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SAMAR: THE CONTINUING AGONY OF A LAND

A Report on the Fact-Finding Mission to Samar,
November 3 - 15, 1981

Backround. The world has been celebrating Human Rights Day for the past 33 years now. On December 10 each year since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was drafted and ratified in 1948, millions the world over have reflected on the dignity of the human being and the basic rights that are supposed to be due him irregardless of what his race, creed or status in life may be.

The significance of such venerable day, when men are reminded of their equality to each other, has not been lost to Filipinos. There are questions, however, regarding the relevance of its celebration in the country today.

How, in the first place, can Human Rights Day be rightfully celebrated in a country like the Philippines where the dignity of man remains an abstract concept and respect for human life itself, particularly that of ordinary peasants, is practically a myth?

For more than eight years, the Filipino people, some 70 % of whom constitute the peasantry, have buckled under the weight of a repressive regime that had resorted to martial rule as an answer to an ever-deepening socio-economic and political crisis it has failed to cope up with effectively.

Thousands who have dared speak against such a regime and the status quo that it so obsessively protects have been imprisoned, tortured, even summarily killed. To this day, many continue to languish in jail; still many more grieve the loss of loved ones buried in unmarked graves, their fates unknown. The tragedy of it all is that, in exchange for their basic rights to life and liberty, the regime has paid the Filipino people back with only more poverty, deprivation and oppression. All these, in the name of national unity, progress and development.

The lifting of martial law last January this year has failed to substantially change anything. In fact, with its continued dictatorship over the Filipino people legitimized under its grandiose normalization scheme and the resultant sham New Republic, the regime has simply intensified the application of its most brutal tactic of political repression - - MILITARIZATION.

In many areas in the country today, the regime has concentrated sizable portions of its (to date) 275,000-man Philippine Army(PA), its 65,000-strong Philippine Constabulary and Integrated National Police (PC-INP) and its 75,000-member paramilitary Integrated Civilian Home Defence Force(ICHDF). These areas, so categorized by the regime as "rebel-infested," include Kalinga-Apayao, Abra and Isabela in the Mt. Province and the Cagayan Valley, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, The whole of Central Luzon, including Bataan and Zambales, Laguna in the Southern Tagalog region, Bicol, the islands of Panay, Bohol and Samar in the Visayas and the entire island of Mindanao.

The unabated influx of the regime's military forces in these areas has brought along a spate of barbarities against civilians in the wake of so-called peace drives against "communist-terrorist subversives (CTS)." What price "national security?" Given the situation, the answer is clear--human rights.

The celebration of Human Rights Day in the Philippines, therefore, is not one to be joyful about. For there is only the violation of human rights to angrily grieve for, to militantly cry out against.

The Human Rights Campaign and the Fact-Finding Mission to Samar. In the light of the highly deplorable human rights situation in the country today, justice and peace-oriented institutions and organizations, including various other members of the concerned citizenry, have decided to form an alliance that would spearhead a three-month long campaign to culminate on December 10, 1981, the 33rd anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On October 5, 1981, the human rights alliance, dubbed the Makabayang Kilusan para Isulong ang Katarungan (MAKIISA KA), was formed, with 30 Church-based institutions and organizations, including other sectoral groups, responding.

The alliance formation and the consequent launching of the human rights campaign proved timely as concerned citizens in the Eastern Visayan island of Samar, saddled as they were with numerous cases of grave military abuses against civilians, promptly requested for the fielding of a fact-finding mission.

The mission, which arrived in Samar on November 3, 1981, was composed of two Americans, one Australian and five representatives from the MAKIISA,Ka and the Coalition for the Defense of People's Rights(CDPR), a counterpart alliance in Cebu.

Inquiries on cases of military crimes committed in Samar's three sub-province- - Eastern, Western and Northern Samar - - ended on November 11. Data was gathered mainly through interviews with the actual victims of military abuse, including those who have luckily survived open massacres, their immediate friends and relatives, and in some cases, the officials of affected barrios, i.e., barrio captain and capitana. Visual documentation was made possible through cameras.

Hereunder is the report on the fact-finding mission to Samar.

Militarization in Samar: The Tragic Facts

The rape of an Island. The Eastern Visayan island of Samar is today like a virgin being gang-raped at gunpoint.

Endowed by an extraordinary abundance in natural resources, Samar continues to catch the lustful eyes of both foreign and local investors who see in the island's richness an illimitable source of superprofits.

Foreign big business concerns presently straddle this unwilling 1.342 million hectare-wide maiden of an island, way up from the north down its eastern and western sub-provinces. Chiefly exploiting Samar's forest, mining and fishing resources, these concerns are, for the most part, financed, either directly or through joint ventures with local partners, by American, Japanese and West European (mainly in the west and the east) and Australian (in the north) investments.

Previous documentation on the socio-economic conditions of Samar have pointed out the fact that the presence of foreign investments there has not necessarily redounded to the benefit of its economy. Government projects, financed chiefly through loans and aids granted by the governments of foreign investors themselves (such as the A$25 million Australian-backed infrastructure project under the so-called integrated rural development project in Northern Samar) have only served to sharpen the focus on the depression that Samar is presently wallowing in.

The Cosmetics of Progress. In Samar, people use to say: "The only thing beautiful in our island are the roads." This comment, caught in passing in one of the mission's random interviews, was made in reference to the Pan Philippine Highway, a long stretch of concrete spanning Samar all the way from Allen in the north down Sogod in the southernmost part of the neighboring island of Leyte. The highway, the construction of which was financed by the Japanese under the Fil-Japan Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation, is now actually one of the major tourist attractions of Samar, not, of course, excluding the San Juanico Bridge which links the island with Leyte.

Beautiful Roads and Nipa Huts. An ocular survey, taken from the windows of a cross-country bus traversing the Pan Philippine Highway, bears out the sharp contrast that the "beautiful" roads have with the conditions of the people living alongside them.

