect to enter into a war?

A. We did not expect.

Q. Was there any preparations in the Philippines for war?

A. No, I don't think so.

Q. What did you expect from the Japanese immediately after the invasion? Now, this is before the Island was secured.

A. Immediately after the invasion, we really didn't expect nothing. We thought they are, you know, they were friendly, so, you know --

Q. You say they were friendly, or did you expect them to be friendly?

A. We expected them to be friendly, just like the Americans. So that, you know, personally, I think we were curious, going there, and watch, and. to find out how they look and all this kind of stuff.

Q. This is a two-part question. Was there a resistance movement immediately upon the outbreak of the hostilities, and if there was not one, what precipitated the resistance movement?

A. I don't think there was a resistance movement immediately after the invasion. In fact, I never heard of a resistance movement immediately after the Japanese landing in our country , not until about the time when they started to kill Filipinos, Then that was the time when almost all able Filipinos where willing to join the guerrilla movement.

Q. This is a three part question. What was the very first bad act in your community by the Japanese? The first part of the question, how did you hear about it, from what you can remember, and what you heard, did those in your community expect it? Was this a complete surprise, or were you sot of expecting this thing to happen? And, what was the reaction toward it, by you, and by the people in your community by the people in your family

A.The very first bad act that the Japanese did in our community surprised the people. I think it was the time that they were trying to construct more air fields and they were rounding up men to work for them in the air field. And, as a matter of fact, my father was one of those who was taken and the Japanese just took those men away without even telling the families where these people are going to be brought and they weren't even told. The families were not told how long

are these people going to be away, or the place where they are going to. It's just like they are being taken and leaving their family wondering whether they are coming back or not.

Q. What was your reaction to all this?

A. Well, my reaction to that was that I was mad, angry , because the way they treat my father and we found out that my father was not even compensated, I mean, most of the men were not treated properly and they were not even given rest. My father said, when they tried to get some rest, when they were so tired, they hit them. They slapped them and made them work as long as they were able.

Q. How did you find out about this?

A. I overheard it from people in the neighborhood and from those relatives of mine that were living not far from the place where this happened, and friends of my father, they tell the same we experience.

Q. From what you remember, just at what point did your family, and those in your community, form any definite attitudes about the Japanese, and their occupation of the Philippines? What events brought about these attitudes?

A. As far as I can remember, when these things happened, this was the beginning where, people became angry. When this forced labor started, I think was the beginning when people turned antagonistic towards the Japanese. It became more intense when they started killing. I can remember a young man, about 18 years old or so, in my community, whom I know personally. The Japanese got him and he was suspected to be a guerrilla. He was paraded in the whole community with a chain on his back and he was burned by cigarettes all over his face, and his face was so swollen that no one recognized him. For those who knew him they would not have recognized him, the way he looked, and even at that situation in the eyes of the people, the Japanese still kick him and slap him. He barely could see, but still when he answer something that is not favorable to the Japanese, they still kick him. And, also, when this happen the Filipinos tried to, well, strengthen up the guerrilla movement because of how this particular man was treated. Most of those who have seen these things, well, they were furious about this being done, so all able-bodied Filipinos practically joined the guerrilla movement. Some of them were sort of inactive. What I mean by inactive is they

don't participate in carrying gun's, in ambushing and all this kind of stuff, but they support food and other needs for the guerrillas, and then when this guerrilla movement was so intensified, they began ambushing the Japanese. In some instances, the Japanese tried to go to the outskirts of the town and, try to look for the guerrillas and having some pro-Japanese come with them as the guide, and when this happens, some of the guerrillas tried to catch and ambush them in a place where they think there will not be so much Filipinos that will be affected. The guerrillas usually give some warning to the people in the community that there there is going to be an ambush in the particular area so people in the neighborhood stay away as far as you can. Probably they kill two or three Japanese and then the Japanese will retaliate on on so many, people regardless of ages. Any people - any Filipino they can pull out in that particular community, they will kill. They filled some houses with a lot of people in the community. Those people were caught by surprise. They did not know that they are going to be killed. They thought something, you know, that it's just some kind of visit or something, so they rounded up these people and took them into, the house. I think there are two or three houses that are close together.

Once they are all inside, they douse the house with gasoline and burn them alive. And, they said there was a pregnant woman - this is what we heard - was reluctant to get inside the house.

Q. Who did you hear this from?

R I heard this from people farming close to this area where this incident happened. This woman was reluctant to get into the house, so the Japanese just stick a bayonet into her belly killing her and the baby

Q. And she was pregnant?

A. Yes, she was pregnant. So, when this kind of act is done, I think no one in the world would ever like these things to be done to their own people.

Q. One other question. Were these atrocities committed in the presence of Japanese officers?

A. Yah, I guess so. Because --

Q What do you mean, you guess so? Do you know for certain?

R I don't know if they're officers or not. They all dress alike, but I think the only thing that we think of that he is an officer, when he has a, what is that, uh --- a revolver, --

Q. A sword?

A. A sword and a revolver, or whatever. He does not carry a long gun, so we presume that he's an officer.

Q. Yes.

A. O.K.

Q. The enlisted men do not carry a sword?

A. Right. And --

Q. Were these atrocities that you've mentioned, were these committed in the presence of an officer?

A. Yah, the Japanese usually go in groups, say in one whole truck. Whole truck like that there is -- we saw one person there with a sword.

Q. A samuri sword?

A. Yah, a sword. Well, I think the atrocities were done in the presence of the officers.

Q. But do you know from the people that you knew who have seen these atrocities? You see, the sword is a samuri tradition which represents a virtue. Only an officer can carry a samuri sword. Now, the man with the samuri sword, were these men present when the atrocities were being committed?

A. Gee, well, I did not see it.

Q. But, from those who have seen it, what they have told you?

A. Yah, I think, what they have told me is that there was this guy with a sword and we get the impression that this sword was used to chop off heads from these Filipinos. This was what was used. So, we always understand that when there are some atrocities going on, they used these swords to chop your head. So, we presume that this one was always around.