



# IN INTRAMUROS: OUR LAST DAYS IN THE HOSPITAL OF SAN JUAN DE DIOS

*Consuelo Severino*

*In the weeks of February 1945, inside the walls of Intramuros, the San Juan de Dios Hospital, run by the Daughters of Charity, was caught up in the thick of battle between the Japanese forces still occupying Manila and the invading American forces.*

*The account of Sor Consuelo S., D.C. provides a unique and firsthand description of the events in Intramuros during the Battle of Manila in the period of February 3–26, 1945. Harrowing in its details, the account testifies to the courage and faith of the DC Sisters and the people who were with them during the ordeal.*

## **1945**

**Feb. 3** — That the Americans had entered Manila this day was a thing totally ignored in Intramuros. We missed the Glories of the day!

**Feb. 4** — On this same day the famous bridges were all blasted followed by a great conflagration destroying the adjoining districts. Our hospital was greatly affected by the violent shocks, causing considerable destruction upon the chapel, the pharmacy, the Sisters' habitation, the offices, etc. The following night everybody was kept awake.

**Feb. 5-6** — Situation getting more and more critical – nothing to be heard and seen but the blasting, shelling, and burning. On the night of the 6th, we could only lament over the fatal end of the post office building at the mercy of the dynamites and flames.

**Feb. 7** — We were at Mass at about 6:05 a.m. Close to the solemn moments of the elevation, the chapel began to shake violently and wall fragments and dust fell in over the altar. The shake kept



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repeating at short intervals, causing more and more panic. We had to move to the end of the chapel until the sacrifice was completely offered, thanks to the firmness of our zealous chaplain. But what was going on? From my own criterion, I got the idea that the American forces were in reality approaching Manila and those shelling came from both parties. Whether I was right or not, the idea was an encouraging one.

A short time passed by. We got an order that all hospital departments should be opened for inspection by some Japanese officials. Then a list of all hospital inmates was required, grouping the personnel accordingly. On the very onset, I think not one had suspected *the dark aspect of the situation*.

At about 11:00 a.m. we got another order that we, the Sisters of the San Juan de Dios Hospital (as there was another congregation of Sisters taking charge of the T.B. patients of the Quezon Institute (Q.I.) occupying temporarily our hospital) together with those abiding with us – the hospital Chaplain, two houseboys, and three housemaids – should all assemble in a certain place and wait for a roll call. All orders had to be strictly followed. We assembled and waited. Half an hour, – then an hour passed by and nobody appeared to make the call. Then, suddenly our assembly had to disperse, as fire was seen on one of the roofs of the hospital. How and from where, we knew not. Now came the need of immediate action. But how? The water supply was cut off.

But God never abandons His. Fortunately, the hospital was still keeping an old artesian well which was made to work anew, and from this source the fire was successfully put out. And who were the heroes? The truth cannot be denied – the Jap soldiers. There were some inside the hospital (perhaps keeping watch) and these together with some others who rushed in from the street, tried their best to put out the fire, themselves fetching buckets of water from the said well.

Naturally, we were all filled with admiration and gratitude for, in truth, like true gentlemen, they did a noble service. But, alas! This noble act turned to be *a mere comedy-refined hypocrisy*, as we saw things in the latter part of the day.



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Since the very morning, columns of smoke could be seen rising from several directions; the shelling was continuous, the danger was imminent. But, why didn't and why don't we quit Intramuros? Simply because we could not bear to leave the hospital at the mercy of the looters, and more so, we had and have our full trust that nothing would happen and, that at any rate, the hospital would survive all calamities. (In this we can only humbly acknowledge how human thoughts go far from God's designs).

And now there was no possible escape from Intramuros – we were doomed rather to die than to live. However, as awful as the situation was, as dark as the things looked, in many a heart, there lingered a bright hope, the hope of a better day, the hope of a better atmosphere, and the hope to see the Stars and the Stripes.