Clusters of nipa huts, many, delapidated abodes constituting "pocket" roadside villages, pass swiftly by, broken only at intervals by vast tracts of uncultivated, very rugged land(only 25 % of Samar's total land area is cultivated, the rest being devoted to settlements (.12 %), reserved forest (.85 %), commercial forest (45.98 %) and alienable/disposable lands (28.22 %), and by vistas of the sea itself (the highway is mainly a coastal road; only rarely does it pass through interior towns.)

A cross-country bus, indeed, provides a convenient, albeit bleak, picture window to the poverty that presently holds the people of Samar in virtual bondage. (The UP School of Economics estimates that based on 1975 government figures, 48 to 55 % of the population in Eastern Visayas are poor, earning less than P3,679 to P4,083. This is way below the Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) poverty line of P7,524 a year. In Samar, the income of the people, majority of whom are peasants dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods, stood at 34 % less of the national income on the average. This is far cry from the millions of dollars in profits that foreign and local big businessmen regularly bleed off Samar's major raw materials-extractive industries.)

The Garrison State. Travelling on bus, one also catches a glimpse at the reality of the problem that now grips the hapless people of Samar in sheer terror - - Militarization.

Easily perceivable is the heavily pronounced military presence. Along the highway itself are numerous Philippine Army detachment camps, usually constituting nipa huts and lean-tos complementing the standard military tents raised atop strategic roadside promontories. Manned, for the most part, by platoons of soldiers, these camps also maintain roadside checkpoints where passing vehicles, whether public or private, are made to stop and be subjected to inspections.

Along that particular strech between Catbalogan, Western Samar and the approach to the San Juanico Bridge are found at least 17 military checkpoints. It was one of these checkpoints, about less than two hours ride from the San Juanico Bridge, that this fact-finding mission first encountered one of the various forms of military harassment now in practice all over Samar -- the inspection of "cedulas" (residence certificates) and other documents of personal identification.

Army regulars, PC-INP elements and ICDF recruits operating, not only in the maintenance of checkpoints, but in the conduct of counter-insurgency operations, mostly, in the interior towns and barrios of Samar are supported by the Philippine Navy (PN), in the operation of patrol fast crafts around the island, the Air Force, in the operation of two service helecopters between Catbalogan and other stra-

tegic coastal towns and the Philippine Marines. Also in action are some of the regime's elite storm-troopers -- the PC's long-range patrol forces, the army's scout rangers and the vicious Special Forces, the so-called Lost Command, under the mass murderer, Col. Lademora of the Davao City-San Pedro Cathedral bombing fame.

The following is a list of military forces and their specific deployments in the island of Samar. (This is based on the documents made vailable by justice and peace groups based there.)

A. Northern Samar

1. 15th IB, under Lt. Col. Boy Nazareno. This unit, which is presently headquartered in the municipality of San Roque, was just transferred from Western Samar last October 21, 1981. As of November 8, the 15th IB was still deploying its forces to different detachement areas in the north. To date, 15th IB detachments are operating in Laoang, Catubig, Las Navas, Lapinig, Gamay, Mapanas and Palapag.

2. 366th PC Coy. under Lt. Col. Ibarra Mariano, now headquartered in Pambujan. This unit under the 363rd PC Battalion, the provincial command headquarters of which is in Catarman. Col. Mariano, it was learned, is presently slated for reassignment to Mindanao. Reliable information have it that the move was prompted because of the loss of 75 M16 armalite rifles from his command.

B. Eastern Samar/ as of October, 1981

1. Provincial PC command/INP/ICHDF:
   Headquarters: Camp Asedillo, Borongan, Eastern Samar
   Provincial Commander/INP-ICHDF superintendent: Major Pablo Acuba, Jr.
   Provincial Command Strength:
   -364th PC Coy, under Captain Felixberto Ong
   -365th PC Coy, under Captain Manzano (this unit was just recently activated and is now based in Dolores).
   -INP strength: 528 men
   -ICHDF strenght: 794 recruits(more are being recruited).

2. Brigade Task Force:

   Headquarters: PC Hills, Borongan, Eastern Samar
   Provincial Commander: Col. Bayani Fabic
   Units:
   59th PC Battalion:
   HQ: Salcedo (Bo. Palanas)
   CO: Lt. Col. Prospero Oli
   Deployment:
   -Balangiga: strength - one company under Lt. Duran
   -Giporlos: strength - one platoon
   -Macarthur: strength - one platoon under Lt. Garbo
   -Balangkayan (Bo. Cabay): strength - one platoon
   -Maydolong (poblacion): strength - one platoon
   -Maydolong (Bo. Guindalitan): strength - one platoon
   -Quinapondan (Bo. Buenavista): strength - one platoon
   -Taft (Bo. Tabok): strength - one company
   -Taft (Bo. Malinao): strength - one platoon
   -Hernani (deployed only last October 15): strength - one platoon under Lt. Rivera
   -Llorente: strength - one company
   34th IB, 5th ID (PA) (This unit replaced the 52nd PC Battalion last June, 1981. The 52nd was redeployed to Camarines Norte where it perpetrated the infamous Daet Massacre.)
   HQ: Dolores, Eastern Samar
   CO: Lt. Emilio B. Leon

Deployment:
-Dolores (Bo. Henolaso): strength - one company
-Dolores (Bo. Caglaw-an): strength - one company
-Maslog: strength - one company
-Oras: strength - one platoon
-Oras (Bo. Cadi-an): strength - one platoon
Jipapad: strength - one company
-San Policarpio: strength - one platoon
-Arteche: strength - one platoon under Lt. Napoleon Alvaira
-Can-avid: strength - one platoon under Lt. Juan Rongavilla
-Orac (Bo. Dalid): strength - one platoon

3. Special Forces:

a. Long-range patrol (LRP)/(PC)
Garrison: San Julian (Bo. Potong)
CO.: Capt. Licodino

b. Scout Rangers (PA)
Garrison: Can-avid (Bos. Camantang and Can-ilay)

4. 543rd Engineer Construction Battalion
51st Engineer Brigade (PA)
HQ.: DOlores
CO.: Maj. Corado

5. Army Reserve Command (Arescom)
HQ: Dolores

6. Task Force 41, Philippine Navy Construction Battalion (Seabees)
HQ: Borongan
Strength: one platoon

C. Western Samar/partial list

1. 19th IB (PA), headquartered at Calbayog City
2. 14th IB (PA)
3. 20th Mechanized Infantry Battalion, 5th ID
4. PC/INP/ICHDP

In Need of a Unified Command. The aforementioned forces constitute part of the Eastern Command (EASCOM), the fifth unified command built within the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Formerly headquartered in Tacloban City, Leyte but is now based in Catbalogan, Western Samar, EASCOM, which is under the supervision of Brig. Gen. Salvador Mison, has an operational area covering the entire Eastern Visayas. It, however, has most of its forces deployed in Samar.

