

## CHAPTER IV

### THE JAPANESE INTERREGNUM, 1942-1945

This chapter deals with the Japanese occupation of Koronadal Valley. An alien invading force would radically change the direction of developmental process in Koronadal Valley, particularly Buayan. From an envisioned agricultural settlement serving a major function for the Commonwealth government, Koronadal Valley was transformed into a local entity whose future direction would be determined by the people no longer in accordance with the objectives for which it was established but in accordance with the dynamics of growth in response to changing times. It is ironic that an event that was calamitous in itself would provide the libertarian condition to liberate Koronadal Valley from the limiting confines of Commonwealth Act No. 441.

But more than structural change, the Japanese interlude put to test the new community. The sudden departure from the scene of the two titans of the community - General Paulino Santos and Mayor Abedin - raised the urgent need for the people left behind to take stock of themselves and respond to the difficult times sans the guiding hands of its leaders.

#### **A. The Southward Thrust of Japan to Mindanao**

To the people of the valley, the war was received with shock, fear and trepidation. It was like a thief in the night coming when everybody was unprepared. One settler recalled:

*"We were afraid when we heard over the radio that the Japanese are coming. We immediately evacuated and left behind our farms and animals. We hid in the mountains of Palkan, proceeding to Glamang and then to Kiamba. Our hunger drove us to dig sweet potatoes from the farms that we passed by. We did not even know who owned the farms"(Catalina Docallos, in an interview by Cosep, 1995).*

The immediate response of the people was a spontaneous evacuation to safer places. The areas deemed safe were those away from the coasts and highways. On the side of the NLSA management, steps were taken to safeguard the lives and properties of the people. Lagao, the headquarters of the NLSA in Mindanao due to its proximity to Sarangani Bay, was not deemed safe. For this reason, the administration offices, records, properties, and supplies were moved to Banga in the Allah Valley, a distance of about 80 kilometers.

The disarray of the NLSA itself signaled a major change - the people had to rely on themselves for survival because the administration was not in the position to look after them. Reverend Domingo was more vivid in his account:

*"December 8, 1940 [sic. 1941] unang bumba ng Japones dito sa atin unang putok ay sa Hawaii at sa Pier Harbor. Napotol ang gobierno sa pagsoporta sa amin kayat dito rin kami nabigla*

*dahil sa guerra at mabuti na lang ay ang request ko na traktor or Caterpillar nakapagpaararo ako ng (2) hectaria. Inompisahan kong magtanim ng kamoteng kahoy at saging. At mayron akong 1/2 hectare na mais at bago na-ubos ko ang rassion ko mayron din bonga ang mais. Kahit mura pa pilit pinipitas dahil wala nang makain. Dito kaming nagsisi naman. Yaong maraming pamilla ay hirap na hirap sila . . .”*

*(December 8, 1940 [sic. 1941] the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Our support from the government was terminated. We were caught unaware. I was lucky that I was able to request for a tractor and was able to plant two hectares of root crops and bananas. I also had 1/2 hectare of corn. Thus, before my ration was fully consumed, the corn plants started to bear fruit that I harvested even when still young in order to have something to eat. We started to have regrets again. Those with big families found great difficulty . . .”*

Mr. Vic Diaz, the teenaged son of a settler at the time of the outbreak of the war, recalled that they had just harvested sacks of peanuts when they evacuated. In their haste to evacuate, they left their houses and their produce. Mr. Eliseo Dulay evacuated to his kin in Palkan that appeared a major evacuation site for Lagao settlers being in the interior. Even the B'laan natives and Magindanao residents of Koronadal Valley were similarly situated. The Japanese coming elicited similar responses from the people of the valley.

The Japanese campaign in the Visayas and Mindanao actually started with the bombing raid of Davao on December 8, 1941 launched in coordination with the Japanese air offensive, barely 24 hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In this raid, planes from two aircraft carriers damaged the military installation in Davao. On December 20, before dawn 5,000 assault troops in 14 Japanese transports escorted by a cruiser squadron and the carrier, Ryuja, invaded Davao. The 101st Infantry, stationed in Davao, offered only slight opposition in the face of heavy artillery and naval fire. Before dark, half of the assault troops were already being organized for the capture of nearby Jolo Island (Toland 1961: 21)

The initial landings in Mindanao and Jolo were then made to enable the Japanese to establish advance bases for their air units that would take part in the invasion of the Dutch East Indies. Consequently, the Japanese warships of the Third Fleet and an aircraft from Formosa started moving to these bases. Meanwhile, the Japanese from December 31, 1941 until April 10, 1942 conducted no ground operations with their landing in Cebu (Toland 1961: 92).

With the fall of Bataan, the Japanese then proceeded to effect the complete occupation of the country. On April 26, the Kawaguchi Detachment left Cebu and landed in Cotabato on April 29. The detachment loaded in eight transports and convoyed by two destroyers appeared at the entrance of Cotabato Harbor. Lt. Col. Calixto Duque of the 2nd Infantry put up a resistance and succeeded in stopping the first wave of Japanese from establishing a beachhead in Cotabato town.

However, with constant naval bombardment aided by air support, the Japanese were able to land at Parang at 4:00 o'clock in the morning and at Polloc Harbor at 11:00 o'clock. On May 1, more Japanese landed at Cotabato and Malabang. The arrival of the order from General Wainwright to General Sharp in Bukidnon to surrender brought an early end to what could have been an otherwise long-drawn resistance offered by the USAFFE in Mindanao.

