

MARAG VALLEY'S RAVAGING WAR: CHRONICLES OF SURVIVAL

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Abstract: The study intended to write a documentary which shows a compilation of the chronicles of survival of the people of Marag to display their experiences and survival mechanisms during the wars years in the valley.

Key informants from Marag Valley, Luna, Apayao were taken as respondents of the study. Sites, connected to the war such as the settlements, camps of both the rebels and the military and the battlefield of the two opposing forces were also visited and documented by the researchers.

The researchers used the Interview and Purposive Sampling methods of research. Documentation, Literature writing, and Expert Validation of the gathered data were made.

The researchers conducted interview (unstructured) with limited key informants from Barangay Marag. The researchers also asked permission from the key informants to take photos during the conduct of interview. Ilocano dialect was used during the interview so that the respondents easily expressed their ideas.

To summarize some important points from the stories of survival, the researchers made a Coping Mechanism Matrix which shows the survival mechanisms or strategies done by the key informants to survive from the war.

Keywords: Marag Valley, Philippines, New People's army, No man's land, war.

1. RATIONALE

One of the most prominent cases of salvaging, massacre, and forcible evacuation happened in Marag Valley, Luna, Apayao. (Juan, 2004) It was once infested by the leftist – the communist armed group called the New Peoples' Army.[1] The area became a (battle ground of) resource base and a training ground of communist insurgent in northern Luzon. In 1980s, it was declared a "no man's land". The worsened peace and order condition prompted some of the residents to leave their homes and farmlands and evacuate to Luna and Pamplona.[2] Pieces of evidence of the war years scattered in the area--booby traps, strafed or burned houses, man-made tunnels, caves and even land mines abound in the Valley. There are scores of more recent stories of atrocity, human tragedy and crime.[3]

Residents said that they still feel the trauma, pain, and hardship of the war years. But being chased around the mountains in the tri-boundaries of Apayao, Cagayan, and Kalinga by contending forces have taught them precious lessons in survival and resilience.

Objective

Specifically, this study is intended to:

1. document stories of survival from the destructive war which happened in Marag Valley;
2. write a literature regarding the stories of survival from the war; and
3. validate the documentation of the gathered survival stories.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

War

War is a phenomenon in the history of humanity. War is waged in order to obtain economic and political goals and concessions, and to dominate. War is very destructive and its results cause too much pain and sufferings. In all types of

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armed conflict, in most cases brutality and various barbarous acts are practiced by opposing protagonists to weaken the enemy's resistance. The Filipino-Americans were no exception, considering that they belong to different races and civilizations. (Zulueta & Nebres, 2003)

Apolinario Mabini, in a manifesto dated April 15, 1899 at San Isidro, Nueva Ecija said:

"And since war is the last recourse that is left to us for the salvation of our country and our national honor let us acquit ourselves like men, even though the lot of present generation is conflict and sacrifice. It matters not whether we die in the midst at the end of our most painful day's work. The generations to come, praying over our tombs will shed for us tears of love and gratitude, and not bitter reproach." [4]

Marag Valley

Marag Valley is a vast forest land extending from the foot of Mt. Siamsanderie in Luna, Apayao to the Malababie Valley in Pamplona, Cagayan. Most of the land area is thickly forested which gives an impression of "virginity" and settlements are found along the mighty Marag River.[5] It is home to Ilocano migrants, Isnags, and Aggays. Prior to 1984, Marag Valley had the services of a complete elementary school and a PC detachment. Although its rugged terrain made it inaccessible, the social services sector conducted regular visits to the area. The people were self-sufficient. The residents had their own farmlands to till and the valley's fertile lands produced rice that supplied Pamplona and other towns. Some residents were skilled rattan craftsmen and their products were bartered in the neighboring towns.[6]

It was in the 1980's when fierce fighting between the military and the rebels happened in the valley until the military recovered the area from the rebels during the early 1990s.

During that period, many lives were lost including innocent civilians, human rights were violated, tortures were perpetuated and properties were destroyed. Marag valley was extremely difficult to negotiate with and treacherous because the NPA set up booby traps along rivers and other areas. (Tolentino, 2011)

In interviews with Marag residents, mission participants documented two cases of extrajudicial execution, as well as six confirmed civilian deaths from bombing and shelling during Nakilala-Salidummay -- indicating that the army statements that no civilians remained were untrue. The group also reported the destruction of over one hundred homes, many of them burned to the ground by soldiers, who also destroyed food supplies and crops. According to press accounts and investigations by the Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center, at least 500 families, or close to 3,000 individuals, fled the area during the period from October to December.

