

Papua New Guinea Martyrs

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Introduction

Although this essay has a short title, every word of it calls for an explanation. We might start with the last term, really a theological concept. Here, one can ask whether the martyrs concerned are some of the people of the beginnings of Christianity in Oceania, such as the LMS missionaries, James Chalmers and Oliver Tomkins, who lost their lives on Goaribari Island, on April 7, 1901. Or should we extend the term “martyrs” to, say, Saint Peter Chanel (+1841), “the first martyr of Oceania”, who was canonised in 1954, or also Blessed Giovanni Mazzucconi (+1855), who died near Woodlark Island, and was beatified in 1983. As a matter of fact, Catholics were hesitant to use the term for Peter To Rot, who died during the Pacific war, because the decree for his beatification has, as yet, not been promulgated. In our essay, we will adhere to the broader meaning, and also concentrate on the recent past of only 50 years ago.

The word “martyr” is, obviously, used in the plural, and this also poses problems. There were, of course, foreign missionaries, and local people. But how many of them were there, in the period from 1942 until 1945? A usual count – of which I ignore the origin – gives the number of these people as 239, belonging to four different churches. They include 12 Anglicans, 15 Lutherans, 24 Methodists, and 188 Roman Catholics. A more-recent computation has shown that other churches, too, were involved, and has come up with names of 40 more people, putting the total at 279. We do believe that there are still many more, and will discuss this, too, further on.

Now, the title also contains a geographical limitation. The name “Papua New Guinea” is rather an anachronism, because it entered into daily usage, only after independence in 1975. Before that time, there was another designation for the same geographical area – particularly among the Anglicans. They counted, in their own church, about a dozen “New Guinea martyrs”, all killed during World War II. Still, we feel that, nowadays, there is good reason to use the modern name of the country, and also to recall other denominations as well, and refer to all war victims on the mission staff as the “Papua New Guinea martyrs.”

I: War in Papua

To speak about the “New Guinea martyrs” has, for many, the connotation that the whole Pacific War did not touch Papua, in any way worth mentioning. But it did, and the local reaction to it was quite obvious, even though different, in various parts of the country. One might say that, in the south, the people’s response was most evidenced in the support given to the Allied soldiers, e.g., by the “Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels”. In the north, the local attitude towards the war was more evidenced with opposition manifested against the invaders, e.g., by the assistance given to the coast-watchers. And, if on either side, there was betrayal, on each side the people had to pay heavily. Above the Ranges, they were beheaded by the Japanese, while, south of the Ranges, they were hung by the Australians.

Of course, there was no Japanese invasion along the south coast of Papua. However, it should be clear that the Japanese advance from Lae first reached Buna and Gona, on the Papua north coast, in July 1942, and that, a month later, it also hit Samarai, on the eastern tip of Papua. Both localities were part of the same Australian Territory. Again, it was in the north-eastern tip of Papua that the Anglicans lost most of their mission staff. Hence, using the political sense of the term, there were, no doubt, in the south, several “Papuan” among the New Guinea martyrs, even though the churches lost many more of their people in the north, in what was then officially known as the Australian Mandated Territory of New Guinea (1921-1942).

If Papua be restricted to the south coast of the island (as is commonly done), there is no doubt that – after the fall of Buna and Samarai – it also suffered seriously from the Pacific War. Actually, it was the professed aim of the Japanese to reach Port Moresby. They first tried to do this by sea, but the battle of the Coral Sea, in May, 1942, thwarted this plan. After that, they tried to do the same, overland, via the Kokoda Trail, and they were stopped only 60 miles from their goal. There is even some evidence for a third attempt by the Japanese, when, in early September, 1942, three Japanese dive-bombers landed on the beach of Table Bay, on the south coast of Papua. Some authors believe that these enemy planes were probably a scouting party, who were attempting to survey a second Kokoda-type trail, to surprise the Allied Forces. In other words, these Japanese planes has not just lost their way, or happened to be off course, but they had come with a purpose of their own.

Reconnaissance flights and bombing raids over Papua began early in the war. In the first quarter of 1942, Port Moresby was strafed many times, beginning on February 3. This was the signal for the Australians to increase their forces, and to conscript all able-bodied males of British citizenship, between 18 and 45 years. Many missionaries enlisted voluntarily, among others, the rector of Port Moresby's Anglican church, Revd Henry Matthews. But, because he had passed the legal age, he was discharged. At the same time, white women and children were evacuated to Australia, and shiploads were organised to transfer the mixed race population from Port Moresby to the islands near Daru.

In August, 1942, Mr Adrian Matthews, a medical assistant, accompanied the first group of people to Daru, while his father, Revd Henry Matthews, took the second group of evacuees to safety. On the small coastal vessel, in which he travelled, the *Mamutu*, there were 75 mixed-race people, a number of Papuans, and the crew. However, on August 7, while the ship was 30 miles to the west of Bramble Cay, a Japanese submarine – later identified as being of the RO 33-type – shelled the vessel four times, hitting the wireless room, the bridge, and the hull (twice). Later the submarine returned to machine gun the drowning passengers. The boat sank rather quickly, while an Australia plane, which, on the next day came to the rescue, was also downed. In the end, there was one single dinghy left for the survivors. Out of the 142 people on board, only one man survived: Billy Griffin, from Rigo. At the same time, Fr Henry Matthews, and a Papuan teacher, Leslie Gariardi, who was with him, became the first two Anglican martyrs in the Pacific War.