Moreover, in North Cotabato, a member of the famed Bolo Battalion of the army decided not to surrender, inaugurating the continuation of the fierce independence of the Magindanaos even in the face of a superior force. A former guerilla officer gives us an account on the establishment of one of the successful guerilla organizations in Mindanao, viz:

*"Surrender, not me, sir. Why should I surrender when I had not yet had the chance to fight the enemy? Moreover, I can't be disloyal to America and my government. Mark my word sir, I'll carry on the fight." These were in substance the spirited remarks of a young Moro officer when his American commander told him on May 8, 1942, of the order of General Jonathan Wainwright for all the USAFFE forces to surrender. He had probably in mind that the Bolo Battalion (an all-Moro quasi-military organization establishing soon after the outbreak of hostilities primarily to serve as an auxiliary service unit) had never pitted in actual combat against the enemy . . .*

*. . . He (Pendatun) immediately contacted his brother-in-law, Datu Udtog Matalam, who was also a First Lieutenant of the Bolo Battalion . . . (Capt. Morales in Millan 1952: 300-308)*

And forthwith, the pair set up a military camp at Maridagao (Pikit) which became a cradle of the largest guerilla outfit that fought and first to strike at the enemy in the province. They established a far-flung intelligence network "to observe and report what was going on throughout the Upper Valley, to contact former USAFFE and BB personnel, to scout for and collect arms and ammunition of any caliber . . ."

By December 1942 the forces of Datu Aliman of Kidapawan, Major Matas of Midsayap and the Dilangalen brothers augmented the Pendatun-Matalam force. These groups decided to form the Bukidnon-Cotabato Force in response to the news of Japanese maltreatment of the prisoners-of-war in Casisang, Bukidnon. Thus, the Magindanao response to a rumored maltreatment of prisoners-of-war, most of which were Americans and Filipino soldiers, shows the unity forged by the threat of an invader. This is confirmed by a study made by Evelyn M. Jamboy (1982) on the guerillas of Lanao where the Christians were reported to have sought refuge among their Muslim friends with the Japanese occupation of Iligan.

Also significant was the response of the guerilla force in trying to put a stop to the outbreak of lawlessness among the native inhabitants who attacked and looted the belongings of evacuees from the settlement. It was reported that Pendatun gave a warning to lawless elements that they would answer to him for any wrongdoing done to the Christian settlers (*The Settlement Advocate*, Vol. I, No. 5, February 1947: 13). This by itself is significant for this shows recognition

from a Magindanao leader of the need for the people to unite against a common foe.

The Japanese Forces came overland from Cotabato town on May 14, 1942 (Toland 1961). The Japanese warplanes bombed the strategic areas for two days and a Japanese warship at the shore of Dadiangas pounded the surroundings with heavy shelling. These were met without resistance at all. Immediately, the Japanese Imperial Army took over the management of the settlement. The Japanese contingent consisted of one regiment with more than 500 combat men. The number increased as more troops arrived from Davao. They were seen coming by some settlers "like ants" marching in the highway.

### ***B. General Paulino Santos' Dilemma***

The decision to fight was easily reached by Lieutenant Pendatun since he had the vast area to hide among kinsmen who could provide the manpower, food supplies, and protection. But the case of General Santos in Koronadal Valley was different.

The news of the bombing of Davao by Japanese planes shattered the peaceful world of Koronadal Valley. Immediately, the manager of the NLSA took steps in safeguarding the lives and property of the people. General Santos' initial reaction to the Japanese invasion showed his unwavering loyalty to the Allied cause. As early as the second week of January 1942, General Santos was reported to have conferred with the high command of the USAFFE in Malaybalay, Bukidnon regarding their needs that could be supplied by the NLSA. Thus, a procurement team headed by Col. John Miller was reported to have made weekly trips to the Koronadal and Allah Valleys up to the end of February (Ramirez 1993: 165).

According to one informant, General Santos and Mayor Abedin even organized a guerilla force as part of their initial reaction to the Japanese invasion. However, later, General Santos started to nurture the idea that fighting against heavy odds would endanger innocent lives. The interviewed settlers were unanimous with the belief that the late general had no choice because, unlike Lieutenant Pendatun who could always seek refuge among kin in the interior part of Cotabato valley, General Santos had the settlers to think of. He feared that if he would run to the mountains the settlers would be left at the mercy of the Japanese. Finally, he decided to deal with the Japanese peacefully and "play ball" with them for the safety and protection of life and property in the area.

General Santos' partner in Buayan, Mayor Abedin, reportedly went along with the former's position of dealing peacefully with the Japanese. However, not all were agreeable to the general's plan. Those persons who opposed a diplomatic relationship with the Japanese went to the remotest areas. A relative reportedly opposed Mayor Abedin himself. This disagreement coupled with misunderstanding on property led to Abedin's death on January 20, 1942. He was buried in his private land at Baluan which still exists today. By the time the Japanese came Mayor Abedin was already dead.

If General Santos "played ball" with the Japanese, does this mean that the general was a Japanese collaborator? To answer this question, the role of General Santos during the Japanese occupation has to be taken into account.

After the Japanese arrival, Buayan was made the base of Japanese administration in Koronadal Valley. The Japanese commander and General Santos signed an agreement where the "Japanese will not molest or abuse civilian in all districts of Koronadal valley but with the condition that the people will cooperate and never commit any wrong move otherwise they will feel the repressive force of Japanese displeasure."