The deployment of the Eastern Command in Samar marks a peak in the intensifying militarization on the island since it began during the mid-70s when the regime first received reports about the presence of NPA guerillas there.

The NPA, acronym for the New People's Army, a communist-led mass movement formed in the late 60s, reportedly fell back to Samar after it suffered serious setbacks in its major strongholds in north and southeastern Luzon upon the declaration of martial law in 1972.

Within Samar's rugged mountains and lush virgin forests and with the help of the historical militancy (dating back from the Balangiga Spirit of 1901 when Samar battled American colonial troops under Gen. "Hell-roaring Jake" Smith) of its poor peasant population, the NPA found good ground for its

armed propaganda and organizing activities.

By the mid-70s, the NPA, so it is reported, was already starting serious consolidation efforts until by the end of the dedade, it already enjoyed political control over many areas in Samar, particularly the hinterland communities.

The growth of the NPA and its spreading influence over Samar has apparently given the regime a justifiable excuse to saturate the island with troops. And throughout the years since the mid-70s, the influx of these troops has gone unabated. Today, Samar ranks only second to Mindanao among the most heavily militarized regions in the country.

A Close Encounter with the Brutal Trooper. The intensifying militarization of Samar is presently being equalled only by the increasing brutality and arrogance with which the military forces stationed there are pursuing their avowed aim: stamp out the NPA menace and create the "economic and political viability the regime so desires in the island.

The situation, which now closely resembles that which characterizes the garrison states of World War II, can be best described by an incident encountered by the fact-finding mission itself while on its way to Catarman from Calbayog City last Nov. 8.

Catarman is about two hours ride away from Calbayog City. The mission was on board a yellow Ford Fiera with plate no. 902 driven by Luciano Demaayo, a 26-year old resident of Dinagan, Calbayog City. Halfway through the trip, the Fiera passed by a group of about seven PC troopers in front of a roadside store in the municipality of San Roque, Northern Samar. The troopers, some of whom were in civilian clothes while others were uniformed and armed were boisterously flagging down the vehicle for a ride to Catarman's town cockpit.

The driver, thinking that they could not be accomodated anymore, drove past them. After about ten meters away, a passenger shouted; in Waray:"Para, kay bub-tuhan 'ta! (Stop, we're about to be fired at!)

It turned out that the PC troopers got piqued because the driver did not stop by them. An armalite-wielding member of the group was already aiming his rifle at the Fiera before it finally stopped at the passenger's warning. When it did, the troopers rushed towards it and began demanding an explanation from the driver. The armalite-wielding trooper brusquely asked him in Tagalog: "Bakit hindi mo kami pinarahan? Anong akala mo sa amin, walang pambayad?" (Why did'nt you stop? Do you think we would not be paying for the fare?) While asking this, the trooper was thrusting his rifle's muzzle up against the leg of the terrified driver.

It was fortunate that there were foreigners, members of the fact-finding mission itself, inside the vehicle, for after a little while, the troopers let go off the driver. But only after they threatened that the poor driver will be dealt with more drastic action on his return from Catarman.

This incident, common as it is all throughout Samar, is pale, however, compared to other recently committed military atrocities the intense brutality of which the fact-finding mission has come in grim terms with.

The Sag-od Massacre. None in the troubled history of Samar, not even the burning of the eastern town of Balangiga by American colonial troops in 1901, can surpass, in terms of intense brutality, this mass extermination of defenseless peasants by elements of the terrorist Special Forces (SF).

On a drizzling dawn that Tuesday, September 15, 1981, 17 SF soldiers marched into Sag-od, a small barrio of Las Navas, Northern Samar abutting the vast concession area of the San Jose Timber Corp. (SJTC), reportedly an Enrile-owned firm, and peremptorily roused its residents from their sleep. The SF, along with two ICHDF guides from Sag-od itself identified only as Udok and Mansing, had come directly from their camp about 7 kilometers away from the barrio and situated deep within the SJTC's operational area.

The testimony of a survivor, Reynalda Durian, 25-year old mother of a one-year old boy and widow of Alejandro Yanay, a fatality, best describes the ensuing events:

> "We had already waken up and I was just opening the windows of our hut. I saw 'Tatang' dragging Minoy Liberando towards the house of my father-in-law, the barrio captain. Another SF trooper was calling out to him: 'Baba, kapitan, baba!' (Get down, kapitan, get down!) At the same time, other SF troopers were rousing up my neighbors -- the men, the women and children, everybody, young and old alike -- out of their still closed homes to assemble for a meeting in front of the barrio captain's house.
> My father-in-law was ordered to let us hurry up in assembling lest the army soldiers came and killed everyone. When we were assembled, we were ordered to form two lines, one for the men and the other, for the women and children. Then we, the women and children, were marched off toward the barrio chapel. Our menfolk were ordered to stay put.
> There were two SF troopers sent along to guard us. While on our way, one of them asked for the way to the schoolhouse. All along, we were being led towards the river. One of us pointed out: 'Dili inihan pakapilya.' (This is not the way to the chapel.) The SF men did not pay heed but instead led us on to cross the river. Across, we were brought to an area planted to abacawith a nipa hut nearby. There, we were made to rest sitting on our haunches. After a few minutes, the SF men once again ordered us to march. We did as ordered but after a little while, we suddenly heard the sound of gunfire coming from the direction of the barrio behind us. I began to run away, thinking that we were already being strafed. After only a short distance, I stumbled into a mud puddle, pinning my son, who started to cry, under me. I did not get up until one of the SF guards came, grabbed my arms and dragged me back to the line. He told me: 'Dili na pagdalagan kay patyon kit.' (Do'nt try running away again or I'll kill you.) When I was back, I heard my mother-in-law tell me not to run away again since the soldiers had no intention of harming us women. At the back of my mind, I knew they did. I remained silent, falling back in line. We continued to march on and then we heard the sound of gunfire again, this time more louder and more intermittent, lasting for about 20 to 30 minutes. It dawned upon us that our menfolk were already being slaughtered. After a while, the firing stopped and I saw one of the SF men wink at his companion, saying: 'Tapos na ang lahat.' (Everything is finished.) Then, both of them tied red kerchiefs around their heads.