At about 2:00 p.m. a temporary altar was fixed at the end of the chapel. There seemed to be a bit of calm and things were prepared for the next morning Mass. But an hour after, we observed smoke and fire from a nearby building, which, consequently, was the one on Magallanes street. Had the fire been combated, we could not discern, so we kept observing it closely, seeing it smaller and bigger at intervals, "Could it only be extinguished, things could go on fairly," But no, all hopes were getting in vain. Another hour – and another house caught fire – then the next and the next. Hopes for the hospital's safety began to gloom and we were then prompted to save life and some personal belongings, although I dare say that we still hoped for the best. We prepared to leave, but perhaps for only one night, or for a day. At least we could not reconcile ourselves with the probability or the idea of losing the hospital.

5:00 p.m. past. Everybody and everything was in great commotion. The Sacred Forms were consumed. To stay or to go was the pending question; in the meantime we got busy with our preparation, while on the other hand some Jap soldiers got busy destroying the wooden walls of some departments and throwing down to the grounds (patios) chairs, tables, bed cushions, – all room furniture and equipment. It was, according to their previous announcement, "to evade, somehow, the propagation (spread) of the fire by removing the inflammable parts and things." What a *queer proceeding!* It forced out tears from some of us to see the house and things thus treated. They made us believe that they were trying



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at all cost to save the hospital from burning, – but all were only *vain pretensions*. Yet, I confess that in our anxiety to see the hospital safe, we could not help feeling consoled by their pretended diligence.

About 6:00 p.m. The table was set for the evening meal, but nobody had a thought for it. We were still trying to get more things to safety when one of our Sisters, almost flying up the stairs, gave the warning of an “immediate evacuation,” according to the Japs’ order. There was no time to lose. Sisters, patients, everybody, - pieces of baggage in hands and in push carts – all out to the streets. (But on passing by the patio leading to the main door, my attention was called by the heaps of things that were thrown down, among which were some papers and a bed cushion that were beginning to burn. I tried to put out the fire, but time urged and further attempt was useless. It was learned afterwards that those things were set on fire purposely. Was it not queer?

Once in the street, the first thing we saw was the big fire in its full liberty devouring the buildings close by. Such horrible sight almost unnerved us. Now arose the question, “Where shall we go?”

“Where we are supposed to do so,” was our Sister Prioress’ reply, – meaning according to the Japs’ order.

“Let’s go to Sta. Isabel College or to the Cathedral,” urged one.

“Sta. Isabel must be burning now,” replied another.

We were at a loss where to go. To get out of Intramuros was absolutely impossible – prohibited. Some Japs nearby only stood as onlookers, chatting and laughing. “But, Oh Lord, where shall we go?”

At last Sister Prioress said decidedly, “Let us go to the Sto. Domingo ruins,”

And to there we directed our nervous steps – nervous, I say, because aside from the raging fire, whistling bullets fly over us and many times we had to stop, leaving the baggage in the middle of the streets, to seek for shelter by the pavements of the houses. And, under such circumstances, we lost a wheeled stretcher full of valuable things.

Reaching the Sto. Domingo Church ruins very close to those of the Sta. Rosa College (both burned and ruined by the Japs’ first bombing, in 1941) we could not decide whether or not to get inside. We met with the rest of the hospital inmates and hundreds of other



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evacuees, transfixed on the street side along the two ruins. Night fell, so we fixed ourselves with them. So far, we did not see that there were so many inside the ruins. There was no evening meal, at least for us sisters and our companions.

For my part, I thought we would pass only that night there, and by the next day we would be free to get back to the hospital, or to quit Intramuros, if possible. But ah, how one gets deceived by her own thoughts.

The night was brightened by the fire from the burning houses. Presently, some Japs gave the order for everybody to get in the Sta. Rosa ruins, which is a big open space enclosed by plain short walls. The greater part was an open patio, in the middle of which is an image of the Blessed Virgin of the Miraculous Medal, to whose motherly love, protection and solitudes we abandoned ourselves and all. Some meters from the back part of the image is a sort of partition – the skeleton of the college auditorium, which, being recently made in 1941, had resisted more the bombing and has conserved its surrounding posts, some walls, and flat roof. To this was assigned all hospital personnel and was designated “The Hospital Zone” and all the other parts given to the rest of the evacuees. Some thousands more evacuees, among whom were our Sisters of Sta. Isabel and their Chaplain, the Capuchin, the Augustinians, the Recollects, and the Franciscan Fathers, were interned in the St. Augustine Church. The Cathedral and the Sto. Domingo ruins were likewise occupied.

