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WAR OF 1939-45

Received from:

8 MD Rabaul

Class. no. 1010/4/177

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Statements by —
missionaries of Catholic mission, Unapope.

F6041
Replied to
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

A. REGISTRY

No

73/577/

TOR

1400

13 NOV 1945

HQ ANGAU

10 Nov 45

Ref: CA 79/2025

HQ First Army (AIF)

Copy to : 1 Adv 2 Ech

CIVILIANS RECOVERED FROM ENEMY CONTROL: BRO J MAHRHOFER

Attached hereto is a copy of a statement obtained on 3 Nov 45 from the abovenamed who was released from internment on the re-occupation of Rabaul.

2. Bro Mahrhofer advised that he had not been interviewed as to atrocities and that those included in the enclosed statement are all of which he has any authentic knowledge.

Basil Morris

Major General
GOC ANGAU

118

Known/Dead
✓ missing
personnel

ARMED AND DANGEROUS
MILITARY FORCES

TO WHOM
BY WHOM

1000

Brother J Mahrhofer of the Catholic Mission of the Sacred Heart, Vunapope, interviewed at C.T.C., Lae, on 3 Nov 45, stated as follows:

1. When the Japanese invaded New Britain, I was stationed at Vunapope as baker and was so employed until our removal to Ramale.
2. For about a week after the invasion I was aware of Australian soldiers hiding in the vicinity of Vunapope as I was sending them ten or twelve loaves daily by police boys. The Japanese gave me a pass which allowed me to move between the Mission and the Bakery.
3. On, I think, 20 Jan 42, I saw Capt Gray of the Rabaul force being marched between an armed party followed by another party carrying shovels. Later I saw Japanese digging in the vicinity of the Seminary. Boys of the Vunapope school told me that the Captain had been beheaded and buried in that grave.
4. Military Policeman (NCO) Takai was very cruel to Indians, Chinese and Malays. His HQ were near the Mission and I have seen him tie an Indian to a tree and flog him across the face and shoulders with the tail of a ray. The Indian remained tied to the tree for two days and, when released, was set to work carrying big buckets of water. I have often seen Takai flogging persons till they cried out loudly. I have also seen him urinating on the faces of bound natives. I believe Takai was still alive when peace was declared.
5. I saw many Europeans held as prisoners by the Japs early in the invasion but I did not know their names nor was I permitted to speak to them.
6. August Lausen, a half-caste, knows much of the activities of Takai and of Japanese in general and of the movements of civilians.
7. I am no relation to Bro Johann Mayrhofer of Lamengi. His brother is Fr Alfonse Mayrhofer who died sometime in 1943 I think.

Sgd. Brother John Mahrhofer

Witness:

Sgd. A Jamieson WOI

gga 11/11
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

A REGISTRY

No 73/57 T
Tor 1030

HQ ANGAU DATE 11 NOV 1945
8 Nov 45

Ref: CA 79/2012

HQ First Army (AIF)

Copy to : 1 Ad 2 Ech

CIVILIANS RECOVERED FROM ENEMY CONTROL.
BRO A HUTH

Attached hereto is a copy of a statement obtained on 3 Nov 45 from the abovenamed who was released from internment on the reoccupation of Rabaul.

2. A copy of the statement has been forwarded to DO Rabaul with instructions that Timian be contacted and questioned (see para 4 of statement).

Basil Horni

Major General
GOC ANGAU

Brother A Huth of Vunapope Mission interviewed at Civilian Transit Camp, Lae, on 3 Nov 45 stated as follows :

1. I was stationed at Vunapope when the Japanese landed in Rabaul. After six weeks of being confined to the precincts of the Mission, I, with Bros Schueltingkaemper and Wochner, were permitted to grow foods at Takubar Plantation for the use of the mission and remained on that work till peace was declared.
2. Bro Rischoff told me that Mr Guy Allen and a Methodist missionary from Watnabara were taken away from the Duke of York Is to Rabaul on a small vessel by the Japanese about 26 Jan 42.
3. I have seen the Swiss Hoffstetter several times when he visited Vunapope. I last saw him about the middle of 1942. I did hear (from whom I can't remember) that he joined the Japanese at Salamaua and was taken by them to Rabaul. He seemed to have a fair amount of freedom as he was usually accompanied by an interpreter only.
4. About June or July '43, one of my labourers asked me had I seen two American Airmen and when I said 'No' he told me that they had been hiding in a drain not far from where I had been standing. When I moved on they had come out and asked the boy to take them to the nearest Japanese camp. This he did. While I was talking to the boy, the two airmen passed in the custody of Japanese police on the way to Kokopo. The Jap camp at which they surrendered was on Takubar but I believe their escort had been sent in from Kokopo. I was never able to learn where their plane had crashed and I did not know of any crashing in the locality about that time. I cannot describe them from the brief sight I had of them but the 'boy' told me that both were tall and very young, one with very fair hair being exceptionally tall. Both are of slender build. It is possible that the driver of the police truck in which they were being taken to Kokopo is Timan of Liyuan village, and he may remember the occasion. Incidentally Timan should be able to give valuable information regarding members of the Rabaul force and crashed airmen as he was driver for the Kokopo police right from the beginning of Japanese occupation. He knows the fate of many of them as he was told much by the Japanese and actually witnessed captures and punishments. He has said, on several occasions, that he could tell many stories but was afraid.
5. A camp of European (British) POW was established at Takubar. I was not allowed contact with them. It was established about Oct/Nov 1942. The inmates came from Singapore. I estimated that they were about 450 in number. About Feb 43 the majority of them were moved leaving 84 incapacitated behind. During several surreptitious conversations with some of the remainder, I arranged to leave food where they could pick it up as they were obviously starved. This was discovered by 'Gunso' Higaki - then a private - one of the guards. He was sympathetic and gave me permission to leave limited quantities where it could be picked up but emphasised that larger quantities would draw the suspicions of the other guards. On 9 Feb 44, 21 moved (I learned from Higaki after peace was declared) to Watom I - the other 63 having died of disease accentuated by starvation. Inmates told me that Higaki was very humane towards them and helped them in every way he could even giving them his own issues of quinine and medicines.
6. I myself received kindness at the hands of Pte Furogave (Kamutcho Unit) in receiving damaged supplies and his omitting to report matters which would have brought me into serious trouble.
7. I was told by Papuan boys of the Mission that Capt Gray of the Rabaul force was killed near Vunapope for refusing to divulge Military secrets. He was tied to a coconut tree and coconuts were thrown against his stomach. Still refusing to talk, he was decapitated. (Sgt?) Chikami and Sugai (interpreter) were members of the interrogation and execution party.

8. I have already told members of the Atrocities Commission of other atrocities known to me including assaults on Bro Wochner and myself.

Sgd. Bro A Huth MSC

Witness:

A Jamieson WOI

Notes from HQ ANGAU records.

ref para 2. Rev H B Sheldon was Methodist Missionary of Watnabara.

3. Hoffstetter - was engaged in mining in the Morobe District. He disappeared early in 1942 while under surveillance by NGVR and has since been reported as seen assisting the Japanese in various parts of the Territory.