The scope of the Japanese air war did not only cover the capital, but also its hinterland, the Goilala Mountains, and all the surrounding area from east to west. The island of Yule was strafed. Visitors to the Catholic Mission are still shown the holes from the bullets in the wall of the Father's House, as well as the hole at the spot where, a few moments before, Fr Andrew Supeyrat sat down! At the time, there were no military installations on the island, although, later, a US Air Force radar unit was established there.

Terapo, 120 km to the west, on the south coast of Papua, was also lost for the Mission. The Allied Forces made it a base to unload materials for the building of a proposed road between Bulldog and Wau – to provide access to the Territory of New Guinea.

Two Catholic mountain stations were machine-gunned. At Ononghe, Fr Theophile Cadoux, a visitor, had the experience of a bullet hitting the confessional, in which he was sitting, while at Oba Oba –now a derelict place in Kuni Territory – the shooting from the air damaged the church’s roof, and pierced the missal laying on the alter. Both events happened on Sundays, right before High Mass, when many people had gathered. Some suspect that the enemy pilots might have believed that they were witnessing a meeting, with a paramilitary purpose, or also the strafing of church buildings would alienate the local population from the white missionaries.

At the beginning of the war, some of the Roman Catholic mission personnel of Eastern Papua had been evacuated to Yule Island. Others, like Fr Norbert Earl, enlisted as chaplains in the army, and served in the New Guinea campaigns. However, after a few months, Fr Bernard Baldwin, who had gone to Yule Island, returned to his Samarai Mission. He saw how the church set-up in Milne Bay had been completely destroyed, while the churchgoers had dispersed into the bush. After five days, the Japanese returned to shell the place again. On one of his trips up Milne Bay, Father’s own launch was strafed by Zero planes. Luckily, there were very few casualties.

Despite many setbacks, Fr Baldwin was able to keep in touch with the faithful. He later wrote that, all the time, he found the people surprisingly good, and longing to see the missionaries return. Papuans, who had joined the Army, made themselves known to the chaplains, while those, who stayed back, revealed a high degree of initiative, without being spurred on by the Australian missionaries. In one particular village, one boy performed 33 baptisms, while one girl had 28 new members to her credit. As to Fr Norbert Earl (who after almost two years of absence, during which he also served on the Kokoda Trail), when he returned to his mission station, he discovered that two young ladies had 58 children in their new school, and 40 people prepared for baptism.

What has been said here about Catholics, also applies to other religious groups. An LMS authority, Bernard Cockett, also President of the Australian Council of Churches, said that, materially, Methodist stations were devastated, European mission workers made prisoners of war, and the rest of the people evacuated wholesale. Yet, those who stayed on, kept the faith, and were doing all the good they could. He continues, “Had the natives given help to the Japanese, New Guinea would have fallen. Then Australia would have been invaded . . . and if Australia and New Zealand

had fallen, the Pacific would have been open to enemy aggression, right to the western coast of the United States and Canada.

It is not our purpose here to pay tribute to the bravery of the Fuzzy-Wuzzies, the cargo carriers, the stretcher bearers, the guides and scouts and messengers of the Allied Forces, although their work, too, reflects credit to the missions who had trained them. Bernard Cockett noted that, of the 6,000 carriers, who crossed the Central Ranges of New Guinea, 75 percent came from places where the LMS had laboured for 70 years, and, thus, provided the formation, which now proved to be so useful. For our purpose, it might suffice to give just the example of Maiogaru Gimuleia, who showed herself to be a good Samaritan for a foreigner in need.

The story of this nurse is well known. She worked at the Kwato mission hospital, near Samarai, and saved the life of Bill Whetters. This Australian pilot had parachuted out of his disintegrating Kittyhawk, and landed behind the enemy lines, somewhere off Samarai. In a way, no Papuan had anything to do with this war, going on between Australians and Japanese, and nurse Maiogaru could have left it at that. Still for her, it was business as usual, for friend and for foe, alike. She brought the pilot into her own house and nursed him. For more than a week she hid him from the ever-present Japanese soldiers. After a while, she had a letter brought to the competent ANGAU officer, and, in the end, she travelled with the injured man across the bay to deliver him into safe hands. Whetters was laid in the bottom of her canoe, covered with a pandanus palm mat and baskets of vegetables, while she, and a man from her village, paddled forth, right under the eyes of an enemy patrol. Eventually they made it. When asked what repayment could be given, Maiogaru only indicated a few items, which she believed would make her a more-efficient nurse. A jungle angel, with a mission background, and, till today, one of Papua New Guinea's living legends. A martyr? No. A witness to Christianity? Yes.