It was some 10:00 p.m. when the Japs began to impose order.

“Hospital personnel .... in line,” was the first command.

“Male patients here – female there. Doctors, Sisters, Nurses, and attendants on that part.”

Some feared we were going to be mowed by the machine gun. There were five Sisters of the St. Paul de Chartres working for the T.B. patients and we, sixteen Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul forming a unit of the San Juan de Dios Hospital.

Along the three sides of the ruins were some big building, waiting victims of the fire. As the night was far advanced, we tried to take some repose, but were soon disturbed when the said buildings were reached by the fire, one after another. Everybody was on the alert. The raging fire was amazing: the flames were menacing – nearly



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catching us; and the big heaps of fuel (firewood and sticks) that were deposited in our very place; and the heat was intensely felt. Then a bomb, a hand grenade, or a bullet fell down among us and all in mass rushed for safety, falling to the ground as we did so. One of the nurses fell victim to shrapnel.

In the meantime, two of our Sisters stayed outside to watch for our things and with them our ingenious sacristan and his cousin, with a friend and his companion. The said friend was a young husband of a young wife who was almost to be a mother. These four fellows were taken away by the Japs that very night after having been stripped of their chains, watches, etc., and in spite of the Sisters' pleadings, were taken away and never to return. Oh, how we miss them!

So, the whole night until morning, we were kept gazing at the fire, moving from one side to another, according to the direction and intensity of the flames. At dawn, the fire was finishing with the old Sto. Tomas University. As the last inflammable portion fell and consumed, all breathed a sigh of relief. But, still, there were two houses on the opposite side left unburned. Then it rained – though little, but enough to soak us, so that from head to foot we got so dirty with dust and moisture.

### **IN THE STA. ROSA RUINS**

From the evening of February 7th to the morning of Feb. 23rd., we were strictly concentrated within the ruins and within the Intramuros walls. Day and night, at very short intervals, our trial, I dare say, our martyrdom was to hear the roar of the cannons, the whiz of the bullets as they tore through the atmosphere, passing over us, and the bang(!!!) as they reached the targets, or fell upon some unfortunates.

Thanks be to God, we were able to bring some provisions, especially rice. The cooking was done by means of a small fire built according to an old-time type. Fuel was abundant but water was scarce, it had to be fetched from some distant open well, here or there, with much difficulty and risk of lives due to the flying bullets and shrapnel. One day, shrapnel fell inside a pitcher which one of our house girls was carrying. How Heaven protected her! How the



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Sacred Heart rewarded her faith and confidence, as in those moments she kept repeating, “Sagrado Corazon de Jesus en Vos Confio.”

I think it can be easily comprehended how we ate and drink, but frugally and scantily. I am sorry that my daily records of those days got lost, so that now I can’t remember very well the different incidents in their exact dates. However, I’ll try to reproduce them here as exactly as possible.

**Feb. 6** — As I said above, dawn found us gazing at the old Sto. Tomas University as the fire was consuming it altogether. This was our first day to miss the daily Mass and the Holy Communion. The day was spent in preparing shelters or simple protection for our things by means of zinc pieces fallen from the roofs; and also a corner for a fire place. The T.B. patients had to accommodate themselves by lying or sitting over some heaps of fire sticks (fuel), or on the mats over the bare ground. For us and for all the rest, there were no better accommodations, so that the days and the nights were passed in a restless manner. So then, we were all mixed up with the T.B. patients. During the shelling, bombing, and discharging of the machine guns, we had to content ourselves by hiding behind the plain walls and posts, while the very weak patients had to stick to their places. Fortunately, no one was touched by any shrapnel. How palpable was Heaven’s protection over us!