I saw the other SF men already coming out of the barrio and heading towards us. Our guards led us toward the Malapanit through which we were ordered to wade. The SF men from the barrio had already caught up with us and altogether, they marched ahead of us. Then, they were onto the stream with the other women and children following, still unaware of our impending fate.
The other women and children had difficulty negotiating the steep decline into the stream, thus delaying our progress. I was behind all of them and I saw this as a good opportunity for escape. Together with two other women and their children, I along with my son, quietly broke away from the group. We ran and ran until we reached the hut of my father-in-law in his upland farm. As we were running, I glanced back and saw that the other women and children were already onto the stream, still in a line but this time with one SF trooper in between each of them.
In a few moments, they were across and we heard the strafing begin."

Of the women and children, only 13 survived. There were two other children who managed to escape from the massacre. They were, however, lost deep within the forest towards which they ran afterwards and died of starvation. These were Andy Yanay (9) and Roda Yanay (6), both grandchildren of the barrio captain.

Of what actually happened during and after the massacre of the women and children, eight-year old survivor Marela Yanay narrates:

"When the strafing started, it was my mother, Aurora, who was among the first hit. She was five months pregnant and was carrying my four-year old brother Jumar with her. She got hit on the forehead while my brother's body was almost torn into half by bullets. I myself survived when my mother pinned me down under her as she fell. Prostrate, I did not get up until the soldiers were all gone and everything was quiet. Then I stood up and felt blood oozing down my neck. I realized that a bullet had grazed me on my head. I also felt my hair completely covered by the shattered brains of my mother. I looked around and saw my dead barriomates. I saw an infant, a kid brother of Elsa who earlier was grabbed from his mother's arm by an SF trooper as it began to cry. The trooper then dropped it on the ground. I approached the infant and found out it was crying. I picked it up and cradled it on my arms, trying to pacify it. Then I felt Elsa approach telling me to put her brother down and leave it alone for it was already better dead . I placed the baby down. Then I, along with Elsa, Andy and Rona (Yanay), ran away from the place. I felt the ground and saw it red with blood. After a while, Andy and Rona stopped and told us they were going back for their mother. Elsa and I told them not to for she was already dead. But they insisted so Elsa and I went ahead until we reached the barrio.

Of the men of Sag-od, none survived, except those who were already in their fields at the time of the massacre. One of them, a certain Danilo, was among the first to arrive at the scene after the gunfiring had stopped.

In his testimony, Danilo said he saw the corpses of the men piled on top of one another in front of the barrio captain's house, on a bermuda-covered gradient. The body of the barrio captain himself, he added, lay a few meters apart from the menfolk, indicating that he got "special treatment" from the SF troopers.

"There was little blood that drenched the place," Danilo says, pointing out the fact that almost all of the men were hit on their heads and other less blood-dense bodily parts. The men, according to the testimony, were apparently fired upon about four or five meters away with the SF troopers positioned a little higher on the gradient with the muzzles of their guns level their slaughtered victims' heads.

(This is corroborated by the skulls, including that of the barrio captain, which were made available for examination by members of the fact-finding mission. Indeed, many of the skulls had bullet punctures. One skull looked like a bullet entered an eyesocket, blasting off half of it away. Other skulls, including one which only had the frontal/facial structure intact, had no crowns or backs left at all.)

It was learned that the Bo. Sag-od was declared a "no man's land" for at least one week after the massacre. Thereafter, regular army troopers came and conducted a cleaning-up operation. A number of corpses, of the menfolk in particular, were placed inside four of Sag-od's houses which were later burned down, thus serving as instant incinerators. Others were buried in hastily dug graves where they were either dug up by wild animals or exposed to the elements, thus hastening their decomposition.

Meanwhile, the perpetrators flee. Col. Ladesmora, also known as "Tatang," was reportedly fetched by a helicopter immediately after the massacre and flown out of Samar. His men, on the other hand, were safe-conducted past the interior towns of Northern and Western Samar finally coming out to Catbalogan where they surrendered their arms to Gen. Salvador Mison. They were then smuggled out in batches from Samar. Military murderers, indeed, protect their own!

How did the residents of Sag-od recognize that their captors and executioners were actually SF troopers? They were, according to survivors interviewed, obvious in their get-up: beards, sneakers and T-shirts worn over camouflage trousers; all wielded arms that were standard military issue ranging from cal. 45 pistols to M16s and Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR).

The Casandig Incident. It was a virtual tragicomedy. Comic, because army troopers and ICHDF elements were enegaged in a shooting war, thinking that their adversaries were NPAs. Tragic, because, in the process, 15 innocent farmers in detention died.

It all started on July 25, 1981 when the army detachment in Casandig, Wright, Western Samar, under CO Pablo Sacaguing, invited farmers from that barrio and from Tutubigan, another barrio, for cockfighting inside the military camp. When the farmers came, Sacaguing began collecting cockfighting fees. A total of ₱50 were collected from the Casandig farmers and another ₱214 from the Tutubigan farmers. When the money was in, the army troopers bought gallons tuba which they drank, along with their CO and a number of ICHDF elements present inside the camp.

