

Guerrilla Priest: Al Griffiths and the Resistance Movement in Kalinga in World War II

STEPHEN GRIFFITHS

The Cordillera Review: Journal of Philippine Culture and Society 4 (2): 3–36.
<https://doi.org/10.64743/ZPCG6526>

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of World War II, Al Griffiths was priest-in-charge of St. Paul's Mission in Balbalasang, Kalinga, the Philippine Episcopal Church's most isolated mission. With the support of Balbalasang's Chief Puyao, Griffiths helped the miner Walter Cushing organize the first guerrilla resistance to the Japanese in northern Luzon. Their 121st company of guerrillas ambushed the Japanese at Lamonan and inflicted significant casualties. After General Wainwright surrendered on Bataan, Cushing ordered Griffiths to cease his guerrilla efforts. Knowing that the Japanese wanted to capture him, Griffiths and his family, together with the mission nurse Dottie Taverner, went into hiding in the forest. They were captured in March 1943 and interned in Camp Holmes near Baguio and later at the Bilibid Prison in Manila. General MacArthur's 37th Infantry liberated them in February 1945. In addition to describing early resistance in the Cordillera to the Japanese invasion, this article provides an intimate glimpse of the American colonial experience in the Philippines and its impact on the Tingguian people. It also presents an unexpected portrait of Japanese soldiers and their commanders, defying stereotypes.

Keywords: Japanese invasion, resistance movement, World War II, Kalinga, Philippine Episcopal Church

I hid out in the mountains of Luzon for 16 months with my wife and child. When the Japanese captured me, I was tied to a bed for two weeks. The Japanese officer said he was going to kill me. He gave me a shovel. I thought I was going to dig my grave, but it turned out to be a Japanese trench. After digging trenches for two days, I was sent down to the Baguio concentration camp and then to Bilibid here in Manila. It was a tough old life, but I have no regrets. But it sure is good to see the old Yanks again, believe me!

On the Army Intelligence film, my father's voice is strong, and he speaks with no hesitation: It is February 1945, and he has just been liberated from a Japanese prisoner of war camp in the Philippines. The camera captures him from the waist up. Standing under a tree by a sun-drenched wall, he is thinner and younger than I have ever

seen him. His hair is long and wavy. He is wearing a short-sleeved cotton shirt that is too big for him. His smile is bright and expressive. Shadows of leaves flicker across his face. Mortar guns boom in the distance. The 37th Infantry is still fighting for possession of Manila, the capital city. He speaks in a Boston accent I had forgotten he had.

His is the last interview on a 90-minute film titled *Death, Escape & Liberation: POWs in the Philippines During World War II*. I didn't know it existed until recently when an acquaintance brought it to my attention. My father, an Episcopal priest, never told me the story he relates on camera to Army Intelligence. Only when he was with friends who had been in prison camp with him did he—or my mother—ever talk about their wartime experiences. Instead, they each wrote an account of the war for my sister and me to have. This essay is derived from their two unpublished memoirs.¹

When I began editing and rewriting my parents' manuscripts, I was much older than they were when they lived through the experiences described in this narrative. I was constantly amazed—and sometimes very moved—by how they coped with their extraordinary circumstances. This project has reintroduced me to my parents and given me a new affection and respect for them and for other civilians caught up in the great changes that wartime demands.

A Whirlwind Courtship

Al Griffiths, a native of Massachusetts and fresh out of Virginia Theological Seminary, first went to the Philippines in 1931 to become the chaplain of Brent School in Baguio City. An Episcopal Church school, Brent served the sons and daughters of American colonial officials, missionaries, miners, and entrepreneurs.

Eager to become acquainted with the Episcopal Church's mission work in northern Luzon, Al traveled throughout the Mountain Province² during school vacations. He was especially enchanted by his visit to Balbalasang in the sub-province of Kalinga.

On the upper reaches of the Saltan River and surrounded on all sides by pine-forested mountains like an amphitheater, the village was home to the Episcopal Church's most isolated mission, reached by a three-day hike from Laganilang in Abra Province to the west or a two-day hike from Lubuagan in the mountainous interior.

Not long after the United States acquired the Philippines from Spain in 1898, the Secretary of the Interior for the Philippines, Dean C. Worcester, visited Balbalasang on a tour of northern Luzon. In his account of the 1905 journey, he wrote:

We visited several of the wilder settlements of the Tingians in Abra, then made a hard climb over Mount Pico de Loro and descended its eastern slopes to the Tingian village of Balbalasan in the Saltan River valley. Its people, while not really head-hunters, were often obliged to defend themselves against their Kalinga neighbours, and were consequently well armed. (Worcester 1914, 538)

Balbalasang villagers were famous throughout the region for their skill in crafting machetes, spears, and head axes. The Tingguian, like other mountain tribes in northern Luzon known collectively as Igorots, had maintained their independence throughout three-hundred years of Spanish colonial rule, never becoming acculturated like their lowland brethren. In contrast, the Americans and the Igorots quickly took to each other. Americans admired the Igorots' bravery and independent streak, and Igorots saw the advantages to be gained in education and health care by forming close associations with the new colonialists—perhaps none more so than Puyao, the chief of Balbalasang.

Puyao had been appointed mayor of the Balbalan District in Kalinga shortly after the Spanish-American War. Respected and loved by his people, Chief Puyao had encouraged villagers to build an elementary school and teachers' quarters with wood they cut and carefully hewed from the forest. American colonial authorities were so impressed by his initiative that they assigned a supervising teacher and four assistants to the school (Fry 2006, 161). Exploring the advantages to be gained by an even closer association with Americans, Chief Puyao invited the Episcopal Church to establish a mission in Balbalasang. The first missionary arrived in 1925.

In 1936, the priest-in-charge of St. Paul's Mission in Balbalasang resigned. When Al heard the news, he asked the Episcopal Bishop of the Philippines for the assignment. Now serving as the chaplain of St. George's School in Rhode Island, Al missed the Philippines and was eager to return to the Islands in a new role as a missionary rather than as a school chaplain. The Bishop quickly assented.

By 1936, St. Paul's Mission had grown to include a small church and several outstations, a dispensary, a girls' dormitory for students from neighboring villages who attended the elementary school, and two residences for mission staff. The buildings were made of pine and had thatched roofs. Dottie Taverner, a plump and cheerful British nurse in her fifties, staffed the dispensary.

Balbalasang villagers called their new priest "*Padji*" (father). His mission house stood on a hill above the church and plaza. He had a grand view of the Saltan River Valley and the village below, almost hidden by coffee and tangerine trees. On both sides of the

pine-forested valley, villagers had carved rice terraces fed by water drawn from mountain streams. At planting, the fields were a rich, muddy gray. They quickly turned bright green with seedlings and matured to a warm golden brown at harvest. Flowing through sun-washed granite boulders, the Saltan River rushed past the village. Al swam in it almost every day. He wrote his friends in Massachusetts that the river was as fresh, clear, and sparkling as champagne.

One evening in the summer of 1937—after he had been in Balbalasang almost a year—Al turned on his short-wave radio to listen to the news. He was surprised to learn that the Japanese had attacked Shanghai and that all American women and children there were being evacuated by ship to Manila. Wondering if a woman he had met at a church conference the year before—and who taught in Shanghai—might be among the refugees, Al made the long trek out of Balbalasang, caught a bus to Manila, and was dockside when the ship pulled in. Yes, she was on board, but what he didn't know—and was soon to find out—was that she had just been married. The women in her wedding party were with her, including her unmarried sister Nessie Coles, a teacher in Hawaii.

Al and Nessie quickly struck up a friendship and for the next nine evenings in a row they dined and danced—at the grand Manila Hotel, the Army-Navy Club, and the huge Santa Ana dance hall. They made a striking couple. Thin and as tall as Al, Nessie had wavy black hair and pale, white skin. She wore no jewelry, her only make-up lipstick. Al's curly blonde hair had turned gray at the temples, but he was trim and tanned from his swimming and mountain hiking. He smiled often, making his green eyes sparkle.