With the Japanese occupation of Koronadal Valley, General Santos continued to function as Director General of the settlement under the direct supervision of the Japanese serving as the intermediary between the people and the Japanese. In February 1944, he was appointed Commissioner of Mindanao and Sulu where he was charged the task of closer supervision and administrative control over all government offices in Southern Philippines with another Paulino (Gullas) as Commissioner for Visayas; the maintenance of peace and order; and most importantly, the enhancement of the nation's food production in areas under his control (*The Tribune*, February 5, 1944: 1) In August 1944, he was named Commanding General and Chief of the Constabulary following the American bombing of the Philippines (*The Tribune*, August 30, 1944: 1). He died in Kiangnan, Mountain Province during the American liberation of the Philippines (Ramirez 1993: 165).

In 1965, the then sole representative of the sole province of Cotabato, former guerilla leader turned congressman Salipada K. Pendatun, objected to the name General Santos for the place because "he believed that the general was a collaborator" (Tabugo, typescript, n.d.). Pendatun had a good ground for pushing the collaboration issue since General Santos was a former Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army and could have been a good asset in the organization of guerilla movements. With his leadership and cooperation, South Cotabato could have undertaken an active guerilla activity against the Japanese having the unflinching loyalty and admiration of the settlers.

To collaborate means, "to cooperate with or assist an enemy of one's country, usually represented by an invading or occupying force." Taking this definition at its face value, General Santos indeed qualifies as a Japanese collaborator during the war. When retained as manager of the Koronadal Valley Settlement at the onset of the Japanese occupation, he cooperated with the Japanese in all conceivable manners - providing all the demands of the Japanese force from food to labor and sending letters to some guerilla leaders to dissuade them from attacking Japanese outposts so as to make highways passable to allow safe delivery of food to other areas. As such, he received an award from the Japanese military administration for cooperation and pacification efforts (*United States Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch*, 1944). As Commissioner of Mindanao and Sulu, he exerted efforts to convince guerillas to surrender and work for greater food production. According to a confidential report of the American' Office of Strategic Services, it was in his pacification campaign in Lanao that several assassination attempts were reportedly made by the guerillas. With his appointment as commanding general and chief of the constabulary during the approach of the American liberation forces in the Philippines, he reached the zenith of collaboration by his appointment in a delicate position during the period of Japanese setback in the hands of the Americans.

Moreover, those who condemned General Santos as a collaborator were not settlers of the Koronadal Valley Settlement. The interviewed settlers, including a former guerilla, Mamerto Natividad, were unanimous in the belief that the late general surrendered and cooperated with the Japanese for the sake of the settlers. The interviewed settlers strongly believed that what motivated the general to cooperate with the enemy was not his selfish ambition to become an outstanding figure in the government or in the political arena for he was by nature not a politician as attested by his twenty-five years of outstanding service in the military. It would also be a mockery to judge his gesture towards the Japanese as an act of cowardice for his experience as a military officer was a living testimony to his courage and heroism. Nor can we consider his relationship with the Japanese easily an act of treason for he knew that his life would be in danger from the guerillas for cooperating with the Japanese.

It appears that Wendel Fertig's (leader of the 10th Military District Guerilla in Mindanao) description of one type of "collaborator" easily fits the general:

*"Some are good men who think they can help reduce the suffering if they can work with the Japs, and persuade them not to rape and torture. Such men are wrong but they mean well, and damn it, they're brave. It takes guts for a man to go to the enemy to get a better deal for his people . . ."*(Keats 1963: 87)

It would, however, be futile to make on-the-spot judgment over an issue without having to look into the cause and motive underlying such act. As far as Honorable Salipada Pendatun was concerned, he could well afford to go to the mountains and organize a guerilla movement since survival in terms of food supply in his area of jurisdiction was accessible.<sup>18</sup> The situation in the settlement during the Japanese occupation was very different from that in Northern Cotabato. Within the settlement area, there was abundance in food supply, but outside it was a jungle still far from the benefit of human cultivation and productivity. General Santos believed that if he would bring with him more than 7,000 (the estimate in Buayan settlement area) to the mountains they would certainly die of famine and disease. If he chose to flee to the mountains, he was equally sure that they (the settlers) would become hapless prey of Japanese cruelties. This was likely to happen since the Japanese, upon knowledge that he was a former Chief of Staff of the Army, would naturally look for him and use the settlers in demanding for his surrender.

But despite cooperation, the Japanese did not fully trust the Filipinos. When the situation of the country was getting worse for the Japanese, just when General MacArthur's forces were about to land in Leyte, the Japanese High Command in Manila made an order to send General Paulino Santos to Luzon purportedly to help in the pacification efforts. It was President Jose P. Laurel who sent a plane to fetch General Santos. The night before the plane left the settlement, the Americans started bombing Davao.

