Massacre at Palawan

MEN of the 186th Infantry of the 41st Division who captured Puerto Princesa on Palawan, westernmost point thus far in our Pacific advance, knew what they would find.

They found it in the backyard of the old Philippines Constabulary Building—three long mounds used by the Japs as huge graves for the charred bodies of 140 American POWs.

1st Sgt. Albert Scharper, former Washington (D. C.) newspaperman, opened one of the mounds.

"The first thing we noticed," he said, "was the smell of death. The only remnants of bodies were charred bits of bones but unmistakably human bones. Charred pieces of clothing stuck to them."

The 186th knew what it would find because before their landing they were read the accounts of the massacre told by four of nine known prisoners who escaped. The prisoners were captured May 7, 1942.

The most vivid story of what happened during the early afternoon of Dec. 14, 1944 was told by Pvt. Glenn Weddell McDole who was with the 4th Marines at Corregidor.

"About 2:00 an air raid was sounded and we were told to get into the shelters because hundreds of American planes were coming," he said. "We all figured that the Americans were going to land so to make it safer for ourselves we did as commanded.

"Upon hearing a bunch of Japs yelling, I looked out of my pit and saw a Jap captain come running out to our area followed by about 50 or 60 Japanese soldiers armed with light machine guns, rifles and buckets. I ducked back into my pit not yet knowing what was coming off when all of a sudden an explosion sounded, men screamed and there were sounds of machine-gun fire.

"One man looked out of the pit and said, 'They're murdering the men in A Company pit.' I looked out and saw one man coming out in a sheet of flame. He was cut down by machine-gun fire.

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MASSACRE

"On seeing this we began digging our way out through a prepared escape hatch. All the men had gotten out of the hole except one. Before we got out we saw a torch thrown into the pit and a bucket of gasoline thrown in on the torch. We could feel the heat of the fire as we got out.

"The man in the pit screamed. I suppose the flames got him because he did not hit the beach with us."

On the beach McDole and two others hid under a pile of rubble as Japs combed the shore killing all the prisoners they found.

"I could see six Japs with an American in the center being slowly tortured with bayonets while another Jap joined the group with a bucket and torch," said McDole.

"The American began begging to be shot and not burned. He screamed in such a high voice I could hear him. Then I could see the Japs pour gasoline on one of his feet and burn it, and then the other. He collapsed. The Japs poured gasoline on his body and set it off."

The nine prisoners who were known to have escaped swam the bay and were helped by guerrillas to find their way back to American-occupied islands.

The statements made by the survivors, some sailors, some soldiers, some marines, were identical except for minor details.

When the 186th seized Puerto Princesa, the Jap garrison estimated at 2,000 had fled to the hills and if they know what's good for them they will stay there.

The 186th knows the Japs are guilty as hell.

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