After this whirlwind courtship, Nessie sailed back to Hawaii to begin the school year and Al returned to his work in Balbalasang. They began to correspond, and it wasn't long before Al proposed marriage. Nessie accepted. In November 1938, they were married at St. John's pro-cathedral in Shanghai (so Nessie's sister could be her Maid of Honor).³ They honeymooned in Hong Kong, then sailed to the Philippines to begin their married life in Balbalasang.

Al and Nessie soon found that their life took on a pleasant pattern. Each morning, Nessie would attend Al's early morning mass. While Al visited parishioners and attended to his church work, Nessie supervised the household, planned meals, and wrote letters to her family. Early each afternoon they took a short siesta. Then Al and the elementary school teachers met on the school plaza for a tennis match. At five Nessie and Al had tea. When villagers returned from working in their fields, the church bell rang for vespers. Each evening after the service, Al and Nessie walked through Balbalasang to visit villagers before returning home for dinner.

As weeks went by, Nessie noticed that villagers always asked Al the same question. Finally, one evening she asked him what it was.

He told her what she was beginning to suspect—they were inquiring if she were pregnant.

“And what do you tell them?”

“Oh, not for twelve years!”

Nessie gave birth to her daughter Katy in December 1939.

The First Days of War

By mid-1941, Al and Nessie's concerns of an impending Pacific war grew daily. In July, the U.S. Navy mined Manila Bay in anticipation of a Japanese attack. In October, U.S. High Commissioner to the Philippines, Francis B. Sayre, canceled a planned trip to Balbalasang, the political situation too tense for him to be absent from headquarters. Radio reports were so pessimistic that Al and Nessie thought war might break out at any moment.

As a precaution, Nessie mailed an emergency order for canned goods and supplies along with her usually large Christmas order. In case they had to evacuate quickly, she packed a *pasiking* (Tingguian backpack) with a change of clothing, a raincoat, and an extra pair of shoes each, a five-pound tin of powdered milk, two tins of oatmeal, matches, and a flashlight.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The U.S. declared war on Japan the following day. Within 24 hours of the attack, the Japanese landed an advance force of 2,000 men at Vigan, a coastal town 80 kilometers directly west of Balbalasang (Norling 1999, 23). Lowlanders fled into the mountains. Schools closed, and children made their way home as fast as they could. An officer commanding a company of Filipino soldiers in the neighboring province of Abra found his way to Balbalasang and reported to Chief Puyao that his soldiers had deserted. Rumors spread rapidly: All the Chinese merchants in Vigan had been hanged and Roman Catholic nuns in Bangued raped. On December 22, a main force of 43,000 Japanese soldiers, under the direction of General Homma, landed at Lingayen Gulf and quickly moved south to oppose American forces defending Bataan and Corregidor (Norling 1999, 23).

On the sixth day of the war, just as Al and Nessie, and their dinner guest Dottie, were sitting down to eat, a villager burst into the house with the news that an American family was approaching Balbalasang—and the mother was about to give birth. Dottie quickly grabbed a kettle to heat water. Within minutes Garnett and Dolly

Morris and their five-year-old daughter Denis arrived. Much to Dottie's relief, Dolly was not in labor.

Garnett operated a small gold mine 40 kilometers west of Balbalasang. As the Japanese moved inland from the coast, he was afraid to keep his family there any longer. Al and Nessie urged the Morrisses to rest for a few days before continuing on to the Batong-Buhay Mine, south of Balbalasang where a physician was on staff. Instead they chose to remain in Balbalasang, and, at Dottie's invitation, settled in on the upper floor of her home. A few weeks later, under Dottie's expert care, Dolly gave birth to a son.

Their next visitor was Walter Cushing, who with his partner, "Pee Wee" Ordun, operated a gold mine very near Morris's. Not having forgotten the fun they had panning for gold on his last visit, Al and Nessie were delighted to see him again. Cushing was on his way to Batong-Buhay to radio the United States Army Headquarters on Bataan for approval to organize a guerrilla company. He had gathered up the weapons and ammunition deserting Filipino Army units had left behind and hidden them in a tunnel at his mine. He was eager to put them to use.

Cushing was a dashing figure, with striking good looks. His father was Canadian and his mother Mexican. Slight in stature, he had dark skin and bright blue eyes. His parents met while his father was working at a silver mine in Mexico. The family moved to Los Angeles where Walter, the oldest of 10 children, graduated from high school. In the 1930s, two of Walter's brothers went to the Philippines to work in the gold mines. Walter wanted to join them, but he was married, the father of a child, and broke. He got a job as a steward on the *President Hoover* and jumped ship when it reached Manila. Once he found work, he sent for his family.

The subsequent failure of his marriage spun Walter into a nine-month drinking binge. To sober up, he planned to set sail for Saigon to join the French Foreign Legion but his friend Pee Wee Ordun intervened. Pee Wee persuaded Walter to join him in opening the Rainbow Mine in Baay, Abra. Cushing was 34 years old when the war broke out (Ordun 1943, 1-2).

On Christmas Eve, Cushing returned to Balbalasang from Batong-Buhay. With great excitement, he reported he had received permission to organize a guerrilla company, the first formed in northern Luzon to fight the Japanese. From the mine, he brought boxes of chocolate for the women, all-day suckers for Katy and Denis, and several five-pound tins of powdered milk. In a hurry to return to his mine, he wouldn't stay and celebrate Christmas.

Christmas morning dawned cool, clear, and bright. Both the mission and village were festive with red poinsettia. Al conducted the Christmas service at eight. Then he and Nessie entertained the

village children with a party at their house. The party ended with the distribution of gifts and candy—and a big peanut scramble down the hillside to the church plaza below. With cries of “Merry Christmas!” the youngsters returned home.

That afternoon Al, Nessie, and their guests—Dottie, the Morrisses, and Pee Wee—sat down for Christmas dinner—turkey with all the trimmings and cherry pie for dessert. Al amused them by reading a Christmas note from an old friend in Massachusetts. His friend wrote that he would have to bear the brunt of war if it should come—while Al could live peacefully among his Tingguian friends and watch the clouds roll by day-by-day—safe in his Philippine Shangri-La.

Little did any of them know while feasting that day that all of them would be imprisoned during the war, three would perish, and it would be years before those who survived would be rescued. Walter Cushing himself would be shot and killed in an ambush in less than a year.

Ambush at Lamonan

While on home leave in the summer of 1940, Al had been commissioned as a chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve. Cushing asked him to organize a guerrilla company in Balbalasang, and he quickly agreed, although he worried that his Bishop would not approve. The goal of his 121st Company would be to prevent Japanese movements from Abra in the west to the town of Balbalan in the east. Guerrillas would also carry dynamite from Batong-Buhay to the lowlands where Cushing would use it to blow up bridges and roads, frustrating the Japanese advance on Manila. Cushing gave Al the rank of Lieutenant, and he asked Chief Puyao and the villagers to address Al as “Lieutenant” rather than their familiar “*Padji*.” Al was to take his orders from Colonel John Horan. The Commandant of Camp John Hay in Baguio, Horan had been caught away from his company when the war broke out, and he had fled to Lubuagan. There he lived with the Rev. and Mrs. Nagel at the Kalinga Academy.

Al asked Chief Puyao’s son-in-law Santos to be his first lieutenant and Frederick Dao-ayan, a villager who taught at the elementary school, to be his second lieutenant. Al used the school building as the headquarters for the 121st. Within days thirty-seven Balbalasang men joined the company.

At dawn on January 19th, Cushing and his men attacked two convoys of Japanese soldiers when they entered the coastal town of Candon in the province of Ilocos Sur. Sixty-nine Japanese were killed and fourteen trucks were captured or destroyed (Norling 1999, 2). The raid was “the heaviest blow the Japanese suffered anywhere in



Figure 1. Map of Northern Luzon.