His farewell message speaks of the uncertainty of the future for him and for everybody, yet, amidst uncertainty, there was the unremitting faith in the

future of the Koronadal - Allah Valley Settlement (Allah Valley was opened in March 1941). Thus, he said:

*"I am leaving you for good. Only God knows when and how I could come back to continue with what we have started here. Continue planting even only camotes in all your home lots and farmlots. Treat each other as your brothers and members of your family. You believe me, all these districts we have opened and organized someday will become regular municipalities. To those who will stick to their respective place will be richer someday. My dear settlers and employees, my family will remain with you. Have full faith in God and have more patience. Unite and cooperate with one another, worse comes to worst. Let us hope that this war will not last long." (Ramirez 1993)*

When the Americans landed in the Philippines, General Santos was in Bayambang, Nueva Vizcaya. He was isolated and subsisted by raising his own food like planting camote. He led a miserable life with his aide-de-camp. But even in the most trying of circumstances, his faith and confidence in the community he helped built with the settlers in cooperation with the original inhabitants of the place was unwavering. Thus, in a cave in an Ifugao village one day in July 1945, in a conversation between General Santos and his aide-de-camp, Sgt. Ablan, the former talked of his son saying: "He's in Mindanao with the rest of my family, in Koronadal. I also hope you will see Koronadal. It was a wonderful place. The people there are hard working and within a few years they will have built a paradise for farmers. You should go there. You'll make a good settler" (Munda, n.d.).

Later, General Santos became a very sick man. Moreover, General Masouka, the Japanese General keeping watch over General Santos and his bodyguard, refused to heed the plea of Sgt. Ablan to allow him to bring General Santos to an American hospital five kilometers from Kiangan. Later, a Japanese doctor visited him. Subsequently after the visit of the doctor, he died. Thus, the death of a great man whose departure from the Koronadal scene would forever change its course of development. For a time, the settlement would be like a rudderless ship, buffeted by ocean's waves.

### **C. The Japanese in Koronadal Valley**

In the previous chapter we have seen how General Santos as the benefactor and protector of the people with the full backing and authority of the Philippine government together with the peaceful reception of the original inhabitants of the valley, provided the mantle of security over the Koronadal Valley Settlement. Moreover, the need to evacuate with the coming of the Japanese caused them to leave the security of the settlement. It was in the course of evacuation that the evacuees experienced looting, robbery, and other lawless acts. Ramirez (1993) reported that bandits from Allah valley looted the valuables of the Catolicos and the Velasquez families, all evacuees from Buayan. In Kapingcong, Tacurong the American, Wilbur Smith, was killed and his daughter raped. Even in Glan settlement which had been in peaceful co-existence with the Muslims since the American period, the need was seen to act against the

Muslim uprising against the Christians in the barrio of Sapu in 1942 (Suzuki, 1992). The ugly appearance of historical divide briefly reared its head during this period of confusion.

Due to the general breakdown of law and order, General Santos ordered the NLSA chief mechanic and the NLSA shop supervisor to improvise and make a tank out of a D - 4 tractors with gun mountings. Captain Sebastian Javelosa of the Philippine Constabulary was asked to rescue the Christian settlers in Kapingcong. Likewise, the overseers of the settlement districts were directed to organize volunteer guards from among the settlers and NLSA employees. The night patrols and volunteer guard units proved effective in curtailing the general restlessness (Aquino, in an interview, 1976).

When the Japanese finally arrived, the Supreme Commander of the Japanese Imperial Army immediately sent an order to General Paulino Santos to meet him. There was no battle of words over the bargaining table between the Japanese commander and the leader of the settlement since the latter had earlier laid firm his decision to deal with the Japanese in peaceful terms. The Japanese took over the administration of the settlement under tight control and close guard. The major condition given by the Japanese Commanding Officer was that no hostile action be made against the Japanese. On the other hand, all that General Santos asked was that all demands of the Japanese should pass through him and that no direct dealings between the Japanese and the settlers be made, apparently to lessen possible areas of irritants between the invaders and the settlers.

In the beginning, the Japanese were friendly, good and happy. No harsh measures were adopted toward the residents. They did not molest belongings and women in the settlement, particularly Buayan. They were said to pay whatever they got from the settlers, whether food or services. The Japanese brought with them cloth materials and had them bartered with vegetables, rice, chicken, and pigs. Sometimes, they even played the band for the entertainment of civilians (Royeca, in an interview, 1976)). One informant whose house was used by some soldiers as a lodging house even said: "The Japanese were good. *Sa katunayan, mas tarantado pa ang ibang Pilipino.*" This particular informant appeared so miffed by the unspoken suspicion by some settlers that he was fraternizing with the Japanese.

Despite Japanese presence, however, the people tried to return to their normal activities as shown by the account of one settler from Tampakan found north of Tupi:

*"Here in Tampakan, even if it is war period before we were very happy. Every Sunday, some barrios came here just to have enjoyment like Bo. Kipalbig, Bo. 7, and Maltana. They played different games especially softball game that's our favorite game before. It seemed there's no war to us because of our happiness. If we heard frightening news, we find some ways in order not to panic" (Carlos Godmaling, in an interview by Jennifer Acapulco, 1995).*

What made the Japanese happy and good to the settlers was the abundance of food supply in the settlement, for it was General Santos' policy to require every settler to have a backyard poultry, piggery, vegetable garden and



orchard so that nobody would go hungry. This policy was so internalized by the settlers that even during the war they planted palay, corn, cassava, camote, and fast maturing crops wherever they evacuated. They also made commendable efforts to produce articles whose supply had gone low due to the interruption of the interisland trade. With the scarcity of sugar and cigarettes, sugar cane and tobacco were planted. Even wines and liquors were locally produced. Cloth was woven from abaca fiber and cotton. Reverend Domingo narrated:

*“At noong bumalik sila dito sa atin ang programa ng NLSA ipinagpatuloy ngunit wala ng suporta. Kaya and ginawa ng ating General ay nagmiting kami at napagkaisahan namin na magtanim kami ng cotton at gumawa kami ng (loom) habilan at lahat ng mga matandang babai na marunong mag-habil nang damit maturuan sila dahil sa loob ng tatlong buwan may bulak na ang tanim doon sa Lagao. Noong umunlad and (weaving loom) nagkaroon kami nang damit, pinalitan namin ang barong abaca.” ( With the resumption of the NLSA program, the government support was withdrawn. So, the General had a meeting with us where we agreed to plant cotton and make looms and all the old women who knows how to weave would be taught because it would only take three months for cotton to bear fruit. When the weaving industry thrived, we were able to change our clothes to the ones made of abaca. )*

The cotton industry was adopted as a major industry after the Philippine Executive Commission created the Bureau of Agriculture headed by Hilarion Silayan. It was this bureau which took over the function of the defunct NLSA but without the earlier government support to settlers. General Santos and some NLSA employees were called back to duty. Director Silayan sent an urgent message to General Santos to spearhead a campaign for an extensive production of cotton. As a result of the development of cotton industry, Lagao was then known as the “cotton bowl of the country” (Ramirez 1993: 181).

General Santos took immediate steps to help the NLSA employees who stayed in their posts even with the Japanese occupation but with largely reduced wages by loaning them eight (8) hectares of land each taken from the Administration Farm. Here, they raised cotton. Under Commonwealth Act No. 441, NLSA employees were prohibited to own farmlots in the settlement area. But Commonwealth Act No. 441 was no longer in operation with the Japanese occupation. During the incumbency of President Magsaysay, an executive order was passed allowing government employees to acquire homestead not exceeding 24 hectares. As a result of this executive order, the loaned eight hectares of land became the property of former NLSA employees (Aquino, 1976).

Life appeared to have returned to normal despite the presence of the Japanese. The settlers continued planting and harvesting rice, celebrating fiestas, and holding anniversary celebrations. Usual recreational activities continued and different ballgames were still observed during Sundays. The Japanese reopened schools where Japanese songs and Niponggo language were taught. Market places were also reopened in the present site of Peñamante Clinic in Lagao with Sunday as the market day.

The cooperation accorded the invading force by the NLSA employees who stuck to their positions despite the onset of the Japanese occupation coupled with the absence of an active guerilla force in Buayan were two important factors for the harmonious relationship between the people and the invading force.

Moreover, informants were saying that despite cooperation, their secret feeling was for the Allied Powers and hostility toward the Japanese. The Japanese and Filipinos, though fellow Asians, due to divergence in culture and historical experiences, failed to comprehend the psychology of each other contributing to the feeling of fear and distrust by Filipinos. Ironically, though both the Americans and the Japanese were colonizers of the Philippines, the Filipinos had different reactions toward them. Renato Constantino labeled it the "successful miseducation" of Filipinos by Americans. In fact, he further observed that the American propaganda had succeeded to such a degree that during the war the Filipinos considered themselves another front fighting the global war of the Americans. Such attitude was clearly enunciated by the Cotabato guerilla leader Pendatun when he said in a letter dated January 16, 1944:

*"It goes without saying that those who remained loyal to and kept on fighting for the cause will be justly rewarded while those who readily embraced the enemy thereby proving themselves faithless to their country and disloyal to the American people will be correspondingly dealt with. . . ." (Historical Bulletin, Vol. X, No. 4, December 1966: 59)*

Hence, to the Filipino mind, America was equated with liberty. Freedom and loyalty to the country also meant loyalty to the American people. Such feeling was so widespread that almost everybody awaited the return of the Americans to liberate the country from the Japanese. Cotabato guerilla resistance was a testimony to this.

One incident in Koronadal Valley did not help dispel the negative feelings towards the Japanese. On November 5, 1942, a group of ex-USAFFE soldiers in Marbel district led by Lieutenants Alfredo Garingo, Hermogenes Allas, and Emilio Dar assisted by Sergeants Debil and Buyco, attacked a detachment of 13 Japanese soldiers. One Japanese soldier was killed in this attack but the people of Marbel District particularly Barrio 6, where the relatives of these guerillas were based, were made to pay heavily for this affront to Japanese power. Thus, one account said:

*"Ominit ang pagsusuri ng Hapones at dito hinoli ang overseer na si Mr. Antipolo at pinatay nila dito po sa Pilot Elementary School at sa puno ng flag. Malaki ang butas na ginawa nila dahil sa ang mga bata, kon anong dahilan pati na ang mga asawa ng USAFFE mahigit o kumulang mga 36 personas na nailibing sa puno ng flagpole". (The Japanese were so mad that the overseer, Mr. Antipolo, was arrested and killed at the Pilot Elementary School by the flagpole. They made a huge burial grave*

*because even children and the wives of the USAFFE, more or less 36 persons, were buried near the flagpole") (Domingo, 1947).*

Mr. Albert Morrow, assistant to the manager who took over the management when General Santos was appointed to other positions causing the general to stay in Manila, tried to convince Captain Oishi to release the prisoners. However, his attempt to convince the Japanese was doomed from the start because being an American mestizo who looked more American than Filipino, the Japanese viewed him with suspicion. Unable to convince the Japanese from the slaughter of innocent children and women, he committed suicide (Ramirez 1993). The late Albert Morrow's bodyguard, Mr. Santiago Odi, followed this act of protest. Upon arrival in Koronadal from his travel, General Santos protested against the atrocities done under the command of Captain Oishi. One informant, however, gave Lieutenant Jesus Larrabaster the credit for the stop of the carnage after 36 deaths. Reportedly, his courage in facing the Japanese with a bluff of the area being surrounded by guerillas who were ready to attack once he failed to come out from the building after a specific period of time, was allegedly what convinced the Japanese to release the remaining prisoners.