**Feb. 9** — Fire again after a restless night. They set fire upon the last two buildings – the bodega of Zuellig Inc., and Rodriguez and Co. At about 1:00 p.m., I heard an exclamation, “Oh pity, they are taken away.” This was referred to the internees, who were among the patients, namely, Rev. F. Cornelius Von Russel (Dutch); Mr. Eijjar Kristensen (Danish); Mr. Michel and Mr. Gibson (Americans); Mr. Benzon (English) and an English lady. I then observed that Father Russel had to leave his noon meal unfinished to follow the Japs. A Sister had to follow him some steps to reach him a glass of water. After him, followed Mr. Benzon and Mr. Kristensen; the rest had left ahead. Where were they taken? In mute silence, we could only think of the horrible Fort Santiago. A Spanish patient, whose name I cannot recall, was taken away with the Internees, thus sharing with them the bitter and cruel pangs of Death, as was their supposed fate. I wonder that he was taken too, as he was only a patient – very weak and not an Internee.



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**Feb. 10** — The morning was still dark and was made more so when we were given the sad news of the probable separation of our Spanish Sisters, and, hence, of the French Mother Prioress of those of the St. Paul. More than distressful, the idea was repugnant and one could not help feeling indignant. If it is a question of taking them to Fort Santiago and there meet death, “they better take us all and kill all”, was all I could say. However, we had to prepare ourselves for the catastrophe. Moments, hours, and the whole day were passed in suspense. But confiding all our pains and all we had to our most loved Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Miraculous Virgin, His mother and our Mother, we were saved from such catastrophe. As usual Jap officials and soldiers made their daily inspection. About 9:00 a.m., they took with them the following: Rev. F. Pio Sawal, Chaplain of the San Juan de Dios Hospital, Dr. Lahos, acting director of the Quezon Institute, Dr. Noriega, their helpers Dr. L. Corales, dentist and pharmacist of the S.J.D. Hospital, and Mr. Urrutia, a mechanic, and all the male hospital attendants. How impressive was this action! But, thank God, about one hour after, Father Pio, the doctors, and Mr. Urrutia were sent back, to our great joy, especially to those of Mrs. Lahos and Mrs. Urrutia. And we could only lament for those who were taken away, but did not come back anymore.

**Feb. 11** — Since three days ago, water was very scarce, taken from a sort of a dugout. It was pinkish, turbid, and repugnant even after boiling. An attempt was made to dig an open well until a deposit of water was discovered at the top of the flat roof. It lasted but a few days. Victims of shrapnel were brought in for dressing, — a woman with a bleeding forehead carrying a child with a bleeding leg; a fellow whose foreleg was almost cut through; a boy with bulging eyes; a child whose face was bathed in blood; etc. Doctors, Sisters, and nurses were kept busy. Casualties of these kinds were brought in daily.

**Feb. 12** — As in the previous days, we observed with anxiety the American planes, as they hovered in groups above us. But there was always one or two that kept hovering noiselessly almost the whole day as if scrutinizing something. Could they see us?

This day was born a baby girl, but father-less, as the father was taken away the very night of our arrival. The baby was baptized and the mother lying on a mat over the bare ground imposed the





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name Ma. Dolores, expressing her pain and sorrow. This was one of several cases.

**Feb. 13** — Bombing and shelling becoming more intense every time, but now we seemed to get used to them. Sometimes we tended to be carefree; we just got startled to the nerves whenever bullets and shrapnel fell, almost touching us already.

In the afternoon an extra danger scared us to death. A drunk Jap official ravaged our place with a brandished weapon. In our struggle to escape from him, we all stumbled over another, as we passed by a narrow opening. He had taken hold of a Sister, whose age and physical troubles hindered her from escaping; but, thanks, he was not able to injure her, and his drunkenness seemed to be a feigned one. Another Sister was on her knees with arms in cross waiting for the blow, but again grace triumphed and was left uninjured.

As our situation was getting more dangerous, the medical and nursing corps sought a better shelter, occupying a sort of small hall with three rooms. Being enclosed with walls and roofs situated on a lower level of the ground, and almost hidden at the back of the hospital zone, it offered more safety. The Sisters were given one of the rooms.

**Feb. 14** — We got up from another restless night. I say got up because in spite of the blasting and the shelling, strained by the day's torturing trials, we could not help seeking a bit of repose as soon as we were given some moments of silence — either in sitting position, reclining against some baggage, or lying in full on some space whatever. And usually got the repose at dawn. Some striking casualties were brought in.