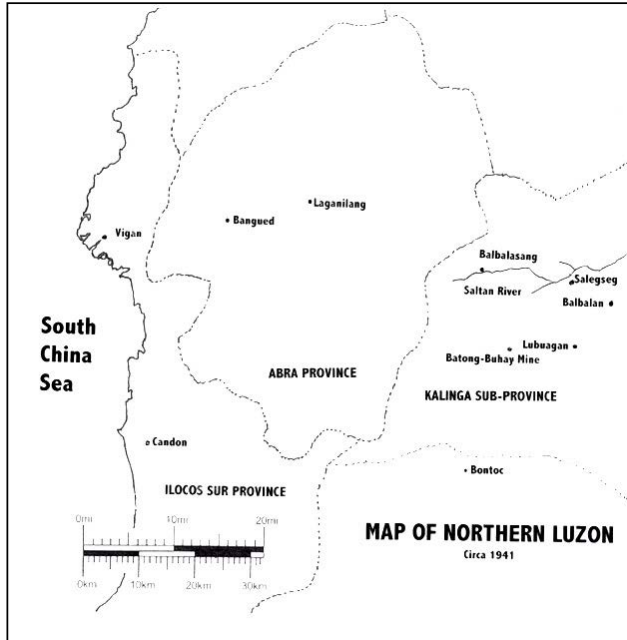


Figure 2. Map of Northern Luzon, circa 1941, showing location of places cited in the article.



Figure 3. Balbalasang Valley, late 1940s. (All photos accompanying this article, except Figures 6, 7, and 15 were taken by Al Griffiths.)



Figure 4. Village homes in Balbalasang.

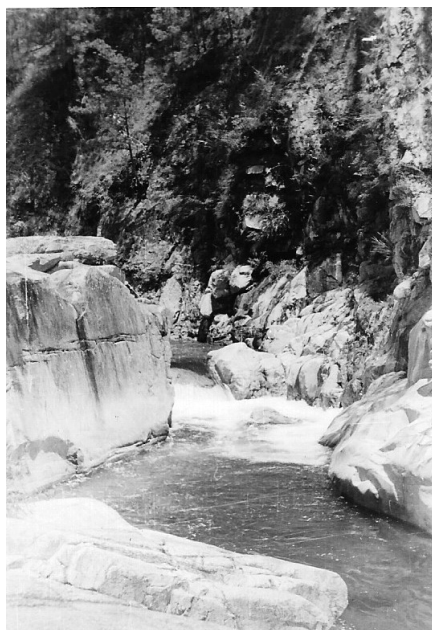


Figure 5. Saltan River.



Figure 6. Portrait of Al Griffiths, likely taken not long after he first arrived in the Philippines in the early thirties.



Figure 7. Al and Nessie Griffiths in their mission home in Balbalasang which was burned by the Japanese during the war.

North Luzon in the first month of World War II" (Norling 1999, 2). News of Cushing's success soon reached Colonel Horan in Lubuagan who promptly proclaimed him a major in the guerrilla resistance (Norling 1999, 3).

Cushing seized large supplies of food at Candon, including 50 bags of flour. Al's guerrillas carried the flour to Balbalasang where he dispensed it to civilians and guerrillas as needed. He had forty bags transferred to Mapga, an evacuation camp his guerrillas had built for him beside the Mapga River, about three kilometers from Balbalasang. Much of the flour, Nessie discovered, was infested with weevils. Whenever any was needed, she and Katy's *amah* Hilda would spend a morning sifting it. They gave extra special care to the flour Al sent to Father Albert, the Roman Catholic priest in Salegseg, who used it to make communion wafers.

February and March were quiet, but on a Sunday in April, Al received a message to report to Colonel Horan in Lubuagan at once. Normally, it took two days to reach the town via the main trail. But Al and his two guerrilla companions took a short cut over the mountains, and reached Lubuagan at nightfall after a long and strenuous day of hiking. He discovered that Colonel Horan had no urgent need to see him. The Colonel told Al that he was having trouble getting Al's commission, as Army Headquarters had no record of his appointment as a chaplain in the Reserves. Al had his appointment papers with him so Horan radioed his serial number to Headquarters.

Meanwhile, back at Balbalasang, a runner came to Nessie with a message for Al from Major Cushing. The Japanese—eight hundred strong—were on their way from Abra to Lubuagan. Cushing planned to ambush the enemy at Lamonan, in the midst of a pine forest about 15 kilometers west of Balbalasang. Al was to evacuate all villagers immediately. Since Santos was on a scouting mission for Al, Nessie sent for Frederick Dao-ayan and Garnett Morris. They decided to dispatch a runner to Batong-Buhay to radio a message to Colonel Horan and Al and a second runner to take the shortcut to Lubuagan in case the radio at Batong-Buhay was not working. Dao-ayan also sent runners to villages along the trail, urging villagers to evacuate and to take their food supplies and animals with them.

Nessie's anxiety grew by the minute. She kept herself busy packing—clothes, food, blankets, and Al's important papers. He arrived at seven that evening, near exhaustion from having hiked as quickly as he could over the rough mountain trail. The radio message had reached him as he and Colonel Horan were having an early morning breakfast. After Al showered and rested for a bit, Nessie served him a chicken dinner by candlelight.

Nessie's intent was to leave for Mapga the next morning with Dottie and Dolly, but she could not sleep. The longer she lay awake

the more convinced she became that the guards Dao-ayan had posted by the trail to Abra were asleep. At midnight, she woke Al and begged him to take her and Katy to Mapga. She wrapped two-year-old Katy in a blanket and handed her to one of Al's guerrillas who had been sleeping on the kitchen floor. He carried her slung in the blanket on his back.

Despite its short distance from Balbalasang, Mapga was difficult to reach. The trail followed the swiftly flowing Mapga River. The midnight evacuees had to cross and re-cross it thirteen times. The air was still and balmy, the sky alight with stars, rushing water and footsteps the only sounds.

Just as they turned off the main path to go deeper into the forest, they saw a brilliant shooting star streak across the sky, its golden tail seeming to hover for breathless seconds before disappearing beyond the rim of the mountains. Nessie hoped the shooting star was a good omen, that all would be well with them.

As soon as Nessie and daughter Katy were settled at Mapga, Al returned to Balbalasang. He got just two hours of sleep before going down to the village to ask for volunteers to help evacuate Dottie and Dolly. Garnett had already left for the ambush.

Cushing had expected only 30 guerrillas to participate in the ambush, but as news of it spread, guerrillas from other units showed up as well as two Philippine Constabulary squads (Norling 1999, 26). He ordered Al not to leave for the ambush until the village was completely evacuated. At Chief Puyao's direction, villagers had built themselves an evacuation camp high in the mountains at a place called Maatop. Fearing that the Japanese would steal their horses and eat their pigs, they were up early, carrying food supplies and driving their animals up the paths to their hideaway.

By noon, Al had Dolly and her children on the way to Mapga, but Dottie insisted on remaining behind to pack medical supplies as well as her most cherished possessions. She wasn't ready to leave until late in the afternoon. Only then could Al, accompanied by one of his guerrillas, make his way up the mountain trail to Lamonan.

As they climbed higher, the trail became shrouded in clouds and a cool, heavy mist. Shortly, they met two young men headed back to Balbalasang. One handed a note to Al. Opening it, he discovered the note was from Garnett to Dolly. It read: "Dear Dolly, the Japanese are getting nearer. Our ambush is ready. I shall do my best." Al added a note to Nessie: "Dear Nessie, I am on my way to the ambush. I'll do my best for my country. Love, Al" (Griffiths 1946, 25).

Night fell. Before Al and his companion reached the summit, they could hear gunfire in the distance. They pressed on, the gunfire getting louder and louder with each step. Suddenly, they heard voices and the sound of men rushing down the trail toward them.