As they got drunk, heated discussions arose until finally Sacaguing blew his top off and slammed the table on which they were having a drink. The ICHDF, led by a Rene Cecilio, reacted violently at the gesture and began shooting it out with the army troopers. A certain Maximo and Karkoy, both ICHDF elements, were immediately killed when the troopers returned their fire. Seeing this, the ICHDF ran and took position at the house of Serafin Quebec, a retired army man who operates one of Samar's transports, the Canhagimet Express. Quebec's was, at that time, a safehouse in which 15 farmers arrested during several military operations in Wright, Motiong, Paco, Kan-ligis, Calapi and others, were being illegally detained.

An ICHDF man was firing at army troopers from in front of Quebec's house. Those inside it thought it was being attacked by NPAs, thus pro-

ting them to radio for help from nearby army detachments.

The following morning, July 26, soldiers from nearby detachments of Patag, Lolilokon, Tinani and Lawaan arrived. Immediately, they began firing at the ICHDF whom they saw running and whom they thought were NPAs. Their belief was further shored up when the soldiers who engaged the ICHDF the preceeding day told them that NPAs who had taken refuge inside Quebec's house had attacked.

Immediately thereafter, the newly arrived troopers began firing at Quebec's house where the 15 farmers were still detained. A generator inside the house was promptly hit, causing its gasoline content to flow. At this point, the troopers began firing their grenade launchers and the 105 mm Howitzer cannon which they had brought along directly at the house. It burst into flames burning the 15 detained farmers in it alive. The fire lasted from 7:00 a.m. till 7:00 p.m. Only their charred remains were what was left of the 15 detained farmers.

The Casandig incident was reported in the national dailies in the following version. There were four NPA commanders which the army had captured and detained at Quebec's house. On July 25, an 80-man squad (sic) of NPA rescuers came and entered the house to liberate their comrades. The army cornered them at the house onto which a Howitzer cannon was fired.

This blatantly distorted version of the truth behind the Casandig Incident was reportedly the handiwork of a Col. Hernani Figueroa who apparently wanted to shirk responsibility over the crime and cover up for the stupidity of his men.

The Gebarin Killings. "We strike ... money is the root of all evil. Give us our wages or we all go to hell."

This was the notice that striking workers of the Gebarin (German B. Arañes, Inc.) Logging Corp., an Anglo-Filipino firm operating a 20,000-hectare concession area in the coastal municipality of Marabut, Western Samar, wrote in chalk at the back of a production blackboard in front of the company's motor pool in Bo. Osmeña that same town.

By the time members of the fact-finding mission got to read that notice, it was nearly faded since months had already passed when the strike, prompted by the company's non-payment of wages, first broke out.

But memories of that strike, the "troubles" that it generated, and the ensuing military operations that turned barrios well within the company's concession area, into a virtual hell for about a week last July.

It all started last March when James Steward, British principal in the logging venture, decided to settle the dispute with the workers by issuing a check worth ₱36,000 to pay for the overdue wages. The wages however, were never paid. It is reported that key officers at Gebarin pocketed the whole amount intended for the workers.

One day in May, some ₱28 million-worth of logging equipment stacked in the concession area went up in flames. There are no clear as to who was responsible for the obvious arson. Some reports have it that a number of workers, angry at their being short-changed by management, burned the logging equipment down as a gesture of protest. Others say that it was the handiwork of NPAs in the area whom the workers had approached to help them out of their fix with management. Needless to say, Gebarin's management was quick to react. Slighted by the loss of ₱28 million-worth of equipment and feeling that drastic action was in order, it called in the military to "intercede." What followed was the deployment of a detachment of the 20th Mechanized Infantry Battalion into the area. The detachment pitched camp behind the Gebarin sawmill and established coordination with the company's security, which had a bar-

racks nearby.

In July this year, the detachment, which was under the command of Capt. Virgilio Aspric and Lt. Danilo Punzalan, began punitive military operations. Checkpoints were established at strategic areas within the logging concession. Peasant rattan-gatherers going to and from their workfields in the forest were accosted and made to present their "cedulas," safe conduct passes and other personnel or personal ID papers. When they could not, they were taken captive, brought to the detachment stockade or to the company's security barracks where they were detained tortured, made to suffer various forms of indignities and finally executed.

The fact-finding mission has accounted for 15 peasants who were actually detained and tortured at the stockade or comapny barracks in Gebarin. (Informants in the area point out, however, that there were more but most could be contacted anymore since they were Gebarin migrant labor recruits from Leyte, Cebu and Davao who had already fled with their families at the onset of the "troubles.") Of these 15, 4 have been confirmed "salvaged" right during the course of their detention.

One of the four, Prudito Osena, a 36-year old assistant machine operator at Gebarin, was found buried in a shallow grave in Bo. Osmeña's cemetery. His corpse was already in an advanced state of decomposition. It was his wife, Cesarina, who, acting on relatives' tip, found him on November 2, All Soul's Day, more than three months after his arrest and detention at the Gebarin security barracks last July 19. Prudito was recognized only through the clothes he was wearing the day he was taken.

The three other salvaging cases were identified as Antonio Abon, a certain Dario and Temy. Dario, so survivors say, was executed along with Prudito Osena. Temy, on the other hand, was handpicked for execution together with Antonio Abon.

Juanito Salas, a survivor and brother-in-law of Antonio Abon, narrates:

> "I was arrested at dawn, Wednesday, July 23, 1981, by soldiers who were led by Capt. Aspric and Lt. Punzalan and two local policemen, Oyong Advincula and Manuel Grefiel. Taken with me were my brother-in-law, Tony, and my compadre Alfredo Bachao. We were brought, along with six others, to the security barracks at Gebarin where we were subjected to torture and various indignities. We were ordered to take off out clothes, to dance around, to kiss each other, to fight and punch each other, then to masturbate each other. I myself was hanged by my neck with my feet a little off the ground. In this position, I was punched in various parts of my body for more than five minutes. The others were hogtied with nylon ropes measuring No. 250. Then their hands were pounded by 2" x 2" rods and various other parts of their bodies with rifle butts. The torture lasted until late evening that same day. Then, I saw Aspric pick out Temy from the group of prisoners and ordered his men to brign him to the back of the barracks where in a few moments, we heard a gunshot. Then, a soldier came in again and told Aspric: "Sir, isa pa, sir!' (One more, sir!) This time, it was my brother-in-law who was picked out and likewise shot at the back of the barracks."