The title of "New Guinea Martyrs" has been a usage of the Anglican church. I would like that it has something to do with the overseas appeal of the term where, in geography, the island of New Guinea – covering both its eastern and western political sections – is a handy concept. In addition, in some languages, at least, the term "Papuan" has something of a derogatory sense, referring to "the last unknown on earth". However, the true reason is, I suspect, that, for a long time, the Anglican Mission was known as the "New Guinea Mission", as distinct from the "Melanesian Mission", which cared, e.g., for the island of New Britain, till that, too, was incorporated into

the New Guinea Mission. Then, in 1975, the country became independent from Australia, and, only in 1977, the official status of the missionary diocese of New Guinea – formerly a dependency of the Church of England in Queensland – also changed. The region now became the independent Anglican “Province of Papua New Guinea”. In other words, there is no longer need to stick to the old term. Times have changed.

II: Indigenous Martyrs

How many nationals died at the hands of the Japanese soldiers is very hard to assess. Probably nobody today is able to justify any specific number. This lack of information is not necessarily the effect of racism, but has wider implications. As a matter of fact, overseas sending agencies always used to keep personnel records, before the war and after. They also received letters from the survivors, which then were published in mission magazines – or are still kept in their archives. On the other hand, a villager would not have this type of advantage, yet, some expatriates did not have them either. One known example is that of the Catholic nuns, who prided themselves on providing a supportive role only, and just appear as numbers in the records of the mission work. They did not even sign, with their own names, the account of their experiences during the Pacific war, published in the book *Red Grew the Harvest*.

Father Leonhard Mueller MSC, who had been interned in the prison camps of Vunapope and Ramale, volunteered, before a United States board of inquiry, that, during the war “about 163” Papua New Guineans were killed, just because they were in the way. He must have known that many names to have been able to be so specific, and have gathered these names, through research, after the war. However, the real total of casualties was much greater. One might safely discount the children under age, and the local people, who were faithful believers, and died of old age, or of disease. Yet, if one includes all those killed by brutal treatment, calculated torture, beheading, choking by smoke, medical malpractice, and burials alive, etc. – both in Papua, North-East New Guinea, and the New Guinea islands – the final count easily be doubled.

Oral witnesses confirm that nearly every village had its war victims. In the North Bainings, for instance, there were 12 villages before the war, but only five remained in 1947. In another Baining area, a pre-war total of seven villages were reduced to two. Such results cannot be attributed to introduced sicknesses alone, as some authors would like to have it. Such depopulation is, no doubt, also related to savage executions and bombings,

which, when combined with a decline in the birth rate, finally resulted in the amalgamation of those villages, whose populations had grown too small.

To gauge the effects of the occupation on the people, we should distinguish various examples of how the people coped with the effects of the invasion. We could reduce them to three kinds. Thus, there were some people, who gave up their old allegiance. Then, there were others, who became stronger in their faith, and – finally – there was that small group who lost their lives. They are the “martyrs”, who shed their blood for the faith. But, the English language does not admit this title to those who died after rescue, and whose death was hastened by their past experiences. And what about those who escaped death by a split hair, when their companions in the same trials did not survive? In treating these categories, we will concentrate on the New Guinea islands, although the picture is true for all occupied areas in Papua and New Guinea.

1. Human Reactions

Just as the PNG people had not exulted, when, in 1914, the Australian colonial administration was established, so they accepted, after 1942, the Japanese role: the new masters were too strong to resist. This also affected their attitude towards the churches. Reasons for falling away from the church, once the chance was given, were plentiful, one being just to save their own skin. But there must have also been dissatisfaction with the kind of Western Christianity, which had been preached for so many years, and still was full of secrets. Hence, the fact that a return to past ancestor worship got another lease of life. Incidentally, such a belief was also a kin to some Shinto beliefs, which now and then, were proposed by Japanese soldiers.

Use of magic, to become invulnerable against bombs, and bullets, and swords was also a reason why church practices declined. Again, moral norms, taught by the missionaries, were also undermined, when observant locals saw the activities of the Japanese geisha girls, and deduced that this behaviour could explain the fertility and growth of the Asian masses. A local consequence was total amorality, or a return to polygamy. And then there was the March, 1944, edict of the invaders, banning all religious activities: “*no moa Kristo*”. In short, the people were both afraid and free. Where they saw freedom, they went back to pre-Christian attitudes, and slipped easily into license, and it is rather surprising that many remained so faithful towards Australia, and towards the foreign mission agencies.

A particular case, summing up the above, was the revival of cargo-cult notions, for instance, the one led by a certain Batari of Nakanai. Already, in 1940, he had urged the people to destroy gardens, fruit trees, and animals, in order that the ancestors would send unlimited amounts of cargo. He tied up, and beat, the Catholic priest, Fr Joseph Weigl, and stopped the Methodist students from receiving further training. But, when the cultists tried to take the Japanese cargo, the soldiers beat them up, and put them promptly in jail. Yet, Batari led many people astray.