The tragic incident in Marbel caused the guerillas in South Cotabato, whose main outpost was Glan, to refrain from similar undertakings in the area. They merely contented themselves with gathering vital information as to the Japanese movement, strength, and activities and sending these information to General MacArthur's headquarter in Australia.

In January 1944, the Japanese started laying out an airport in Buayan on the eastern border of Lagao for the landing of Japanese warplanes and as training ground for the Japanese combat pilots. The proposed area of the airfield totaled to 1,200 hectares, said to be one of the largest airfields proposed by the Japanese in the country (Ramirez 1993: 184). Such massive preparation was due to the Japanese belief that the American invasion would start at the southern backdoor of the Philippines with Sarangani Bay as the probable landing place. Ramirez (1993) gathered the information that mysterious objects in big volumes were buried during the night and the B'laan who were used as laborers were reportedly liquidated thereafter. It was also reported that the printing of Japanese paper money for Philippine circulation was done inside the Buayan airfield.

However, although life was almost normal, it was not easy. The sending of around five hundred laborers six days a week continuously until September of the same year when American planes heavily bombed the airport, diverted the settlers from their farm work. Besides, although the laborers were paid for their work, it could be surmised that they worked under compulsion. There was also the demand for greater cotton production further diverting the people from food production. The only consolation the settlers got was the good treatment accorded them by the Japanese.

#### ***D. The Liberation Period***

Despite the proximity to MacArthur's headquarter in Australia, Sarangani Bay, though first on General MacArthur's original plan of early landing in the Philippines, became the scene of the last amphibious landing in the country.

The original plan consisted of four phases of operation in which the initial stage called for an establishment of an American beachhead in Southern Philippines, specifically in Sarangani Bay, in order to establish air bases for the support of the second phase that was a move into Central Philippines at Leyte. However, the Allied Powers' triumph in the western Pacific made it possible for MacArthur to move directly to Leyte, bypassing Mindanao (Willoughby, 1973: 405)

In effect, by landing in the lightly guarded island of Leyte, Mindanao served as an effective decoy in tying down the great number of Japanese soldiers. As of June 20, 1945, Mindanao had an aggregate number of 15,600 Japanese ground forces; Luzon 26,000; and Visayas, only 4,700.

With the advent of American landing in Leyte, the intermittent American bombings of strategic areas, and the withdrawal of Japanese forces from Misamis Occidental in northern Mindanao tied up with the movement of large number of troops from Davao to Buayan in Sarangani Bay caused hardship to the people of the valley. Gone were the days of give-and-take relationship. The war hysteria gripped the losers and reached its climax in May 1945 when the Japanese began looting the people of their food supplies, clothing, bull carts, and work animals. Reverend Domingo narrated:

*“Omalis kami sa trabaho namin. Nag-evacuate kami at hinoli kami naman ng Hapones, lalo ang mga baka, kariton at carabao at tiga-hatid kami ng mga kargamento na mga bala, mga maysakit na Hapones at mga sugatan, pagpunta at pagbalik at sa parang alanganin na kami tumakas kami at pinabayaan namin ang cariton baka at calabao namin. Ito ang pinakasaklap na nangyari sa buhay namin . . .*

*Isang pasayao sa Marbel ay masaya ngunit sa bandang alas 12:30 ay biglang sabay na may palopok sa barrio 2 hanggang umabot sila sa barrio 8 at maraming hapon ay nasawi. Ang ating sundalo ay mga sugatan dahil sila ang nag-ambos sa mga Hapon na nagnakaw ng saging dahil wala na pala ang pag-kain ng Hapones dahil wala ng soporta na dumating sa kanila.”*

*(We abandoned our work [in the Buayan airport]. We evacuated but the Japanese were able to catch us and confiscated our cows, cariton, and carabaos and made us to deliver guns, ammunitions, sick and wounded Japanese soldiers. Finally, we decided to abandon our cart and carabaos or cows in order to escape.*

*There was this public dance in Marbel where we overheard shooting at around 12:30 which started from Bo. 2 until Bo. 8. There were a lot of wounded Filipino guerillas and Japanese killed. The encounter occured because the Filipino guerillas ambushed the Japanese who were stealing bananas. It came to our attention that the Japanese had to fend for themselves because no support is arriving.)*

Prior to the liberation of the place, the American war planes bombed the strategic points of the Japanese defense lines with naval and ground support. The coastal areas of Buayan and Glan were bombed in preparation for eventual

landing. On September 4, 1944, two Japanese coastal vessels were bombed in the vicinity of Glan, the guerilla-held territory of South Cotabato. Another Japanese aircraft was bombed in Buayan the next day. This was followed by an intensive bombing of the airstrip at Buayan and other places in Dadiangas leaving both places in flames. The Japanese transferred their supplies and buildings to the forest about one kilometer northwest of the former headquarter (Willoughby 1973: 407).