They stepped off the trail, not sure what to expect. Al was relieved to discover the voices belonged to Cushing, Garnett, and American soldiers and guerrillas who had participated in the ambush. An elated Cushing told Al the ambush had gone well.

Meeting no resistance on their long trek into the mountains, the Japanese had made three fatal mistakes. First, they neglected to send scouts ahead. Second, the advance guard marched close together, perhaps unnerved by the sights and sounds of a Southeast Asian rainforest. Third, the soldiers placed their helmets over the ends of their guns to protect the weapons from the mist.

When the lead soldiers were only a few feet away, Cushing opened fire and simultaneously set off dynamite charges. The Japanese were slaughtered. Those who made it through the initial assault became disoriented and ended up firing on each other while Cushing and his men fled. The next morning, survivors hastily buried the dead in shallow graves and retreated with their wounded to Bangued, the provincial capital of Abra. None of Cushing's guerrillas was injured or killed.

How many Japanese died at Lamonan is not clear from the few existing accounts of the ambush. Pee Wee Ordun, who was later captured by the Japanese and imprisoned at Cabanatuan, wrote a nine-page description of Cushing and his guerrilla activities. According to Ordun, seven thousand Japanese marched into Abra after the fall of Bataan in April 1942. About a thousand hiked from Bangued to Lubuagan, their trail taking them right through Balbalasang. Ordun (1943, 5) writes, "On their way Cushing met them in two or three ambuscades." In one of these ambushes, the Japanese fired on their own men. No doubt this was the ambush at Lamonan.

The American historian Bernard Norling provides a more detailed account of the Lamonan ambush in his book, *The Intrepid Guerrillas of North Luzon*:

One of Cushing's most spectacular coups took place on April 17, 1942, when he ambushed a company of the Japanese 122nd Infantry near Balbalasang in Kalinga Province.... The enemy, overconfident and unheeding as they often were early in the war, marched into a defile in a column of fours. The ambushers opened fire, inflicting substantial casualties on the leading elements. Meanwhile a Japanese company in the rear tried to outflank the guerrillas but became confused in the dark and opened fire on its own advance guard instead.... The intramural battle among the Japanese continued until an estimated 160 of the enemy were killed. (Norling 1999, 8)

Al, Cushing, and the guerrillas reached Balbalasang at ten in the evening. Al took them up to his house and cooked them a meal

with food Nessie had left behind. He sent a runner to Lubuagan with a message for Colonel Horan that the ambush had been a success. Both he and Cushing expected the Japanese to continue their push to Lubuagan. When the Japanese would arrive in Balbalasang—and what they might do to retaliate for the ambush—was anybody's guess.

After eating, the men continued on to Mapga. The next morning they woke to a breakfast of fresh scones and hot oatmeal prepared by Nessie, Dottie, and Dolly. Cushing ate his quickly. He was anxious to leave for Batong-Buhay to dismantle the radio there before the Japanese could find it. He ordered the American soldiers who had participated in the ambush to join guerrilla units hiding in the mountains, concerned that they were too big a drain on Al's meager resources.

In just days a villager arrived in camp with the news everyone had been expecting: The Japanese had reached Balbalasang. Over a three-week period, hundreds of them passed through the village on their way to Lubuagan. They marched in small groups with captured American soldiers and Filipinos forced to carry their supplies.

Al and Nessie and all those hiding at Mapga knew they were in great danger. To this point the Balbalasang people had been very loyal to them, but now that the Japanese were in control of the village, they weren't sure what to expect.

When the last Japanese soldier left Balbalasang, they breathed a sigh of relief. Al and Santos quickly returned to Balbalasang to see how much damage the Japanese had inflicted on the mission and the village. In Al's house and also Dottie's, soldiers had smashed windows, torn pictures from the walls, stuffed newspapers down the toilets, and defecated in all the rooms. At the church, they had ripped the Stations of the Cross from the walls, torn apart the sacristy where the vestments and hymnbooks were stored, and used the altar as a butcher block for the chickens and pigs they stole from villagers. They littered every village house they occupied, and ordered villagers to cut down coconut and banana trees so they could more easily get the fruit.

Dispirited, Al returned to Mapga. Cushing arrived from Batong-Buhay with news that dispirited him even more: General MacArthur had fled to Australia and Corregidor had fallen to the Japanese on May 6th. General Jonathan Wainwright—who had surrendered on Bataan in April—had ordered all forces resisting the Japanese to surrender. Colonel Horan had already done so in Lubuagan—on June 2nd—and had sent a message to Al via Cushing that if he decided to surrender, he should hike to Lubuagan carrying a white flag.

That night the small band of refugees at Mapga sat around their campfire, all rather depressed. Singing a few of their old favorite

songs didn't improve their spirits. None wanted to surrender. Each knew too much about the guerrilla movement to risk being interviewed by the Japanese. They decided that if the Japanese wanted them, they would simply have to come and get them.

In the morning Cushing announced he had decided to establish his guerrilla headquarters at an old abandoned mine at Guinguinabang—a two-day hike from Balbalasang. He ordered Al to cease his guerrilla efforts and have the 121st hide its military equipment. Before he departed—after a mass Al celebrated in the church—he told villagers not to address Al any longer as “Lieutenant” but to use their familiar “*Padji*.”

Hiding in the Forest

By June 1942, the Japanese had rounded up most American civilians in the Philippines—miners, missionaries, teachers, students, and entrepreneurs—and placed them in prison camps—Santo Tomas, Los Baños, and Camp Holmes, among others. Altogether the Japanese incarcerated approximately 5,000 American civilians (Cogan 2000, 12). Almost all had surrendered to the Japanese willingly. Only a handful tried to escape imprisonment.

The Japanese had a special reason for wanting to capture the *Padji* and his family, revealed in a report written by someone named Concepcion, a lowlander educated at Cornell University (Griffiths 1946, 17). Concepcion was a spy for the Japanese. His report reads:

Father Griffiths has never been an active military man, but he has great moral influence over the people of Balbalasang, who are a warlike tribe obeying old Puyao blindly...If Griffiths, who is with his family, surrenders, it is most likely he will be able to persuade the Balbalasang people to return to their village [from their evacuation camps], and thus normalize the rest of Kalinga. Kalinga is liable to be yet a “trouble area” unless controlled in time. Civilian travelers find staying in Kalinga villages very dangerous unless one is accompanied by an American. (Concepcion 1942, 5)

When Al learned that the Japanese were sending his friend Rev. Nagel of the Kalinga Academy, to Balbalasang to ask him to surrender, he decided to leave the comfortable camp at Mapga and hide elsewhere. He knew Nagel would have no trouble finding a villager to lead him to Mapga, and he did not want to see him. Chief Puyao advised Al to make his new camp at Masablang, west of Balbalasang. There villagers had hillside gardens. Al and his family, along with Dottie, could live in huts villagers used when working in their gardens and were welcome to help themselves to as much

garden produce as they needed. Chief Puyao invited the Morris to join him at his Maatop evacuation camp. Al did not want to involve them in his troubles. When Rev. Nagel arrived in Balbalasang with his message for Al, Chief Puyao refused to reveal his whereabouts.

Twice in the next two months the Japanese command in Lubuagan sent troops to Balbalasang in search of Al. The second time they came within a breath of capturing him on a dawn raid at Masablang. Al, Nessie, and Dottie had just seconds to flee, soldiers firing at them in quick pursuit. They escaped only because villagers deliberately sent the troops up the wrong trail. Much angered, the troops returned to Balbalasang and burned all the mission buildings except the church. They took 30 Balbalasang men as hostages, swearing to hold them in Lubuagan until Al surrendered.