Famous also is the case of Embogi, who had wanted himself to become “King of the Brown People”, and was bribed by the occupation forces. He betrayed three Anglican missionaries near Gona. His fatal deed was offset, though, by the warnings given to the expatriates by faithful villagers. Unfortunately, their words were not heeded. Five months later, Embogi and his gang of rascals, were hung by the incoming Australian Army. His memorable last words were, “I taught you what is wrong, and now, before I die, I, leader, commend you to go to the missions.”

The lack of missionaries also had the strange result that some locals “switched religion” – or fell away from their former mission allegiance. We know of Hosea Linge, on New Ireland, who suggested to Catholics-without-a-shepherd, that they join, for the time being, in the worship of the Methodists. And we know also of Fr Bruno Stapelmann, in North Baining, who sent Vunapope catechists to shepherdless Methodists, asking them to join his church. Here, “Christian religion” was not at stake, and the effects were felt in either direction, with many standing up for their true, old convictions.

Sad to say, there were also several denunciations of Christians, or betrayals of people who had “confessed” their faith. One case is that of Marcus, and his wife Cecilia, of Matong village, near Pomio. Here, an American plane had crashed, and via a *tavur* message, everybody was notified. This particular couple nursed the survivors, giving them food and bush medicine. However, the Bigman O, denounced them to the Japanese soldiers in Malmal, and, while the airmen were imprisoned at Palmalmal, the Christian couple was executed.

2. The Martyrs

A second group of indigenous people were those active in the service of the church, and who sacrificed their lives, especially, perhaps, in the latter part of the Japanese occupation. Previously, some religious services and

preaching had been forbidden, but, when the Japanese advance was being stemmed, and – especially after the Battle of the Coral Sea, and the one of Milne Bay, in the course of 1942 – the tide began to turn in favour of the Allies, suspicion increased about clandestine radios, and about the passing on of messages to the Allied Forces. Hence, the repeated house searches, and the general nervousness, of the Japanese. On one occasion, they heard a Father using his manual typewriter, and were convinced that he was sending out a message in Morse code. They believed that Christians has a kind of hot-line to God, so that Christian prayers were cause of stopping their military advance. One Methodist catechist, Benjamin To Golo, who had led religious services, was imprisoned. Because of cataracts, he had gone blind, and the Japanese played many tricks on him, to test whether his blindness was real, indeed. In the end, they released him. He did not become a war casualty.

One native nun, Sister Teresia FMI, was reported to have said, “*Inglis nambawan; Nippon nambaten*”. She promptly got the “bamboo treatment”. The soldiers made her kneel down, and put a green bamboo behind her knees, and then moved the ends of the stick up and down for several hours. Although the Sister kept denying, and the local superior, Sister Cecilia, offered to be killed instead of her, the torture went on. Sister Teresia died, after rescue, in 1946. She is counted as a war casualty.

Things went even worse with the Catholic catechist, Peter To Rot, who was killed in July, 1945, although he is not among the 63 missionaries, whose names are recorded in the memorial chapel of the Vunapope church. Still, his tomb, at Rakunai, testified, from the beginning, that he was a “catechist and martyr for the church”. In 1944, he was instructed to no longer assemble people for *lotu*. After four such warnings, he was put into prison, beaten on the face with sticks, released, and then betrayed again by To Metapa, a local policeman, who was bent on taking a second wife. During the subsequent confinement, two soldiers, and a Japanese military doctor, came “to give him medicine”. Late that night, some of the prisoners, returning from their meal, found Peter lying on the veranda of a house, as if he was asleep. The cotton wool in his nostrils and ears betrayed the fact that he had been poisoned, and had just died. Earlier that same day, having a premonition of his death, Peter had said: “Do not worry. I am a catechist, and I am only doing my duty.”

In the Methodist church, the losses, among local church workers, were really high, although we are short of specific stories about the victims, and

do not know the dates of their executions. According to the book of Revd Neville Threlfall, *100 Years in the Islands*, two local ministers died: Revd Benjamin Talai, who was beheaded in prison in 1945, and Revd Aminio Bale, who died after the war, as result of the hardships he had endured. Then there are the names of just ten catechists, or senior pastors, who had the oversight of several villages. They are listed in the Journal Resolutions of the 1946 District Synod, now kept in the United church archives at Rabaul. In addition, there also exists another list of 17 pastors, being the people who cared for one village only, and taught there, in the elementary schools. Of these persons, 12 are recorded in the said District Resolutions, but other sources, consulted by Revd Threlfall, add five more names to them.

Although one can argue about this point, it is clear that the Methodist church is of a congregational type, in which lay people have a higher profile than in other churches. There is, therefore, a special reason for including the mission workers, and lay members, who were beaten up, and tortured, by the Japanese, and whose death can truly be called war-caused. Again, mission workers from overseas are usually remembered in other churches, so these people from New Britain and New Ireland should be properly added to the group of other indigenous martyrs.