**Feb. 15** — That we were the target of the Japs' maneuvers was beyond my suspicion. But this day I got convinced, judging from the frequent falls of bullets and shrapnel all around us. The majority of us had to resort to the safer apartment almost the whole day. On my part, for some motives, I stayed where we were, in company with our Sister in charge of the cooking, and to keep watch over our things. However, on some occasions, I was obliged to resort to stay at the apartment. In the afternoon we made a second risky visit



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to our lamented hospital to save some more things that the fire had spared, as we had discovered on our first visit. But in the pharmacy all were turned to ashes.

At about 5:30 p.m., there was an extraordinary calm, so we gathered ourselves at some open space to say our evening prayer. We were so confident of the calm when all of a sudden, a tremendous BANG! seemed to strike the wall right over us. Deafened by the sound, we could only stop for some moments until we heard one of us gave a cry of “Sor Presentacion is wounded!”. In great commotion, we rushed her down to the dressing table. The middle part of her left foreleg was almost cut through.

But another cry was heard too, “oh! Sister Felicity!” She (a St. Paul Sister) was standing only a few meters from us and, Oh, Heavens, she received a direct hit, wounding her by the throat and on the abdomen . . . and she died, instantly. Still another victim. An attendant heard she received another hit at the back and met her instant death. q.e, p.d. for both.

**Feb. 16** — About 2:30 a.m. the world was extraordinarily quiet and still. The silence was then broken by repeated calls for Dr. Corales and Mr. Pili. I, at once comprehended that some Japs were here, looking for these two and some others as Dr. Lajos, Dr. Noriega, and Mr. Urrutia. Some moments more and everything was quiet, as the party had left. In my innocence or ignorance, I thought they were taken for some hospital services. I learned later that they tried to take one of the nurses, but she feigned a T.B. by coughing and she was left. In the meantime, screams and cries of women and girls were heard from Sto. Domingo, then some shooting. What was going on?

About 6:00 a.m., while I was lingering in the patio, a girl approached me. “Sister, please, my mother is dying and some of us are wounded and are too weak to come. This early morning (2:30 a.m.) some Japs, tortured us with their bayonets and machine guns. I, too, am wounded but I have come for some help and relief.” This is the result of the screams and cries heard in the Sto. Domingo ruins.



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About noon, a Sister whispered to me. "I have seen Mr. Urrutia returning but he was crawling instead of walking." And the rest?

Late in the afternoon, rumors that the doctors were killed, reached me. I was astounded, and could not believe so far.

**Feb. 17** — News of the doctors' death was confirmed, as I observed Mrs. Lajos, now cruelly widowed, in her distress. She sought permission from a Jap official to get the remains of her beloved husband and those of others and was granted. The said Jap official was a mestizo, born in Cebu, and precisely, was in good terms with the late Dr. Lajos, whose disappearance affected him very much.

It was only yesterday when he brought six sacks of rice and a sack of salt to be distributed. It was then found out that the poor victims were taken to the left side of Sto. Domingo and were bayoneted the moment they reached the spot. Mrs. Lajos with the other nurses and helpers took the bodies and buried them by the monument of Fr. Benayides, where Sister Felicity and the girl attendant were also buried. Dr. Corales had his rosary entwined among his fingers. They tried to get his ring, but the finger was swollen.

**Feb. 18** — "The Americans are at the opposite end of the Jones bridge. They are speeding up in their temporary reconstruction to cross over." These comments were spread in secret many days ago, very consoling for a situation like ours, a situation that was getting more and more pressing. But on the other hand, they were not so reliable, as they were told by the Japs to the girls and children. For my part, I took it more as a false propaganda; but then I was mistaken, as . . .

This morning, the Japs took away all the male patients (T.B.), the majority already too weak to stand on their legs, and not only the patients, but every man they could find and with them our hospital chaplain, Father Pio Sawal; and also a very aged man of more than eighty winters who had to follow the line supported by two younger ones. To where were they taken? To a military hospital, according to the Japs. To the horrible Fort Santiago, according to our mute suspicion.