Al knew he had no choice but to surrender. He hiked to Chief Puyao's camp at Maatop, six kilometers from Balbalasang and informed the Chief of his decision. Puyao's reaction was strong: He was adamant that Al not surrender. The *Padji* was not to worry about the hostages. He had sent word to them to escape, and he was sure they would succeed. Al returned to their new hiding place at Diwayan, a hunter's camp deep in the forest and far from any village. A week later, one of his guerrillas brought news that the hostages had slipped into the forest at night and made their escape. They had been under the lax guard of a Philippine Constabulary soldier.

Al found his existence very trying. He no longer had his church work, and the absence left hours on his hands when he had nothing to do. It frustrated him that he knew nothing of what was going on in the guerrilla movement. One night in early October, he set out for Cushing's camp at Guinguinabang. The going was difficult, and he did not arrive at the camp until late in the afternoon of the next day.

Al was disappointed not to find Cushing there. Cushing was on a trip to the Cagayan Valley to contact a guerrilla unit. Nevertheless, Al enjoyed the company of Cushing's guerrillas, and he especially enjoyed listening to the shortwave radio for news from San Francisco. The confident tone of the broadcasters restored his hope that the war would soon be over. Each day the guerrillas mimeographed a news report ("The Echo of the Free North") and distributed it to towns and villages in Abra and Kalinga. Their goal was for the Filipino people to remain confident that the Philippines would be liberated and given full independence at the end of the war.

What neither Al nor the guerrillas knew at the time—but were soon to find out—was that Cushing was dead. On September 19th, in the town of Jones, Isabela Province, Cushing was ambushed by Philippine Constabulary troops collaborating with the Japanese. Severely wounded in the attack, Cushing shot himself with his Colt 45. His desire to take his own life rather than be captured so

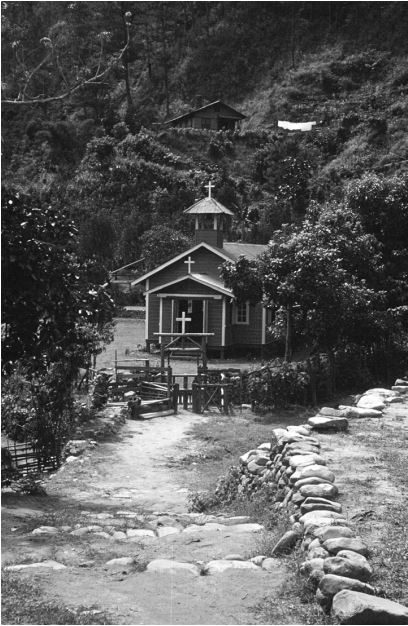


Figure 8. St. Paul's Church in Balbalasang.



Figure 9. Palm Sunday procession at St. Paul's Church.



Figure 10. Village men playing *gangsas* at a village dance.



Figure 11. Student body, St. Paul's Memorial High School.



Figure 12. Dottie Taverner, mission nurse.



Figure 13. Katy Griffiths with friends.

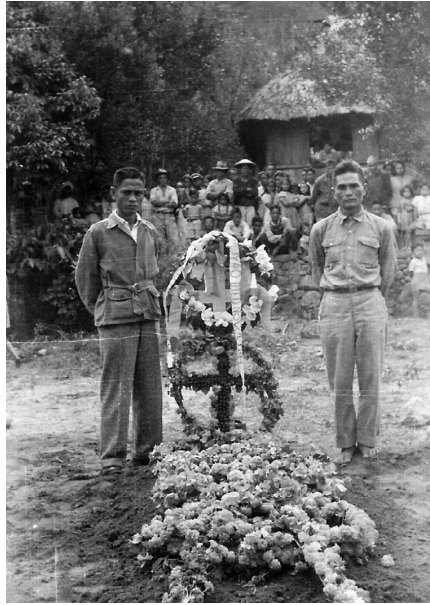


Figure 14. Chief Puyao's grave.



Figure 15. Al and Nessie Griffiths in Balbalasang after the war.

appealed to the Japanese code of honor that they gave him a funeral and buried him in the local churchyard (Ordun 1943, 9).

In December, Chief Puyao invited Al, Nessie, and Dottie to spend Christmas at Maatop. They gratefully accepted his invitation, weary of their isolated life in the forest and eager to see the Chief, village friends, and the Morrisises. After a full day of hiking, they reached Maatop late in the afternoon on December 23rd. Chief Puyao and his family greeted them warmly, and they wept as they embraced each other.

At Maatop, villagers had cut an immense clearing in the forest for their huts and gardens. Al was amazed to see that they had also built a huge two-story structure of bamboo and *runo*, 30 feet wide and 100 feet long. The first floor would be used for Christmas services, Chief Puyao said, and the second as their guest quarters.

Most villagers were still in Balbalasang harvesting rice, but they started to arrive at Maatop late in the afternoon on Christmas Eve and kept coming far into the evening. Carrying bundles of freshly harvested rice on their heads, they lit their way with pine torches when it grew dark. Many brought gifts for their guests—rice, coconuts, squash, and papayas. Food was so plentiful and the occasion so merry that Al, Nessie, Dottie, and the Morrisises were almost convinced that peace had returned. As the night air grew colder, dipping into the high forties, villagers lit huge bonfires. Everyone gathered in close around them and sang carols to greet the coming of Christmas.

Christmas morning Al celebrated Eucharist and he baptized all the children who had been born in the months of separation. Afterwards everyone feasted on great quantities of rice, carabao meat, and Chinese cabbage.

Chief Puyao insisted Al stay at Maatop rather than return to Diwayan. As an enticement, he gave him a large tract of land for a garden. Al was delighted. All day long he chopped down small trees, cleared brush, and pulled up roots. Once the brush dried, he burned it. Villagers gave him sweet potato cuttings and a variety of seeds to plant. Al hoped to produce enough food to meet his and Nessie's needs, and he was thrilled when the first corn and bean seeds sprouted.

His and Nessie's moods couldn't have been better: They were safe, they were among friends, and they had good living quarters. The rainy season had ended, the weather was glorious, and the mountain scenery—rim after rim of forested mountains stretching into the distance on all sides—often took their breath away. But at the end of January 1943, a guerrilla arrived at Maatop and asked for Al. His face was downcast. He handed Al a letter from Captain Hirano, the commanding officer of the Lubuagan garrison.

Al opened it quickly. Hirano wrote that the Imperial Forces of the Japanese Army had captured all the islands in the Pacific. It was now impossible for MacArthur to return to the Philippines. He understood why Al had not surrendered, but if he did so now, he would transport him and his family to Camp Holmes near Baguio (where his American friends were “singing and chatting”), and arrange safe passage to the United States. He ended his letter with a warning: If Al didn’t surrender immediately, he would be executed when captured.

Soon another runner arrived with more bad news: Japanese troops had raided Guinguinabang and captured all the American guerrillas there. Al suddenly felt very vulnerable. As long as the guerrillas could hide out, he had felt reasonably secure. He told Chief Puyao that he would surrender. The Chief said he would call a meeting with villagers to discuss the matter. “Let the people speak,” he said. Later that day they did—and they insisted that their *Padji* not surrender. Al agreed to honor their request.

The *Padji* must go even deeper into the forest now, Chief Puyao said. And he must take two teen-age boys with him. He would be so far from any village there might be times when food would be very scarce. The boys knew how to fish for eels in the swift mountain streams and which plants and roots were edible. Al wasn’t keen on the idea, fearing the Japanese would pressure the boys’ families to reveal his whereabouts, but he also knew that he and his family and Dottie couldn’t exist in the wilds alone, and he accepted the Chief’s advice. John and Marcus, each about fifteen years of age, agreed to accompany them.

They took just a few necessities with them—clothes, blankets, pots and pans, and machetes. Al’s guerrillas helped with the move. For a day and a half they trekked through rugged mountain terrain, crossing from Kalinga into Abra. Finally, they stopped and made their camp by a small brook that flowed into a nearby river. The guerrillas built two huts of bamboo and grass, a larger one for Al, Nessie, and Dottie, and a smaller one for John and Marcus.