While, in the previous cases, death was expected, or did also occur, there are several cases on record, where church workers died, as it were, by accident, thus without any expressed intention of true witnessing, at least at that time. One case is that of the pastor-teacher, Hosea To Ilip, who was murdered by an Australian scouting party, when fishing with a lamp off Lihir Island. The soldiers had thought that he was signalling to the Japanese, and acted accordingly. Another case is that of the young local lady, Magdalena Aiwaul, from Tumleo Island, who wanted to become a nun, and refused to leave the Holy Spirit Sisters, when they were arrested. Afterwards, on March 17, 1943, she found herself on the *Akikaze*, a Japanese destroyer, sailing between Manus and Rabaul. Together with Bishop J. Loerks SVD, and many others, she was gunned down on the ship, and her body dumped into the sea. She is usually counted among the New Guinea martyrs, not, however, the two infants, of Chinese extraction, and the German-born baby, Erich Gareis, who drowned, at the same time, with his parents.

Another disaster at sea occurred with the *Yorishime Maru* – after the usual European pronunciation, rather referred to as the *Dorish Maru*. This

ship was strafed by American B25 bombers, when it sailed from Hansa Bay to Wewak, full of Catholic and Lutheran missionaries from north-east New Guinea. Besides the expatriates, there were, on the vessel, also some 30 Catholic lay people. Of the latter, 22 survived the air attack, but eight of them died from bullet wounds. They are Charlie, Allan and Dora Mathies, Jimi Johnson, Elsie Kraemer, one indigenous girl Paula, and two teenagers. They were all people associated with the mission: men working in the workshops, and women assisting the nuns. In a way, these friends of the mission often underwent more hardships than the expatriate mission staff, because they also suffered the loss of their relatives, and other members of their families.

Similar, is the end of the boy Nagi, the adopted son of the Lutheran missionaries, Jacob and Adele Welsch, who was abducted by the Japanese in 1944, and never seen again. According to another source, the same happened to a local boy, adopted in Hollandia by Dr Theodore Braun and his wife. The lad was taken away by the Japanese soldiers, under the suspicion of being a spy, and was never seen alive again. One might suspect that the two Lutheran couples were concerned with the same boy (?). A case exists, also, among the Anglicans, were Mr Leslie Gariadi, a young Papuan teacher-evangelist from Boianai, drowned with Fr Henry Mathews. This happened between Port Moresby and Daru, when the BP Vessel *Mamutu*, on which they were travelling, was torpedoed on August 7, 1942.

3. The Confessors

A third group of indigenous people contains the bulk of those who, technically speaking could be called “confessors”, that is, men and women, who professed their faith, in the face of great danger, and did not hesitate to risk life and limb for it. Quite a few cases have been recorded, witnessing to the truth that the war had also some good effects. True, materially, churches and mission buildings were razed to the ground, but – as one witness of Raluana said: “People felt a great faith in God in those days. They called on Him in all dangers, and felt He preserved them.” And another witness from New Hanover testified: “It was not until the war came that I was thrown back on God and that I really learned what religion meant.”

There are some gruesome stories by Papua New Guineans, who survived the war, and were able to relate their tortures. Thus, Peni Lelei, a pastor-teacher of Ulu Island, was arrested by the Japanese, and hung from a tree, head down, and beaten, till he fainted.

After regaining consciousness, he was so tightly fastened to a tree that he fainted again. Finally, he was made to dig his own grave, but, at the moment that he would-be executioner drew his sword to cut off his head, he could say, “If God does not want me to die, you will not be able to kill me with that sword”, and the soldier left him. Again, at Rapitok, several Methodist churchmen were put in large tunnel, awaiting their hearing before the military court. Meanwhile, piles of coconut husks were lit at the entrance of the tunnel to choke them to death. Then came the hearing, after which they were, once more, put in the tunnel for two days, and, once again, ordered not to conduct any religious meetings.

As a matter of fact, *lotu* went on, for instance, in caves and other hidden places, or also before dawn – when the soldiers were still asleep, and when the air raids had not yet started. Again, Bibles and sacred vessels were kept safe, so much so that, after the hostilities, catechist To Papuan, of Tabar Island, could give the tabernacle key to the first Catholic Father he met. Among the Mungen, catechist Max Roroa could do the same with the Mass vestments and the altar wine, which he had kept safe all the time from any profanation.

Similarly, Joseph Lomon, the coworker of the Lutheran missionary, Friedrich Doepke, on Manus Island, was able, in 1947, to hand over to the returning Friedrich Walter, the sum of £A132, with which they then could start to reconstruct the Evangelical Church of Manus. A special word of gratitude must go to the native FMI Sisters, of East New Britain, who used their freedom of movement to supply garden produce for up to 363 hungry stomachs in the camps of Vunapope and Ramale. Two of them lost their lives in air raids, two in the POW camp at Ramale, six in various places, and one – Sister Teresia – died after the war was over.

They were what we would call ordinary people, that is, men and women, who were not professionally engaged in the ministry, they also bore convincing witness to their Christian life, through acts of mercy, or sheer charity. Earlier on, we already recalled such a case, concerning Marcus and Cecilia, of Matong village. In general, it has been estimated that there were at least 100 Australian survivors of the Pacific War, due to the help given to them by the Papua New Guineans. But, there are more. Let us give two more examples.