The attacks against the Japanese were done without let-up. Reverend Domingo once more supplied us with an account of the final disaster for the Japanese.

“July noong kami ay may balita na ang tropa ng Americano ay nasa Buluan na. Sinalubong namin sila at kami naman ay (guide) giya papunta dito sa Lotayan at dito sila nag pundo sa Marbel . . .

Sa buan ng Agosto ay bumalik kami dito sa farm lot dahil doon kami nakatira sa Barrio Banga. Binalikan ko ang loteng ito sa Caloocan. . . .

Buan ng Septembre. Dito naman sa Kiamba, pinalubog ang isang malaking barko ng Hapon, dahil nakaharang ang bapor di guerra ng Amerika dito ang dahilang ginotom ang Hapones sa Dadiangas. Umabante ang ating sundalo dito sa Tupi . . . dumating sila sa Polomolok. Dito sila tumagal at nag-pondo at lumaban ang Hapones at sa 18 ng buan dito ay dumaan ang wave to wave malalaki at maliliit na aeroplano walang hintong dumaan patongo sa Leyte sigi rin ang bumba dito sa Dadiangas. Nag-backuit ang tiga Polomolok at dito sa Marbel ang tungo nila. Araw gabi ang ugong ng aeroplano bomba dito pa sa mga barko at putokan araw gabi hanggang naglanding si MacArthur sa Leyte at nagsurrender ang mga Hapones.”

(“By July we received information that the American troops are already in Buluan. We met them and served as their guide until Lutayan and they stationed themselves in Marbel . . .

In August, we returned back to our farm lot because during the war we were staying in Banga. I returned back to my lot here in Caloocan. . . .

In September, a Japanese boat was destroyed in Kiamba. Since the American ship laid seige in Sarangani, the Japanese suffered hunger due to the non-arrival of food and supplies. Our soldiers moved forward to Tupi. . . then Polomolok. Here, they encountered fierce resistance. On the 18th of the month wave to wave big and small airplanes passed by going to Leyte while Dadiangas was continuously bombed. The people evacuated going to Marbel. Night and day we heard the sound of the airplanes, the bombing of ships until the arrival of MacArthur in Leyte and the Japanese surrendered.”)

The American arrival allowed the people to openly show their real feelings in favor of the Americans and against the Japanese. Thus, the Japanese, who previously relied on the people to provide them food supplies in exchange for cloth and other materials, could only hope to get food by stealing "bananas". Meanwhile, the Japanese resident of Dadiangas, Kuruda, turned out to be a colonel in the Japanese army. When the Japanese forces retreated to the hills of Conel with the onslaught of the Filipino-American forces, the lack of food led to his worsening ulcer. He was reported to have committed hara-kiri. His friend Takahashi, on the other hand, was among those who surrendered and held prisoner of war. He managed to return to Japan after the war.

The liberation of Koronadal Valley, the last place in the country to be liberated, was a combined effort of the Reconnaissance Troop of the 24th Division of the USAFFE, the 116th Guerilla Infantry Regiment of Glan under Major Page, the 496th General Battalion and the Combat Company of the guerillas, the 118th Infantry under Lieutenant Colonel Pendatun led by Colonel Robert V. Bowler, and the Expeditionary Battalion of the 108th Division (United States Army in World War II, 1963: 18)

The liberating forces came from various directions converging in Buayan. The 24th division from Davao which, together with the 116th Guerilla Regiment in Glan, cleared the bay shores; the 496th anti-aircraft General Battalion with the 118th Infantry came from Lake Buluan; the Expeditionary Battalion with the 108th Division from Davao traveled through dense rain forest. These combined forces discovered the main body of the Japanese hiding out along river valleys and hilly peaks about 15 miles north of the bay. Organized Japanese resistance collapsed on July 25, and the operation entered the mopping-up pursuit stage.

Heavy fighting erupted for several days with the guerillas joining the American forces. Overpowered and outmaneuvered, the Japanese forces suffered heavy losses. With their defenses broken, the Japanese retreated to the hills. They established their last stand in the Klaja-Conel hills, some nine kilometers away from Lagao. The Klaja-Conel area was very strategic since this was surrounded by creeks that, in the early days of the settlement, supplied the irrigation water to the settlers in Lagao. From their location atop the hill, the Japanese could easily detect troop movement of the joint Filipino-American force. The liberating force was able to penetrate the defenses of the Japanese with the help of the people who showed the other passageways going to the top of the hill. The end finally came on the eleventh day of August 1945 with thirteen men dead and thirteen wounded in the Fil-American unit and 450 dead on the Japanese side.

The Japanese refused to surrender to the Filipino guerillas because they feared they might be victims of the long-time hatred and hostility of the latter. Hence, during the negotiation for surrender held at the bank of the river, the Filipinos were not allowed to participate, reminiscent of the Spanish surrender after the Mock Battle of Manila less than fifty years ago. With the insistent request of the guerillas, however, five Filipino representatives were present in the surrender including the guerilla son of Don Paco Natividad. The Japanese surrendered in four days by batch totaling 1,700 after which they were sent to Davao as prisoners-of-war.

Thus, ended the Japanese occupation in the valley. After the war, the settlers who sought refuge in the interior returned to the settlement and were

saddened to see the place turned into ashes, buildings destroyed, and plants and animals also destroyed. The B'laan natives and Maguindanaos who evacuated to the north were informed by the then Congressman Mangelen of Cotabato that it was now safe to go back home.