Capture

Each morning Al and Nessie rolled up their bed blankets in case they had to make a quick getaway. Gradually they began to feel secure at their new camp and left their beds made on the floor. But on a Saturday in March, two village boys, Juan and Bernadino, arrived in camp with the news that 200 Japanese troops, led by Captain Hirano himself, were on their way to Balbalasang from Lubuagan. Hirano had only one objective: To capture the *Padji*.

Because a few hunters knew the location of their camp, Al decided to move to a temporary camp a mile and a half away. Juan and Bernadino returned to Balbalasang, promising to return when they had more news.

Four days passed. No news. On the fifth, John and Marcus noticed ash drifting over the forest. They feared Captain Hirano had set fire to Balbalasang. Anxious, they told Al they wanted to return home, but he pleaded with them to stay, afraid they would be caught by the Japanese and forced to reveal his whereabouts.

Ash stopped falling the next morning.

To keep their minds off what might be happening in Balbalasang, Al and Nessie helped Katy hunt for the nest her pet hen Jenny had made somewhere at the back of their lean-to. Searching carefully, Katy found it. She was jubilant: It contained four eggs, a treat indeed.

At that moment, Dottie shouted, "Here they are!"

Al grabbed Katy and joined Nessie and Dottie in front of the lean-to. Thirty Japanese troops faced them—guns and bayonets drawn. The lieutenant in command shouted at Al to raise his hands. He quickly gave Katy to Nessie and did so. With the troops were the fathers of John and Marcus, ropes tied around their waists, forced at bayonet point to lead the troops to their hiding place.

Unable to contain their fear, John and Marcus bolted into the forest. The soldiers fired at them, and Al yelled at them to come back. The boys returned, trembling. The lieutenant slapped each of them harshly.

Soldiers snatched up Al's machetes and shouted at Nessie and Dottie to roll up their blankets and clothes. They bayoneted Nessie's pots and pans and set fire to the lean-to. They tied a long rope around Al's waist and then marched them back to the main camp. There they tied Al to a machine gun and ordered him to remain standing. They shoved the women and Katy into the small hut John and Marcus had used as their sleeping quarters.

Nessie barely had time to catch her breath when a soldier reached into the hut, grabbed Katy, and drew her outside. Very anxious, Nessie followed right behind. The soldier seated Katy on a large rock, put a rice bowl over her head, and cut her hair like that of a little Japanese girl, short and just below the ears. Katy made no outcry, much to Nessie's relief. (Although she was only three at the time, Katy remembers this incident, recalling that Nessie said to her: "Don't cry. If you do, the soldiers will kill me.")

At noon, the troops made themselves a meal of rice, eggs, and chicken (Katy's pet hen Jenny had escaped into the forest). Nessie approached the lieutenant and signaled she wanted food for Katy. He waved her away, but later sent her food. Al was given nothing, not even water, and was forced to remain standing the long afternoon.

Inside the lean-to, the soldiers who were guarding Nessie and Dottie began a game of cards. Nessie watched them closely. Once she was familiar with the cards, she asked to have them. They handed her the deck, and she performed a simple card trick, much to their amusement. They motioned to her to repeat it several times until one soldier took the deck from her and performed the trick himself. His companions roared with delight.

At nightfall Al was untied and allowed to join the women. They were each given a blanket and ordered to crawl under the larger hut to sleep. Al whispered to Nessie that he was sure he was going to be shot when he was tied to the machine gun. Later in the afternoon he made conversation with his guards who knew a little English. He mentioned he had visited Japan and that there were many Japanese cherry trees in Washington, D.C. The guards told him the trees had all been chopped down.

Al and Nessie slept well that night. The nervous tension they had experienced the week before, worrying about what might be happening in Balbalasang—and what might happen to them—had been strangely eased by their capture.

The soldiers woke them before dawn and gave them rice to eat. They were eager to leave for Balbalasang to present their captives to Captain Hirano. They re-tied a rope around Al's waist and gave him two heavy baskets of rice to carry. Nessie and Dottie took turns carrying Katy. The lieutenant led them off at a terrific pace, crossing and re-crossing the river many times before reaching the trail. Al fell repeatedly from the weight of the baskets and the slippery riverbed. Each time he fell a soldier hit him with the butt of his gun.

No matter the nature of the terrain, the lieutenant would march them for 50 minutes, and then rest for 10. At noon they stopped for a meal of cold rice and dried fish. Afterwards, the lieutenant set a slower pace, much to Al's and the women's relief. When they neared Inalangan, just two kilometers from Balbalasang, he slowed the pace even more, and he ordered villagers to march ahead so they could witness the *Padji's* arrival in Balbalasang as a prisoner of the Japanese Imperial Army.

The lieutenant led them to Chief Puyao's house, the largest and most imposing dwelling in the village. Captain Hirano had established it as his headquarters. The lieutenant lined up his captives in front of the steps. Standing in the doorway, Captain Hirano called them to attention at the top of his lungs. Everyone bowed to him.

Nessie began to laugh, much to Al's annoyance. "I can't help it," she said, "I'm not afraid anymore. Hirano reminds me so much of my brother-in-law, Tux."

In his fifties, Captain Hirano had a curved mustache and a paunch, just like Tux. Altogether, he was rather distinguished looking.

The captain eyed his prisoners carefully, then ordered the lieutenant to take them beneath the house. Like all Tingguian homes, the house was built on stilts high off the ground so that the space beneath could be used to tether livestock, set up a loom for weaving, or pound rice when it rained. Soldiers had barricaded the space with bamboo and wire. Al, Nessie, and Dottie were surprised to see that beds had been prepared for them.

Al was led upstairs to Captain Hirano, who sat stiffly behind a desk. Al bowed to him, and the Captain returned the courtesy. Through an interpreter, the Captain ordered Al to write a letter to Chief Puyao. Tell Puyao, Hirano said, that if he surrenders now, his property will be protected and he will not be harmed or imprisoned. He could remain in Balbalasang and help restore law and order. Al wrote the letter. Once it was translated for the Captain, he was led back downstairs.

The fathers of John and Marcus had told Al that the Japanese had burned Puyao's camp at Maatop, which accounted for the ash that had fallen over the forest. The Chief had fled with his wife, two daughters, and the Morrises to the village of Asiga.

Every day Captain Hirano and his men made great demands on the villagers, eating their rice, butchering their pigs and carabaos, and drinking their *basi*. When two weeks passed and the Chief had still not surrendered, an angry and impatient Captain Hirano ordered that the Chief's house be burned. His soldiers quickly escorted their captives outside and removed tables, chairs, and beds before setting the house ablaze. Flames crackled, smoke billowed above the coconut trees, villagers shouted and wept. The Chief's house was reduced to ashes in minutes.

Captain Hirano marched over to his captives and announced that the next day he was sending them, along with hostage members of Chief's Puyao's family, to Bontoc, the capital of the Mountain Province. There the *Padji* would stand trial. As for himself, he would remain behind to capture the Chief.

When they arrived in Bontoc three days later—after a two-day trek from Balbalasang to Lubuagan, then a 25-mile ride in the back of a truck—a very ill-tempered officer greeted them. He looked directly at Al and said, "Are you Father Griffiths?"

"Yes, sir," Al replied.

"You're not a good person. You fought the Japanese and killed many at Lamonan."

"No, I didn't fight the Japanese at Lamonan," Al said, truthfully.

While the hostages were led away, the officer ushered Al and the women into a small room. There they sat on benches, wondering what would come next. An hour later they were each given a plate of rice. One of the guards blew up a red balloon and gave it to Katy,

to her delight. The afternoon wore on. Al and Nessie grew more and more tense.