One grateful American, Fred Hargesheimer, had his plane shot down, and was rescued by the people of Nantambu village (West New Britain). He

was nursed by Apelis To Gogo and his wife, Aida, who gave her own milk to restore him to health. After the war was over, the American kept retelling the story, till he had raised enough money to build the “Airmen’s Memorial School”, in Ewasse village. This was his way to try to repay, somehow, those Nakanais who had helped him when he most needed it.

Again, one missionary, Reverend Rudolf Inselmann, of the American Lutheran church, escaped from the Japanese, and was first hidden, and protected, by the local people. Eventually, he could make it overland to Port Moresby, and the United States, from where he later returned, and served here till 1946. Looking at the past events, it is not easy to give their proper due to all the local Christians, who practised, so generously, the Lord’s command to love friend and enemy.

The Anglican Missionary, Fr Romney Gill, who continued his work, during the Japanese invasion, from camps in the bush near his station, paid tribute, in a newspaper article, written soon afterwards to his local assistants: “Father John Livingstone Yaviri and Vincent Moi have deserved the highest praise. John has taken the sacrament right into enemy-patrolled territory. . . . I think, perhaps, that it would be safe to say that the church in New Guinea has produced no greater saint and hero than Robert Somanu. . . . Fancy going up to the station, when a shattering air attack had just passed – when it might be starting again at any moment.”

Although the Japanese occupation can be seen as a ruthless exercise of military power, one must agree that things were not always so oppressive for the people, and that the same restrictions did not apply all the time, nor everywhere, in the same way. There were, for instance, different sectors of command, which could mean that, what one officer had allowed, was a breach of regulations in another sector. Hence, when Revd Mikael To Bilak, and some Methodist pastors, were about to be executed, for conducting services of worship, one Japanese officer, who had given them permission, intervened at their trial and said, “I will have to die, before you kill these men.” Then, there are also cases, where the foreign soldiers shared the Christian beliefs of the Papua New Guineans, and even joined in some of their religious services. And, finally, it cannot be denied that, say, the prohibition of church gatherings could also have been made for a good reason, such as the avoidance of mass killings under the strafing of the Allied Forces. This, as a matter of fact, did happen for Methodist churchgoers at Ratuwul village, in East New Britain, and it nearly occurred

at Ononghe and Oba Oba, on the Papuan side of the Ranges. Here, as in all judgments about the past, many factors have to be taken into consideration.

III: On the Making of Statistics

It is commonplace to say that, with numbers, one can prove anything, although professional statisticians will strongly disagree with such a layman's opinion. Still, the number of people, who died an unnatural death during World War II, is a particularly hard case. Their totals run into the millions, although much uncertainty surrounds each of the possible figures. It is a fact that certain persons were not seen any more, after a given date, but they might have survived, joined the mass of the "displaced persons", and started a new life, forgetting whatever there had been behind. Yet, others might have died a lonely death, without any witness, without any record.

Things are not much better when one zeroes in on the victims among the mission staff, or even on those who belong to one particular sending agency. The case of Sister Maria Molnar comes directly to mind. She worked for the Evangelical Church of Manus, and there is contradictory evidence about her final whereabouts. Did she die at sea, or did she survive? There are, however, more expatriates, who can swell the list of war casualties, or also be left out of it.

1: Too Many?

From an abstract point view, it is quite possible that the total of war victims among church personnel has been inflated. Intriguing it is, for example, that existing listings of Anglican casualties of the Pacific War differ from one another, firstly, counting only 11 Anglican martyrs, and then also adding Revd Bernard Moore. The same is true among the Catholic FMI Sisters of Rabaul, firstly, supplying names for 10 local Sisters, and later adding also Sister M. Cicilia, of Malagunan. One reason for upping the numbers would be that these numbers were used overseas to obtain new personnel to find the gaps, or to assure funds for rebuilding destroyed mission stations. Still, this concern would not be enough to darken a picture, which was already so sad by itself.

There is also the consideration that, among the war casualties, one may also like to count the people, who passed away during the war, but from natural causes, and in whose case the military hand only hastened the end result. The latter is, no doubt, the case of Sister Hedwig Karzer, a Catholic nun, who died of old age, on her mission station at Gayabu. The same is

true of the Adventist Pastor, Arthur Atkins, whom the Japanese, after a forced march, brought to the hospital at Vunapope. Thus, he became the first war casualty among all Christian missionaries.

Having said this, let us now look at the possible reasons to discount some people listed as “martyrs”. A first ground for limiting the total, is that some persons, of British nationality, had felt it their duty to defend their motherland, by enlisting, for instance, in the Australian Imperial Forces. One of them was the Lutheran church worker, Mr Adolph Obst. He left the mission work, and became a coast-watcher on New Britain, where he was bayoneted in a man-to-man fight with the enemy. We did not consider him a mission worker.