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**Feb. 19** — Due to very intense shelling, some shelters got direct hits. Screams of women and cries of children here and there, and among the unfortunates was a small boy with his tongue thrust out and eyes fixed: a bigger one whose face was bathed in blood, screaming of pain and a woman fatally wounded on the right arm and shoulder.

Among the T.B. patients, there were three Japs. One was a brother of the salesman. He died one of these days. As for the other two, I don't know any further.

**Feb. 20** — I think it is not an exaggeration if we say that we were suffering there a sort of martyrdom, physically, materially, and spiritually. This is the thirteenth day of those dry, stormy days and its nights, produced by the cannons' roaring sounds like thunderbolts, succeeded by the tremendous banging sounds of the bullets and by violent quakes. Then, there were the flying shrapnel and frightful machine guns and the many physical discomforts. In the afternoon, while eating our *lugao* (soft boiled rice), some bullets, hitting the ground nearby, filled our plates with dust.

That we were the enemies' (Japs) targets was more and more palpable. But, on the other hand (as it was learned afterwards), we were also the object of the incessant prayers and ardent petitions of the rest of Manila, - all moving Heaven for our sake and salvation. May the Lord be glorified! May His Holy Will be done!

**Feb. 21** — Since our Chaplain's disappearance, patients and victims passed to the other life without the absolution, how sad! May God have mercy on them and may the blessed Virgin intercede for them! In the afternoon a woman, while bathing by a well got a direct hit and was brought in, bathed in her blood.

**Feb. 22** — Was the shelling done by the two parties, the Americans on one side and the Japs on the other, according to the comments? I could not get assured. Another terrible afternoon. Some shelters suffered direct hits due to very intense shelling. Casualties of more or less seriousness as in the previous days were rushed in for dressing. One of the victims was a baby of some days old, faintly crying, and innocent of his bleeding wound. Oh, this war and its cruel lashes!

In the evening some six soldiers, who seemed to have come from afar, visited our place. Accompanying them was a Filipino lad



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in soldier's uniform. Talking in Tagalog to the young folks that gathered about him, he said, "The Americans are now in the Metropolitan. All Manila is liberated except Intramuros. You, here, are the most sacrificed. Efforts are made to get in, but it is and will be a very, very hard task. But only God knows. These people (the Japs) are surrounding all Intramuros walls and are disposed to kill everybody and then to kill themselves." (Their harakiri business).

This reminded me of the Japanese words (threats) heard on various occasions – "We'll leave the city in ashes. Yes, the Americans are coming, but you'll not see them; you'll not enjoy victory."

Now it is comprehensible how they had been busy day and night – fortifying the city, setting cannons and mining the Intramuros walls, government buildings, hospital, and other private buildings of importance.

## THE LAST MORNING

**Feb. 23** — Early in the morning we greeted each other for having passed a better night. As soon as possible, we said our morning prayers. Just as we had concluded, as if by one switch – cannons, bombs, dynamites, hand grenades, and machine guns – all were suddenly ferociously at work. Faces paled, nerves wrecked and all sought for shelter. As usual, Sister Melecia and I remained. Quite carefree, I went for some trifle from a basket, while she began to prepare our breakfast of some weak coffee. Presently, wall fragments and heaps of dust fell over us that made me hide among our baggage and Sister Melecia ran close to me. We prayed, but only to be interrupted by the thunderbolt sounds, quakes, bullets, and shrapnel in all directions. Rain of dust fell over us anew.

Conscious of the real and direct attacks and of our danger, Sister Melecia said, "Ah! We can no longer stay here; let's go down," and down we fled. But in passing by our usual place, I was reminded of our old house maid. I had hoped she was with the rest, but no, glancing back, I saw her all alone trying to fix herself. How could she be left as such? I decided to take her with me. I ran back just in time to lift her up, as she had rolled to the ground. Being too weak to walk, to take her downstairs was impossible for me. All I could



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do was to place her against the wall and stay with her, and together, we began to pray.

I was kneeling for scarcely ten minutes, when I felt something fell down on my left foot,- something heavy, warm, and grasping. Was it only some stone? I stood up and saw my foot profusely bleeding, skin and flesh grabbed away, characteristic effect of the shrapnel. My first impulse was to run down for dressing, but it was too risky, so I had to resume my place resignedly.