Suddenly they heard the clicking of heels. Guards snapped to attention and ordered them to rise as Colonel Watanabe entered the room. Immaculately dressed in his officer's uniform, the Colonel stood erect and glared at Al as if he were the devil himself. Al bowed to him, but the Colonel did not return the courtesy. He took a seat behind a desk, ordered his interpreter to stand next to him, and brusquely motioned the women to sit.

The Colonel pointed to Al and snapped, "You are a priest of the Church. You are the *worst* American in Kalinga. Why did you hide in the mountains so long?"

"I was frightened," said Al.

"Frightened? Why were you frightened? Japanese are good people."

"I found a flyer that said I must surrender before June 1st or I would be killed. I had a bad leg infection. My leg healed after June 1st."

"You hate us. Why is that?"

"No, I do not hate the Japanese."

"You gave speeches urging the Tingguian people to hate the Japanese."

"I do not hate the Japanese. When I was a youth, I gave money to help rebuild Tokyo after the 1923 earthquake. My father gave much money also."

Colonel Watanabe pounded his fist on the desk, interrupting the interpreter. He handed a letter to Al.

It was from his Bishop in Manila, urging him to surrender.

"I never received this letter," Al said. "If I had, I would have surrendered immediately. I'm a priest, and I must obey my Bishop."

"Instead you joined the guerrillas."

Al replied that he had been a reserve chaplain before the war began.

The colonel rose slowly, deliberately, anger rising in his face. In one quick breath he said to Al, "You will be executed." Then he abruptly left the room.

Al had no reaction when he heard the pronouncement. He felt no emotion. But Nessie shouted at the colonel that if he killed Al, he could kill her too.

The ill-tempered officer who greeted them on their arrival returned and waved a paper he had taken from Al in his face. It proved Al was a guerrilla, he said, because it bore Major Cushing's signature. The signature was not Cushing's, Al countered, but the Chief of Chaplains'. The document commissioned him as a chaplain. Furthermore, it had been signed on July 6, 1941, six months before

the start of the war. Al felt exhausted and depressed. Would this clarification save his life?

Soldiers took Al and the women to a large brick building that served as a prison. There they were led to a small jail cell that held a Filipino and two captured American soldiers. Later that evening three Chinese men were shoved in with them.

Each morning for two days the men were taken outside, given shovels, and ordered to dig trenches. After supper on the second day the routine was broken. The men were ordered back to work. Each was given a shovel except Al. Had the time come for his execution, he wondered. Had the other men been given shovels to dig his grave? Meanwhile, Nessie and Dottie waited breathlessly in their prison cell but heard no shots fired. What they could not see was that Al had been given a machete to cut palm fronds to camouflage the trenches.⁴

The next morning the captives received the very welcome news that they would be taken to Baguio City. Once they were on their way, jammed into the back of a truck, Al breathed a huge sigh of relief. He was sure this meant he was not going to be executed. On the road to Baguio—with its expansive mountain scenery—even their guards seemed happy. They asked their captives to sing, and sing they did: two of Al's favorites, "Oh, Susannah" and "Alouette," plus many others. Singing was such a release: Al and Nessie felt that nothing could be worse than what they had just been through.

At Baguio the prisoners were driven to Camp John Hay and divided into two groups—those destined for a military POW camp in Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija Province and those destined for Camp Holmes, a civilian POW camp. Because of his guerrilla activity, Al feared he would be sent to Cabanatuan, but he was ordered to Camp Holmes with the women. Set on a wooded hillside with a distant view of the Lingayen Gulf, the camp was just a few kilometers from Baguio. They were driven to the main office and met by Japanese officers and Miss Spencer, an internee who had served as a missionary in Japan. She interpreted for the officer who had accompanied them from Camp John Hay.

"He asks me to tell you that he knows you are a military man," Miss Spencer said to Al. "But because you have a family, he is making a special concession and allowing you to enter Camp Holmes."

"Please tell the officer that I deeply appreciate his decision," said Al.

They all bowed to the officer, picked up their few belongings, and made their way to the camp's barracks where old friends greeted them warmly. It was Palm Sunday, 1943, 16 months into the war.

Liberation

During their twenty months of internment, Al, Nessie, and Dottie never talked about Al's participation in the guerrilla movement. They kept it secret, both to protect themselves and their American friends still hiding out.

One day a car unexpectedly drove into camp. With much shouting and snapping to attention at the guardhouse, Al and Nessie knew someone of importance had arrived. They walked over to see what the fuss was about and were startled when an officer sprang up from his seat, shouted, and motioned for them to approach. It was Captain Hirano. He greeted them like long-lost friends. Next to him—but remaining seated—was Colonel Watanabe. He offered them a frosty smile without speaking when they bowed.

The next day Al and Nessie were even more surprised when they received another unexpected visitor, Kazuo Fujihara, one of their captors. He had come expressly to see Katy. He had been very kind to her, allowing her to accept eggs from villagers, and picking wild strawberries for her on the long trek from Balbalasang to Lubuagan. They conversed with him for some time through their interpreter Miss Spencer. Before he departed he said that he would like to leave a little gift for Katy. He had meant to bring her milk but could not buy any. Would Nessie accept a small gift of money to buy her extra food? Nessie hesitated for a moment, wondering what her fellow internees might think, and then accepted the gift in the spirit in which it was offered. With it she bought Katy three eggs at the camp store.

In late December 1944, Camp Holmes internees were transferred to Bilibid Prison in Manila, most likely at the direct order of General Tomoyuki Yamashita. The "Tiger of Malaya" had arrived in the Philippines to take command of the Japanese forces just two weeks before General MacArthur landed on Leyte in October 1944. Knowing that the war was lost, his strategy was to slow the American advance to Japan by mounting his defense of the Philippines in the mountains of northern Luzon. Clearly, he wanted the internees out of harm's way. In January 1945, he established his headquarters in Baguio (Hastings 2008, 122, 223, and 227).

MacArthur's 37th Infantry landed at Lingayen Gulf on January 9, 1945 and swept down the central Luzon plain to Manila. There the American Forces met stiff resistance. Retaking Manila became one of "the ugliest battles of the Pacific War," and for a month, "the Sixth Army found itself committed to a street-by-street, often house-by-house struggle against suicidal Japanese resistance" (Hastings 2008, 231). The Japanese did not hesitate to kill Filipino civilians who got in their way while many other civilians died under American

gunfire. Altogether, 1,000 American soldiers died in the battle, 16,665 Japanese, and 100,000 civilians (Hastings 2008, 237-38).

Bilibid was liberated on February 4, 1945. To the internees, it was a glorious “Fourth.” In their joy, they hoisted the American flag that they had sewn in secret. Nessie had sewn the star for Oregon.

A few weeks later Al, Nessie, and Katy were flown to Leyte to await their repatriation. Their turn finally came. After a three-week voyage aboard the *Klipfontein*, they arrived in San Francisco on a glorious spring day in April. They took a train to Oregon and settled in the small coastal community of Nelscott to recover from their wartime ordeal.

Sadly, three of their Christmas 1941 dinner guests did not survive the war. Six weeks after capturing Al and his family, the Japanese captured the Morris family. Garnett Morris was placed in a military POW camp, and his wife and children were interned at Camp Holmes. While ironing one afternoon, Dolly, who was in her early thirties, collapsed from a heart attack and died instantly. Surely the stress of her wartime experience had affected her health.

Towards the end of the war, desperate for factory labor, the Japanese shipped thousands of military POWs to Japan, including Garnett Morris and Cushing’s mining partner, Pee Wee Ordun. Prisoners were kept in holds below deck to avoid aerial detection. They had no fresh air and were given little water or food. On December 13, 1944, the ship *Morris* and *Ordun* were aboard was bombed and sunk by the U.S. Air Force in the Sea of Japan. Both men lost their lives, along with hundreds of other POWs.