We have also omitted one “Reverend Constantine” (or Consterdine), because we have only one witness saying that he might have been imprisoned in Kavieng in 1944, and presumably died there. We suspect, however, that this person was the New Ireland planter, Assunto Constantini (a third spelling!), who, once upon a time, belonged to the Sacred Heart Society, but had left the Mission of Rabaul-Kavieng many years earlier. Further research may put at rest this suspicion. Meanwhile, there is no church organisation, who could claim a person with such, or a similar, name.

Then, there is also the case of the Anglican priest Geoffrey H. D. Voss. He first worked on the south coast of New Britain, last of all in Au village. After that, he had then done supply work in Rabaul, when the regular parish priest had gone on leave. However, at the time of the invasion of the Japanese, he had taken on a civil job in Rabaul, and was put on the *Montevideo Maru*, a POW ship, which was to sail for Hainan Island, near South China, and fell victim to the US submarine, *Sturgeon*, near the Island of Luzon. As is well known, this POW ship was sunk off the coast of the Philippines, in “the greatest single disaster at sea during the Pacific War”. This event accounts for the lost of over 1,000 lives, including those of various missionaries. G. Voss is remembered for having told his catechist, Tomas Passingan, that – if he could make it – he should go back to Au village, and look after it, till he, himself, would return after the war. The name of Voss is now only mentioned among the victims of the *Montevideo Maru*.

Still on the Anglican side, there is also the case, referred to above, of Revd Henry Matthews. He enlisted voluntarily in the AIF, but was discharged, because he was already over 65 years of age. Still, he assisted

his people on their escape route from Port Moresby to Daru, and died at sea on August 7, 1942, the day before his chaplaincy was to have expired. The Anglicans have always included him as one of their martyrs.

Following a slightly different way of arguing, a case could be made to also discount the music band of the 2/22nd Battalion, which, at the beginning of hostilities, was based at Rabaul. Officially, the bandsmen were part of the military, and the army paid them as soldiers. The Japanese had also interned them, with their Australian comrades. Some of these bandsmen died, e.g., in the Tol massacre, but most of them were loaded on the *Montevideo Maru*, and died at sea.

It should be repeated that not all Christian churches share the same concept of what the church is, and how it should operate. Now, the Salvation Army is known to regularly engage musicians as its helpers. Secondly, a distinction, which was upheld at the time, was made between a “church” (designed for serving the expatriate population) and a “mission” (whose task it was to evangelise the local people). On this account, too, the bandsmen would qualify to be counted, as having a task with other Australians. Thirdly, if 16 other church personnel, who perished on the ill-fated POW ship, are taken into account, the same should apply to the 17 Salvationist, who died likewise, even if, at the time, there was no Salvation Army established in the country.

The latter case could also be treated as an instance of “friendly fire”, that is the unintentional killing, in time of war, of one’s own people, or of one’s own allies. There were two such incidents at sea. One such incident dates from 1942, and accounts for the loss of 33 missionaries of various creeds, who – as said above – drowned when the POW ship *Montevideo Maru* was torpedoed. Later on, in 1944, a similar incident happened with the *Yorishime Maru*, which resulted in the loss of 50 missionary lives, “not counting the 15 people who” died a few days later, as a consequence of the wounds inflicted. And, finally, there was the mistake made by Allied soldiers, who belted to death the Methodist pastor, Hosea To Ilip, after a night of fishing, off the Coast of Lihir Island. Maybe there are other cases as well.

2. Or Too Few?

Notwithstanding the above remarks, there is also the other side of the story, which increases the death toll among missionaries, although in no definite manner either. As a matter of fact, no detailed records were kept

about the local people, who died for upholding their Christian ideals. We know, however, of many of them, who assisted complete strangers in need. They did not ask, firstly, whether somebody was a friend or a foe, and they had often to pay for their generosity with the loss of their lives. Names are hard to come by.

Sometimes, the situation is slightly better. We know, for instance, the names of a great many Methodist mission workers, together with their last-assigned places, although most other details about these war casualties are missing. The church historian, Revd Neville Threlfall, reckons that, if we leave aside the expatriate victims among the church staff, and omit the local workers, who were left in broken health because of the war – there are still 98 or 99 Methodist church workers, who died in PNG between October, 1941, and September, 1946.

Although the names of all these 99 people have been preserved, we hesitate to retain as martyrs, even in the broad sense, all 32 (or possibly 33) pastor-trainees enrolled in the George Brown College, at the time of the Japanese invasion. In fact, it would seem that no other church would count those still in training as fully-fledged mission staff. On the other hand, there is no doubt that, subsequently, just these people would have become the most outspoken defenders of the Christian faith, and that some of them might have died in doing so.

Among the Catholic population, which, in the same area of the New Guinea Islands, has about the same strength as the Methodists, one would also expect an important number of church workers to have been killed by the Japanese. But where can one find the evidence? One Bukei, of Suna village (Manus), gave, before a war court in Kavieng, the names of 40 people, whom he knew that were executed by the enemy: four Chinese, four half-castes, eight locals from Lemakot, and 32 locals from Luburua. Some of these people were surely from Catholic villages.