Terror and panic were in everybody's heart and soul produced by these deathly instruments of war. The trying days and nights seemed to have reached their doom. We resumed our prayers, and from all corners nothing could be heard but prayers, ejaculations, and petitions accompanied by sighs, weeping, and lamentations, blending with the horrible sounds of the death strokes from outside.

We were only two in our corner, but from time to time a woman, a child, or a girl would run to the spot until a group was formed. Copious rain of earth fragments and suffocating dust fell un pityingly over us, thus falling upon my bleeding wound, - but worse than these, I was convinced that bullets and shrapnel were falling everywhere because it seemed that in every wave of shots, a woman, a child, or a girl fell victim to it – dying or in agonizing pain. In such a crisis my weakness gave way and could only repeat as a prayer, “Oh, please, enough . . .”

Then another panic. A stream of water flowed in the room, taking us by surprise, as we were in the days of dryness. From where it came, we knew not and it came with such rapidity as to fill our place in just a few moments. Oh, how dreadful it looked, and more so when the dead and the suffering began to float over, just upon my feet and before my eyes. “Is this an inundation? Some strategy of the Japs to finish with us all?”

With these thoughts I could only close my eyes, fearing that my end was coming, too. After having been invoking the Blessed Trinity, our Blessed Mother, and the Angels and Saints and the Holy Souls, I could only keep repeating these, “Oh, my God, I beg Thee pardon for all; I give Thee infinite thanks for all. I ask pardon for all my sins and for those of the whole world as the immediate cause of this war and its cruel lashes; and infinite thanks for all our sufferings as its consequences.”



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I got soaked up to the legs and, poor wound! It had already its first dressing of dust and dirty water. That no infection occurred can only be attributed to God's special mercy and grace. I managed to get closer to my old maid where the ground was more elevated, and waited for God's will.

Little by little, the water subsided to my great relief and as a result, it was only from a deposit of water that was struck by the bullets.

The attack was still on, but was it a double attack? For my part, I dare say it was a clash between the two parties – the Japs attacking us and the Americans attacking them for our defense. It seemed to be getting interminable when all of a sudden, like the way it started – as if by one switch – all those death instruments ceased. Not a sound more can be heard, and an absolute calm followed. We remained motionless for some moments wondering at such a sudden change until, confident of some safety, we began to breathe and move freely. Then I stood up to have my wounds dressed and to join my Sisters, some of whom began to doubt of my existence.

The attack, according to my rough calculation, lasted for about four hours, that is, from 7:00 - 11:00 a.m.

What a spectacle to behold – on the wet ground were lying all the dead and the dying. A lady patient, whose abdomen burst open, lay dead across a stretcher. Most distressing of them all, was the sight of a dying mother whose baby was only a few days old.

With the calm, mothers began to look for their children, sisters for their little brothers, and vice versa. Another disastrous effect was the destruction of our provisions of food and clothing – all thrown down to the ground, soaked with water and ravaged by the machine guns, etc.

## OUR LIBERATION

Gathered together in groups inside the smaller shelter, we waited, not knowing what to do next. Still under the spell of fear and panic, we could only make comments and volunteer guesses.

“What shall we do now?” asked one.

“Well,” replied another, I think there is no more hope for us.



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“Another attack and we will all be finished.”

“We had better say the Rosary in the meantime,” suggested a third one.

For sixteen days and nights we had been facing death, but more so in those moments. Yes, facing death, but I repeat what I said before, – in many a heart, there still lingered a bright hope – the hope for a better time, the hope for a better condition, and the hope to see the Stars and the Stripes!

The Rosary was then started. We were only on the first Hail Mary when a voice cried out that we have to go out. “Who said so?” we asked in chorus. The whole gathering began to stir anxiously. Women and children began calling out to each other in loud voices; everybody in suspense.

“Please, Sister Estrella, try to get information of what is going on. That we are safe here.”

She assured us, as she sat back.

“All right, let us say the Rosary now,” urged another.

At the same moment, the Sister who was at the door said excitedly, “We have to leave this place at once. Many are now moving out.”

“It is dangerous to stay here any longer, we have to be out quickly according to the order,” added another.