Both Antonio Abon and Temy's bodies are still to be found. Many of the survivors, however, believe that both were buried, along with Dario, in a common grave under the shade of a bamboo grove at the back of the barracks.

Of Salas' group composing those who were taken captive during the July 23 operation, eight survived. These are Salas himself, Alfredo Bachao, Avelino Grefiol, Robert Bachao, Esteban Sajurda, Rodrigo Naraja, Sonny Allera, and Diosing Macacado whom Aspric and his men accused of being an NPA commander named Tiger.

On Thursday, following the day they were arrested, the survivors were brought to the 20th MIB, 8 ID headquarters at Parasanon, Pinabacdao, Western Samar. Here, they were detained for a week to let their torture wounds heal first. Thereafter, they were taken to the EASCOM-HQ in Maulong, Catbalogan where they stayed until released on August 23, exactly a month after their arrest.

Meanwhile, on August 26, Gen. Mison, EASCOM commander, arrived at Gebarin to look into military atrocities reported being committed there and to rectify the situation. This was prompted by the exhortation of Operation Bulig (Help) over radio station DYBL-Tacloban to whom the victims were turning to to complain about the Gebarin killings.

Mison's visit reportedly resulted in the transfer of Aspric to Tarlac, Central Luzon where he is said to be heading a new command and carrying the rank of major, Philippine Army. What sweet prize for his brutal performance in Samar. Back at Gebarin, the detachment received a new commander by the name of Romeo Cabutan, captain, PA. By the time the fact-finding mission left last November 7, 11 still to be identified peasants were reported to be in detention at a beachhouse near the detachment camp, courtesies of the new command!

Mass Murder: An Emerging Pattern. The aforementioned cases are but some of the many grave military crimes committed against civilians in Samar today. They, however, stand out from all the rest for they represent an emerging pattern of military abuse -- mass murder.

Mass murder, often in the specific form of open massacres perpetuaagainst ordinary peasant-men, women, children, young and old alike, give further evidence to the increasing blatancy and ruthlessness by which the regime is presently pursuing its policy of "preserving the national security."

By no means is Samar the only theater on which the regime has exclusive applied its mass murdering terror tactics. The Sag-od Massacre, the Casandig Incident and the Gebarin Killings -- all take precedence in the infamous Daet Massacre of June 14, 1981 and theGuinyangan Massacre in Quezon last February 1, 1981.

Military mass murders of civilians, particularly that which to the hapless barrio of Sag-od, has a familiar ring to it. It is reminiscent of how Hitler used deception when he ordered the Jews into the gas chambers during the last World War. In Sag-od, the same air of deception persisted (as in Jews being herded to their deaths ostensibly for "baths") when the SF herded the residents to the slaughter ostensibly at first for a meeting.

With its "record" already bloodied by the Jabiddah Massacre as early as it was still two years in power, the regime has reached a point where it can no more have qualms about trampling on the basic rights of ordinary Filipinos that it is supposed to serve. Hiding behind the legitimized repression that is the New Republic (another lie in the best Hitlerian tradition), the regime today unremorselessly can and is, in fact, killing off many of our countrymen just so that it could assure its continuance in power. This, in the wake of an ever-growing mass movement that threatens to prevent just such a continuance.

In the wake of the intensifying brutality by which the regime has allowed its military forces to conduct the pacification of Samar, its hardy people have stood steadfast in the belief that hope has not died

out on them.

The victims of Sag-od, Casandig and Gebarin may not be resurrected anymore and the intense grief that has befallen their loved ones, cannot, in any manner, be assuaged by grandiose speeches and by acts of pity.

Amid the bitter tears, the persecuted peasant of Samar has long realized that only through the organized action of his people, coupled by the strength that the unity and support that other sectors of Philippine society can give, can he effectively resist the onslaughts of his oppressors.

NOTES:

1. "Tatang" is reportedly one of the aliases used by Col. Lademora of the Mindanao "lost command" notoriety. Lademora is known to use such other pseudonyms as "Soc Rodrigo," "Benigno Aquino," and "Kumander Brown." Other reports have it that Lademora was one of those who perpetuated the Jabiddah Massacre, the mass execution in 1967 in Corregidor island of Muslim commando recruits mobilized by the then two-year old Marcos regime to conduct obvert operations against the North Bornean island of Sabah. The regime then was coveting the island as Philippine territory, a claim disputed by Malaysia.

2. Husband of Nañita Liberando who died during the massacre. His house, which was situated at the east entrance of the barrio through which the SF came, was the first one to be terrorized.