Unfortunately, the testimony of Bukie does not specifically include each person's denomination, and is, therefore, not very helpful. Anyhow, Catholic church workers have never been singled out for "fighting for the enemy". Neither do they figure prominently among the people punished, after the war, for murder and treason. Some, of their persuasion, are, no doubt, included among the 34, or possibly over 100, people who were hung for war crimes (depending whether one follows the figures of Dr Hank Nelson, or those of the Victorian MHR, Mr Barry Jones). Yet, a precise

number cannot possibly be assessed, although it will be higher than that of the one local catechist, Petro To Rot.

There is also a further element, which enters the discussion. Names like “Papua New Guinea”, “Solomon Island”, or “West Irian”, are all new, and are post-independence creations. If one avoids these anachronisms, and sees the picture as resulting from the Japanese advance in the Pacific (or, also, from the point of view of the sending agencies), there is every reason to mark up the number of victims. For the Marist Society, one should not omit the two SM Fathers, and four SMSM Sisters, of their mission, who died in the Solomon Islands. For the Sacred Heart Mission, the losses in the Pacific War include also one bishop, four priests, and eight brothers, who died in the Moluccas, on July 30, 1942. In addition, they mourn five OLSH Sisters, and seven MSC missionaries, or a total of 25 people in other parts of the present-day Indonesia. There were 16 more deaths in the Pacific area, being 11 Fathers, three Brothers, and two OLSH Sisters, on Celebes, Manado, and in the erstwhile Gilbert Islands, all victims of the Japanese advance. It is clear that, with this, not all mission agencies have been listed.

By way of conclusion, one can state that, in making up statistics, much depends on the historical, or geographical, frame of reference, and also on the theological notion of who really is a “martyr”. One thing, however, is sure, and that is that the end result had gradually been growing. Right after the war, Father L. Mueller MSC, of Rabaul, stated that there had been “about 163” war victims in New Guinea. Others after him, spoke of 188 Catholics. Anglicans have gone from 11 to 12 recognised martyrs. Revd Threlfall recently increased his 93 PNG war victims to 98, among the Methodists alone. Hank Nelson, in his recent *Taim bilong Masta*, is surely on safe ground when he puts the total of lost church workers at “over 200 foreign missionaries”.

We would, with some hesitation, propose that there were at least 333 people, whose names have been recorded. However, allowing for the comments made, above, there is solid evidence to put the total still higher. Naturally, they were not only Melanesians, although, among them, there were at least 84 persons who would nowadays qualify as PNG citizens. And then, we do not count, yet, the 32 “nationals”, who were still in training, and the 40 other war casualties, mentioned above. We must leave it to the Lord to remember all the Papua New Guineans, whose names are known by Him alone.

Summary 1

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
1942 Sinking of <i>Mamutu</i> and <i>Montevideo Maru</i>	8	12	16	–	2	–	2	40
1943 Execution on <i>Akikaze</i>	46	–	–	–	–	5	–	51
1944 Strafing of <i>Dorish Maru</i>	57	–	–	7	–	–	–	64
Air raid wounds, shot, beheaded, or bayoneted	43	1	3	6	9	–	–	62
Abducted, unknown, or unaccounted	3	–	1	3	–	–	–	7
Prison, sickness, neglect, or old age	27	62	–	–	1	–	2	92
After rescue on mission station	14	1	2	–	–	–	–	17
Total:	198	76	22	16	12	5	4	33

- (1) Catholics
- (2) Methodists
- (3) Salvation Army
- (4) Lutherans
- (5) Anglicans
- (6) Evangelical church of Manus
- (7) Seventh-day Adventists
- (8) Totals

Summary 2

CATHOLICS				Total
Madang	1 SVD Bishop	19 SVD Brothers	37 SSpS Sisters	71
	9 SVD Priests	2 lay helpers	3 lay helpers	
Wewak	1 SVD Bishop	18 SVD Brothers	18 SSpS Sisters	52
	14 SVD Priests	—	1 Aspirant	
Rabaul-Kavieng	24 MSC Priests	17 MSC Brothers	5 OLSH Sisters	63
	—	1 Catechist	5 MSC Sisters	
Bougainville	—	—	11 FMI Sisters	12
	3 SM Priests	3 SM Brothers	2 SMSM Sisters	
	1 Priest (USA)	3 FMS Brothers	—	
METHODISTS				
New Guinea Islands	11 Ministers	10 Catechists	—	76
		17 Pastors		
		38 Lay helpers		
SALVATION ARMY				
	—	22 Bandmen	—	22
LUTHERANS				
Finschhafen	1 Revd	1 helper	—	16
Madang	5 Revd	7 helpers	2 Sisters/Wives	
ANGLICANS				
Papua	3 Revd	3 helpers	4 Sisters-Teachers	12
New Britain	2 Revd	—	—	
EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF MANUS				
Manus	2 Revd	—	3 Sisters/Wives	5
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS				
New Britain	2 Revd	2 helpers	—	4
Total:	79	163	91	333

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