“There will be a fight and we are asked to get away”.

“But, who says so and where shall we go?”

“At any rate, we have got to die . . . “

Faint rumors – that the Americans were in, as I was suspecting–reached my ears. I whispered it to Sister Raymunda, who was by my side, adding that a fight was going to start between the two armies. She ignored it saying, “Bah! *Que* fight, the fight will be directly against us, the Japs will soon renew the attack”.

In the meantime, the whole gathering began dispersing. Reaching the door, Sister Estrella turned back and insisted saying, “Oh, come out now, they are already here, they are here!”

“Who are here?” was our anxious question.

And she answered with emotion, “The Americans.”

Was it only a dream? Timid but growing confident, everybody rushed out. With much difficulty because of my swollen and painful





## Consuelo Severino

foot, I followed the current, supported by Sister Francisca. At the very door, oh, my God! I was face to face with an American soldier: kindness and smiles were on his face. I greeted him, as did everybody and he in turn, instructed us to go as far away as possible from the area.

Oh! Those were moments of thrill and emotion. It seemed as if Heaven had opened before us. Sighs of relief, tears of joy and gratitude were the expressions of our infinite thanks to our powerful God and Savior with the thought of our liberation. I dare say, *we escaped death by a miracle.*

Let me say some more.

Our caravan – a long line of dirty, weak, haggard, lame, and stooping figures all homeless, walked over bricks, crumbs, moldings and stones. Another soldier addressed us with words of encouragement saying, “Yes, go ahead and don’t fear because our boys (soldiers) are over there to watch and guide you.” Accordingly, we passed by a long line of them posing as our guards, each answering our greetings, with pity and smiles. According to the rumor, they were in the act to meet their antagonists – a fight was expected.

How we walked over those bricks and debris! As I could hardly walk, two Sisters carried me on their backs at intervals. At last we reached the riverside, where for the first time we saw some American tanks. There were many soldiers, too and some with cameras.

Two of them, having noticed that I was being supported by two Sisters, approached and asked me, “Are you wounded?” At my “Yes, Sir,” and the same time showing them my foot, both carried me in their arms until they had me seated on a sort of open, flat boat. The same kindness was shown by the other soldiers to two of our Sisters and other patients.

Still not knowing what to do, or what would be done to us, I was carried to a small paddle boat with Sister Presentacion and some other casualties. Then, with four soldiers, we crossed the river. As soon as we got to the other side, an ambulance and a stretcher were requested. But Sister Presentacion and I were taken to a waiting car (Jeep) and two soldiers took us to San Lazaro Hospital.



### ***Our Last Days in the Hospital of San Juan de Dios***

To these two soldiers, to the two in the boat, and to the two who carried me in their arms I expressed my gratitude, at the same time showing how anxiously we had been waiting for their coming. All of them with satisfaction, answered me, “Oh, we had been trying to come much earlier, but it was impossible.”

As soon as the car had stopped before one of the buildings of San Lazaro, a man carried me up to the dispensary. Thanking him for his attention, he answered, “*De nada Madre, todo por amor de Dios!*” I seemed to have noticed that he had the Doctor’s insignia. At once we were given an injection of tetanus toxoid and while waiting for the dressing, one of the nurses handed me a thick sandwich of American bread and butter.

Once hospitalized with all the kind services and attention of the doctors and our San Juan de Dios nurse, we felt ourselves in a paradise, but as soon as the memories of the Sta. Rosa ruins flitted by our minds, our eyes would fill with tears.

We stayed in San Lazaro for only three days (from Feb. 23, 12:00 p.m. to Feb. 26, 9:30 a.m.), the grateful memory of which will never be effaced from our minds. We were taken to St. Joseph Hospital where we stayed for two whole months (Feb. 26 to Apr. 27.), the memory of which will always fill our hearts with gratitude. Some circumstance took us hastily from St. Joseph’s to Sta. Teresita Hospital, as PCAU patients.

*Now that we are enjoying better days, enjoying a better condition, and we are seeing the stars and stripes, what more could we ask of God? What more could we ask of America?*

*(Written during my confinement at St. Joseph’s Hospital)*

***Sor Consuelo Severino, D.C.  
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