Compared to other civilian POWs in the Philippines, Al and Nessie’s wartime experiences—and ultimately their survival—were shaped by very unusual circumstances. First, was Balbalasang’s extreme isolation. News was slow to reach the village, and mail often went missing. As a consequence, Al never received the letter from his Bishop telling him not to get involved with the guerrillas. Second, Al was a Chaplain in the U.S. Army Reserve. He saw his participation in the guerrilla movement as a natural extension of this role. Third, the dynamic guerrilla leader Walter Cushing operated a mine not far from Balbalasang. He was a neighbor of sorts and had visited Al and Nessie before the war, striking up a friendship. Fourth, Al and the mission nurse Dottie Taverner were well liked and respected by Chief Puyao and the Balbalasang people. Throughout the war the Chief and villagers took great personal risks to feed and hide them.

Fifth, and perhaps most significantly, Chief Puyao was sharp, strong-willed, and unstintingly loyal to America. His support of the guerrilla movement was steadfast. He consistently urged Al not to surrender, and refused to surrender himself even when the Japanese took members of his family hostage. Furthermore, he was a

shrewd judge of character and the first to suspect that the lowlander Concepcion was a spy for the Japanese.

Sixth, Al and Nessie's young daughter Katy was a delight. She reminded her Japanese captors of the children and siblings they had left behind. The soldiers went out of their way to give her treats and extra food. Her presence helped personalize the relationship between captor and captive and may have been key to the Japanese placing Al in a civilian internment camp, rather than a military camp.

Seventh, Colonel Watanabe, who condemned Al to death, was a Christian, a rarity among Japanese military officers (Norling 1999, 89). Al was not aware of this fact (and I only learned of it recently). Did their shared faith contribute to Watanabe's decision not to execute him? We'll never know, but Watanabe's religious faith certainly adds irony to his encounter with the *Padji*. Watanabe gave Al the royal chewing out he expected to receive from his Bishop for getting involved with the guerrillas.

But perhaps a more important factor in Watanabe's decision not to execute Al was his awareness—based on Concepcion's report—that the *Padji* was well regarded by Chief Puyao and the Tingguian people. Executing him would have angered them greatly, further stalling the Japanese goal of pacification.

Return to Balbalasang

Within a year of his repatriation, Al returned to the Philippines, six weeks before I was born in May 1946. Nessie followed a year later with the children. Dottie also returned to the Philippines after recovering at her home in England.

Prior to his return, Al worked tirelessly in Oregon to accumulate boxes and boxes of clothing, medical supplies, food, and seeds for Balbalasang villagers. He requested donations from relief agencies, churches, relatives, and friends.

As he sailed back to the Philippines, he wrote his memoir of the war years. And from Balbalasang he wrote Nessie that he was busy rebuilding the mission and helping villagers with their war damage claims. Sadly, he reported that Chief Puyao was bedridden and not expected to live. The Chief had surrendered not long after Al and Nessie were interned. The Japanese had summoned him to Lubuagan, and on the way he suffered a crippling stroke.

But Chief Puyao was stronger than anyone realized, and he lived two and a half more years. At the Chief's request, Al founded St. Paul's Memorial High School, built on a hillside next to the church plaza. The school memorialized three Balbalasang men who

died in combat during the war. Frederick Dao-ayan served as the headmaster, and Nessie taught a few of the English classes.

Great was the mourning and great the celebration of his life when Chief Puyao died on November 2, 1949. In accordance with Tingguian custom, his body was bathed, dressed, and seated in an armchair on a bamboo platform in the main room of his home. His feet rested on an ancient Chinese jar embossed with dragons. Strands of agate and gold draped from his head. In his lap were five Chinese plates. In the top was a pack of his favorite cigarettes—Lucky Strikes—plus a box of matches. At his right were two Spanish mahogany canes, each crested in silver, and a Japanese samurai sword. A wreath of marigold, bougainvillea, and calla lilies hung from the ceiling above his head, the lilies forming a cross. Displayed on the back wall were red Tingguian horse blankets and two of the Chief's most prized possessions—an American flag and a blue naval officer's coat given to him by William Howard Taft when Taft served as Governor General of the Philippines. To his left, piled from floor to ceiling against the entire wall were bundles of palay (unhusked rice), evidence of his great wealth.

Visitors from throughout Kalinga and beyond arrived to pay their respects. With the help of neighbors and friends, Chief Puyao's family roasted pigs and carabaos and cooked huge quantities of rice to feed their many, many guests. At his wife's request, Al held vespers every evening at the Chief's house. Afterwards villagers and visitors entertained themselves throughout the night, drinking sugarcane wine, singing, dancing—and challenging each other to games of physical endurance.

Chief Puyao's funeral was held the fourth day after his death. The Padji conducted the service at St. Paul's Church, which the Chief had been instrumental in bringing to his people. The Chief was accorded full Philippine military honors because he had served as a military advisor to the guerrillas. His coffin was draped with a Philippine flag. As former guerrillas carried Puyao's coffin from the house to the church, Philippine Constabulary soldiers fired a volley in his honor. The Padji and Fr. Theodore Saboy, a Balbalasang villager ordained to the Episcopal priesthood, led the procession, followed by the coffin bearers, the Chief's family and close relatives, Boy Scout troops, villagers and guests, and, finally, the Chief's saddled but riderless horse. The church filled to overflowing.

Chief Puyao had asked that he be buried at the site of his former home, which Captain Hirano had burned to the ground. His grave was deep and lined with Saltan River stones. As his coffin was lowered into the sandy grave, the Constabulary fired a final salute to this last great Tingguian chief. He had led his people ably in peace and war.

1. Both my parents wrote memoirs of the war for my sister and me to have. My father wrote his in 1946. He ends his narrative with their arrival in prison camp. My mother wrote hers in the early 1950s. Her narrative includes her prison camp experience as well as the three years we lived in Balbalasang after the war. I have based my essay on their two accounts. They are more the authors of it than I am.
2. The reference here is to the old Mountain Province, created by the American colonial government in 1908 and originally composed of the subprovinces of Amburayan, Apayao, Benguet, Bontoc, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Lepanto. In 1966 the old Mountain Province was divided into four regular provinces—Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga-Apayao, and Mountain Province (now referring to the old subprovince of Bontoc).
3. This brief but bloody phase of the Sino-Japanese conflict ended in November 1937, and American women and children returned to Shanghai. Until Pearl Harbor, the International Settlement of Shanghai (the Anglo-American concession) remained a sort of isolated island where Westerners lived fairly normal lives. The pro-cathedral of St. John's was a mile west of the Settlement, but British troops included it in their defense perimeter.
4. The description of this event is slightly different from Al's recollection on-camera (see quote, page 1). In the on-camera interview he may have been referring to his initial reaction when Japanese soldiers handed him a shovel the first day of his imprisonment in Bontoc. What is described here occurred at the end of his second day of imprisonment in Bontoc.

REFERENCES

- Cogan, Frances B. 2000. *Captured: The Japanese Internment of American Civilians in the Philippines 1941-45*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Concepcion. 1942. "Summary of Instructions from Colonel Nakashima to Major Cushing." Unpublished manuscript.
- Death, Escape & Liberation: POWs in the Philippines During World War II*. [2005]. Julian, CA: Traditions Military Videos. DVD.
- Fry, Howard T. 2006. *A History of the Mountain Province*. Rev. ed. Quezon City: New Day Publishers.
- Griffiths, Alfred L. 1946. "For God and Country." Unpublished manuscript.
- Griffiths, Ernestine Coles. 1953. "Mrs. Padji." Unpublished manuscript.
- Hastings, Max. 2008. *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.
- Norling, Bernard. 1999. *The Intrepid Guerrillas of North Luzon*. Lexington,

KY: The University Press of Kentucky.

Ordun, M.B. 1943. "Walter M. Cushing: Guerrilla Leader and Hero of the Ilocos Provinces." Cabanatuan Prison Camp No. 1, May 22. Unpublished manuscript.

Worcester, Dean C. 1914. *The Philippines Past and Present*. Vol. 2. The Macmillan Company.