3. Please refer to appendix for a topography of Bo. Sag-od.

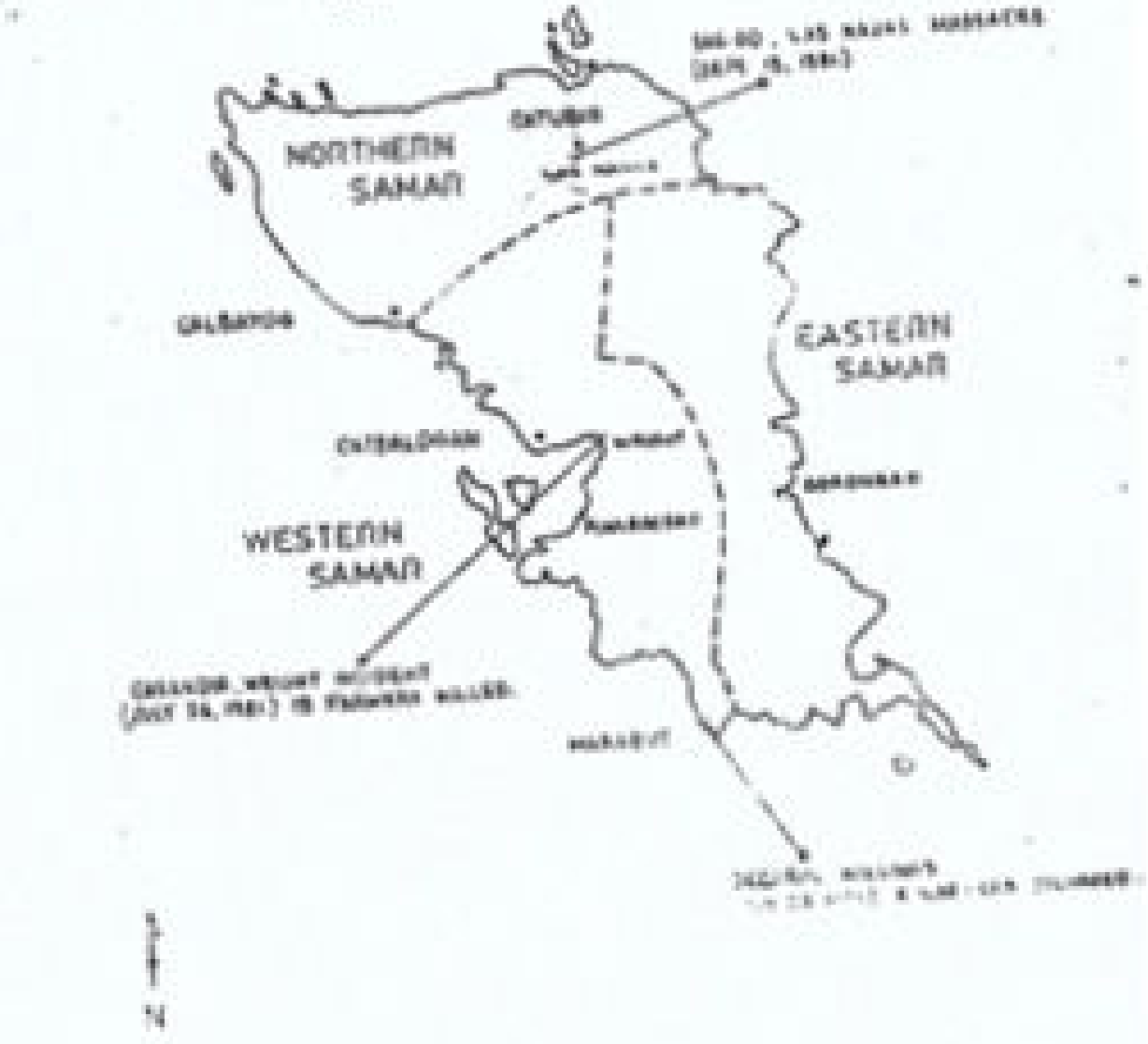
4. See topography attached.

