

The experiences recounted in the following article are typical of what actually took place "behind the scenes" in most schools throughout the Philippines during the occupation days. They show the masterly "ball" game played by our teachers to thwart Japanese cultural penetration.

I PLAYED BALL

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The day I arrived at Iloilo City to assume my duties as division superintendent of schools for the province, I was informed that a newly-appointed government official had to "pay his respects" to Captain Hemono, chief of the military administration for the island of Panay. But for two weeks I kept postponing the distasteful visit because I knew that such "courtesy calls" were actually for the purpose of receiving instructions. It was my desire to delay as long as I could the advent of the time when I should be subject to the dictation and directions of the Japs.

Of course I expected that sooner or later I was to be "requested" to see Captain Hemono if I did not do so on my accord. And I had to be well prepared for the initial meeting — meaning I should be ready to explain my failure to see the Captain immediately after my arrival. True enough, I was "invited" by the Chief of the Military Administration to a conference at his office on the third floor of the former Masonic Building on August 14, 1943, at 2:00 o'clock p.m.

"When you come *Iroiro*?" asked the frozen-faced Jap interpreter as soon as I was seated in front of Captain Hemono. (The latter did not have on his military coat nor his shoes, and sat with one leg hooked over the right arm of his chair. He appeared unconcerned with my presence as if to impress me that the situation was an affair of

one in high authority speaking to an underling.)

"A few days ago," I answered, trying to appear very much composed although actually starting to feel the jitters.

"When few days?" the interpreter asked again.

"July 31st," I replied.

"Rong time now. Why not come report chief *military administrashong arrive Iroiro*?"

"Oh, I wanted to start work right away. So I first visited all the schools. I want to be ready to answer any question I may be asked about the schools." Sensing that the explanation did not seem to satisfy the captain, I continued, "My first interest was to find out what is being done with the teaching of *Nippongo* and whether the 'undesirable' portions of the textbooks have been covered in accordance with the order of the Military Administration in Manila."

"*Hay, yorosi! yorosi!... bry gooda!*"

I know he would fall for that stuff. And to clinch the very good initial impression, I tried to drive further, "By the way, I was surprised to find that the teaching of *Nippongo* has not yet been started in the school."

"We sent pensionado *Manira* study teach *Nippongo*." (I knew that fact when I left Manila as I interviewed some of the pensionados at the Bureau of Public Instruction. But I made no comment.) "Pensionados come back four months."

(The Captain had now taken the initiative in the conversation.) "Too *rong* time. So Japanese *sibiryan* teach Nippongo, *he?*"

I was not prepared for this unexpected development. My feigned great concern for Nippongo had put me on the spot and would now serve to facilitate the teaching of this language which I precisely wanted delayed if not entirely prevented. I had to think fast.

"May... be that can be done," I said hesitatingly. "But I am afraid that in the long run it might be better to wait for the return of the Nippongo pensionados." I laboriously explained that a very good start in teaching Nippongo or any other language is essential. That experience in other provinces were to the effect that in the elementary grades Filipino teachers could teach more effectively than Japanese teachers. Filipino teachers could understand Filipino children better. I feared, I concluded, that the Filipino children might develop an unfavorable attitude toward the learning of Nippongo in the hands of an untrained and incompetent teacher, which would be harmful to the cause of Nippongo in the end.

I guessed this reasoning clinched the argument, as thereafter the captain said not a word. I did not either.

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The rich rice lands between the towns of Pavia and Santa Barbara were converted into cotton plantations by the Japs under the authority of the Dai Nippon Growing Association. The company found very much difficulty in hiring enough men to pick the cotton. People feared being kidnapped or killed by the guerrillas for such positively pro-Japanese activity. But the cotton being an essential war material must be picked. The Japs therefore resorted to the schools—the children.

One morning an official of the Dai Nippon Association, accompanied by two *Kempeis*, came to the Santa Bar-

bara Elementary School, summoned the principal and teachers, and instructed them to require their pupils to spend their class hours in picking cotton.

Not cowed even by the presence of the two armed visitors, the principal (who was a brave man, otherwise he would not have accepted assignment in a school too close to the guerrilla zone) told the visitor that he was sorry he could not acquiesce to their desire without any previous authority from the superintendent. To which the cotton official did not reply... and left.

Wasting no time, the principal rushed to the city and informed me about the whole story. I sought the intervention of the provincial governor, but since immediate action was necessary in order to save the children from having to be collaborators in the Japs' war effort, I forthwith went, in company with the principal, to Captain Hemono.

Employing the same strategy that had proved very effective in our previous encounters, I proceeded with my argument in this wise: That while the picking of the cotton was necessary for the war effort, "we" should try to avoid showing the people any semblance of exploitation in order to convince them of the "sincere, altruistic, and benevolent" intentions of the Japanese people in the Philippines. Like the Japanese, the Filipinos are lovers of education, and in education lay the hope of rejuvenating them and "weaning them away from Occidental moorings." Nothing should therefore be done to impair this education.

The captain was all ears while I spoke, and before we left he assured us that he would look into the matter that same afternoon.

The following day the principal came to his school prepared for the worst. The morning passed; then the afternoon, and no visitor came. Thank God! And the principal slept soundly that evening.