### ***E. The Crack in the Community Esprit de Corps***

The previous account shows how the initial confusion as a result of the Japanese invasion allowed the cultural divide between the newcomers and the original inhabitants to rear its ugly head, albeit briefly. Moreover, the immediate response of both the Magindanao guerilla leader Pendatun who realized the need to unite against a common enemy, as well as the defensive measures put up by the settlers through the *ronda* system pushed away at the level of subconscious such divide.

Moreover, more serious was the giving way of community esprit de corps within Buayan to one of individual survival. As a result, the three years of a conscious effort on the side of both the NLSA management and the settlers of creating community solidarity gave way under the onslaught of wartime conditions. It was during the Japanese period that such cracks appeared. This stands in sharp contrast to the happy report given by General Santos a year before the outbreak of the war, which said in part:

*"We have peopled an otherwise empty valley. And built communities which are models of cleanliness, industry and peace. There is no question that they (the settlers) have found a better home than they left behind. We have proven to the skeptical people that the Filipino farmers can work in peaceful productivity in his community unhampered by vice which saps moral strength. Without doubt, this is the most practical application of the President's policy of social justice for it has given to the poor man who is willing to work a chance to earn a living through his own honest effort. . .  
"(Santos 1940: 1)*

When war broke out, a number of settlers evacuated to distant places. When the NLSA was reorganized by the Philippine Executive Commission under the Bureau of Agricultural Administration, General Paulino Santos, who continued as manager, in his desire to bring the situation back to normal promulgated an order requiring settlers to return to their farm lots and resume their farming activities, setting June 15, 1942 as the deadline to do so under the penalty of being dropped as settlers. Later, the deadline was extended to June 30, 1942, and again to July 15, 1942. Those who failed to return after the expiration of the prescribed period were ordered by General Santos to be dropped as settlers and abandoned farm-lots were subsequently assigned to other persons, mostly probationary settlers (Testa 1946). The then overseer of Lagao zealously carried out this order in Lagao district. Some settlers who returned to the settlement after the liberation of Southern Cotabato found the land assigned to them already given to somebody else.

Compounding the post-war break-up of community solidarity was the loss of records during the war which included the names of those dropped during the Japanese occupation; those who voluntarily exchanged farm lots

before the Japanese regime; and those settlers dismissed as settlers before the Japanese coming but who were not shipped out due to the outbreak of the war. Those who really lost their original farm lots through the above-mentioned reasons and who, upon return, tried to recover their original farm-lots added to the general confusion.

The basis for General Santos' order of dropping from the list those who abandoned their farm lots and failed to return despite the order was a stipulation in the settlement contract (paragraph 2, section 1) which expressly provided that the settler shall "devote himself exclusively to the cultivation of the parcel of land allotted to him and not to leave the settlement or engage in any other trade or occupation without the approval of the Administration". (Underscoring supplied)

Moreover, despite the legal basis, the failure of the management to consider the wartime condition went a long way in nourishing insecurity and confusion in the valley. Thus, while one NLSA employee said that the "general did not make any wrong decision," the dropping of the names of settlers who did not return after July 15 was a legally correct but unfortunate decision.

Another basis for the post-war settlers' complaint was the distribution of land (on loan) to the NLSA employees. There is a basis for this complaint. Commonwealth Act No. 441 creating the NLSA provided that "no officer or employee of the Corporation shall be permitted to acquire, directly or indirectly, any land within the reservation, unless with the specific approval of the Board of Directors in each case." The interviewed NLSA employees justified this act by General Santos as due to the desire of the late general to put the NLSA employees on self-sufficient status due to reduced salary. By January 1943, the Administration farms were subdivided into farm lots of eight hectares each and assigned to the employees. It was found out that majority of the employees who received farm lots under this arrangement paid for them in Japanese currency.

General Santos' preoccupation with other jobs given to him by the Second Philippine Republic, particularly as Commissioner of Mindanao and Sulu, brought him away from the valley. This allowed other officials to take control of the tightly knit organization, which, under his firm direction, showed promise of success. It was unfortunate that those who took over worked minus the government support given during General Santos' time. Hence, the NLSA as the knight in the shining armor who took care and provided protection to them was felt by the settlers as having "abandoned" them in their moment of need.

Thus, the complaint filed in 1946 against the supervising overseer charged him of abandonment during the American bombing of Buayan. Another factor which could attribute to the unacceptability of the post-General Santos officials is due to the fact that they lacked general's "persona" as the benefactor and protector of the people. They couldn't blame the settlers for this perception. While General Santos had a reputation for strict discipline, he was also viewed as totally selfless and seriously working for the objectives of the NLSA that included the well being of the settlers. On the other hand, the charges against eight officials and employees of the NLSA in 1946 (manhandling of settlers; engagement of private business by officials and employees of the NLSA without proper authority; abuse of authority; the utilization of probationary settlers as laborers in the farms of employees as a prerequisite to the assignment of farm lots, etc.) filed by the United Settlers Movement showed that some of the NLSA



officials and employees may have taken advantage of their official functions for personal interests causing them to lose their moral ascendancy over the people. Charges of abuse of authority, corruption, and other illegal acts drove a wedge between the NLSA management and the settlers. Indeed, it is tragic that the Japanese occupation represented the ebb of the community spirit, a vital factor necessary for post-war recovery and development.