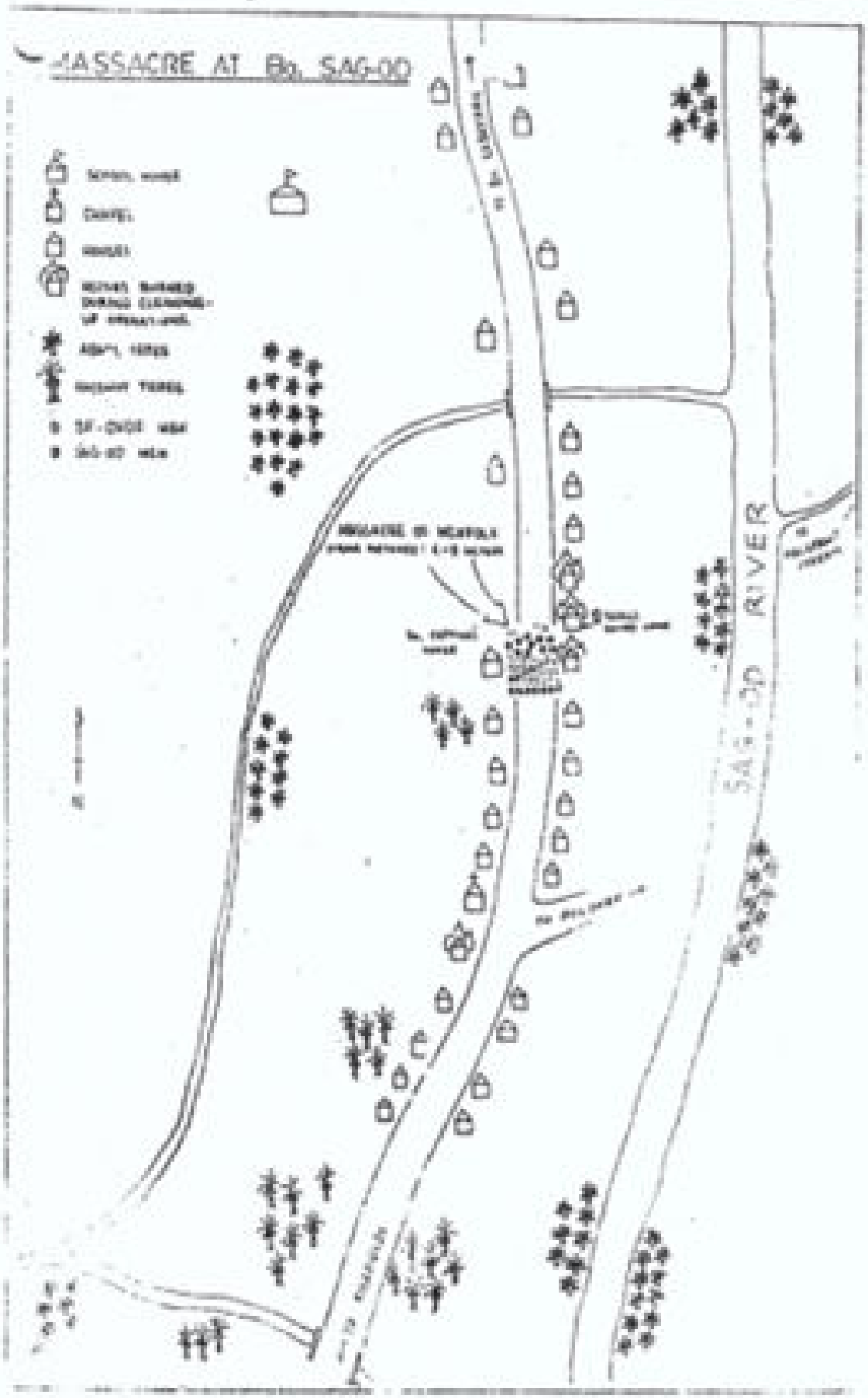
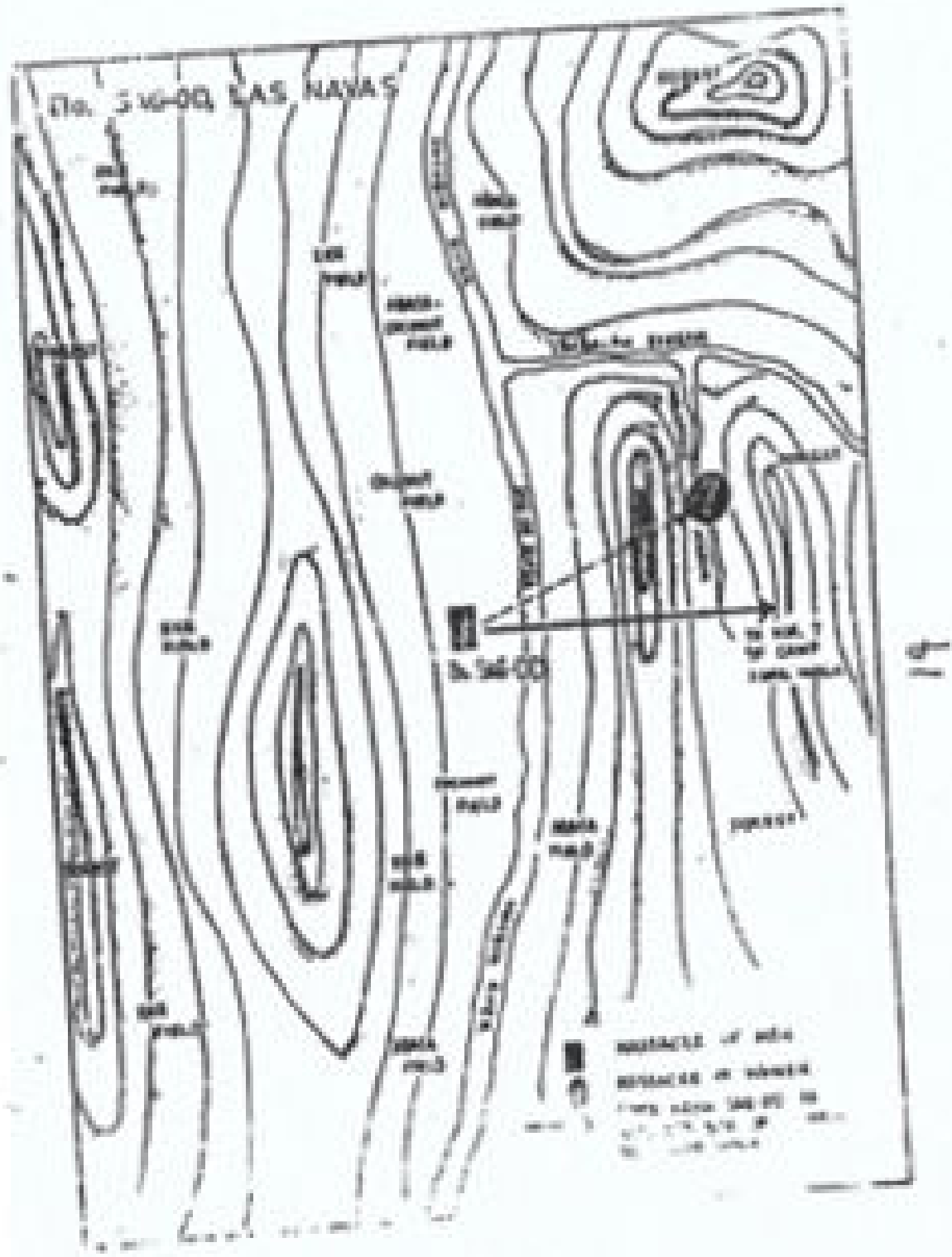
5. The following is a list of the men, women and children who died during the Sag-od Massacre:

a. Bo. Captain Vevencio Yanay (45) and his wife, Meding Ortiz (40); their child Denie Yanay (9)
b. Perto Yanay (33), his wife Aurora Opinion (33), their son Jumar (4)
c. Ansis Reponsion (36), his wife Itang Salingsing (33), their son, Dodo (15)
d. Nonoy Galit (34), his wife Iday Reponcion (28), their children Nengnong (5) and Cadoy (6)
e. Kulas Liberando (55) and his wife Lucila Balinbingan (50)
f. Noli Adora (24) and his wife Bening Arguis (27)
g. Erming Auril (35) and his wife Virginia Galit (35), their son Peter (14)
h. Pio arguis (50 and his daughter Gemma Arguis (14)
i. Alejandro Yanay (20)
j. Ninoy Liberando (27)
k. Venson Golondrina (19)
l. Patik Oben (20)
m. Fania Duran (60) and her child Fe (17)
n. Ita Arguis (65)
o. Oti Ortiz (55)
p. Lara Reponcion (14)
q. Perdon Pahot (47)and his wife Juanita Obiado (30)
r. Estiling Fajenado (37)
s. Atoy Ultra (54); Tacoy Obiado (18); and Nori Cabi (17)

Samar

scale: 1:2,000,000




MASSACRE AT Bo. SAG-OD
SAG-OD RIVER