Marag Valley As The Stronghold Of The CPP

The late Honorable Elias K. Bulut Sr. said that Marag Valley used to be an NPA stronghold during the Martial Law years but is now an ecotourism destination because of scenic attractions. Earlier, the armed forces downgraded the province from a hotspot due to fewer armed attacks. According to him, the NPA rebels come from Cagayan Valley to collect money from residents in the remote villages of Apayao. He cited the community residents as the frontline defense against insurgency, noting that security is anchored in the grassroots. (See, 2014.)

During the interagency meeting of the Task Force on Marag Valley held on June 4, 1991, rebel returnees Nonong Marcelo and Loida Basilio confirmed that Marag Valley was the center and training ground of the communist movement in northern Luzon. Marcelo, 19 at that time, admitted belonging to the sniper platoon of the NPA. He reveals: "A thousand of them were in the basic course and about 200 were in the advanced course. The training graduates were later deployed in the provinces". Bgen. Robert Manlongat, Commander of the 503rd Brigade whose area of responsibility included Marag Valley, later showed certificates of training in military courses given by the NPA. (*Bread and Dignity*, 1992)

In Nerez's report, Senior Supt. Robert Gallardo said that around 10 heavily armed men were reported to be conducting extortion activity in Calayucay, a Sitio of Marag. This was validated by members of the Apayao PPO Intelligence Branch. However, while the police were still gathering more information, one of the suspected rebels identified as Vinia Alejandro, suddenly came out from a house noticed the presence of the police personnel and shouted "Army," "Army," to alert her companions. (Artemio, 2014).

Militarization And Platform For Peace In Marag Valley

Millions of pesos had been poured in by the Aquino and Ramos administrations for the military’s “weapons of destruction” like guns and bullets to drive away the rebels in Marag.

The Aquino and Ramos administration had tried every possible means to reclaim Marag from rebels to make it a government showcase of its programs and sincerity in bringing back rebels and their sympathizers to folds of the law.(Dizon,1998)

In October to December 1990, the biggest military offensive, dubbed "Oplan Salidumay", was launched in the area to flush out the insurgents.

It was also recommended that priority be given to health and educational services. The Marag Valley issue was included in the agenda of the Cabinet Cluster for Security and Political Affairs (Cluster E) meeting of May 8,1991. The PMS recommendations, together with the findings of the PHRC, became the reference for discussion of Cabinet Cluster E on the Marag Valley issue. It also became the basis for the creation of an Action Team tasked to draft the Integrated Rehabilitation and Development Plan for Marag Valley.

The drafted Integrated Rehabilitation and Development Plan for Marag Valley proposed an approach which envisioned the reestablishment of government in Marag Valley through the delivery of basic services and the organization of the residents into self-help units. The member agencies agreed to this vision and recognized their respective roles in the effort. The Department of Agriculture (DA) committed PI 24 thousand for farming projects and DPWH allocated P10 million for the clearing and construction of a road from Luna to Marag proper. The Department of Justice (DOJ) assisted by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), sent two teams of prosecutors to investigate and document alleged human rights abuses committed by both the NPAs and the military. The Department of National Defense (DND), as Coordinator and Secretariat, provided the logistics requirements for these activities. The PMS also recommended to the President the allocation of P3.5 million from the PSF for projects in Marag Valley. This amount funded the construction of school buildings and multi-purpose Hope Centers which offered a combination of health, day-care and feeding services. It also funded start up livelihood projects as requested by the Marag Valley residents. In January 1992, P396/200.00 out of the approved P566 thousand was released to the 54th Engineering Brigade for the construction of a schoolbuilding and a multi-purpose center completed 32 when schoolyear started in June 1992.(Bread and Dignity)

Conceptual Framework

To come up with a documentary of the Chronicles of Survival from the war which happened in Marag Valley, the paradigm of the study illustrates how to better understand and appreciate the study.

Phase 1 was the identification of key informants. Phase 2 was interview and secondary data collection. Phase 3 was writing literary documents. Phase 4 was lay outing and editing. Phase 5 was validation(community meeting/FGD). Phase 6 was final printing of documents.

Research Paradigm

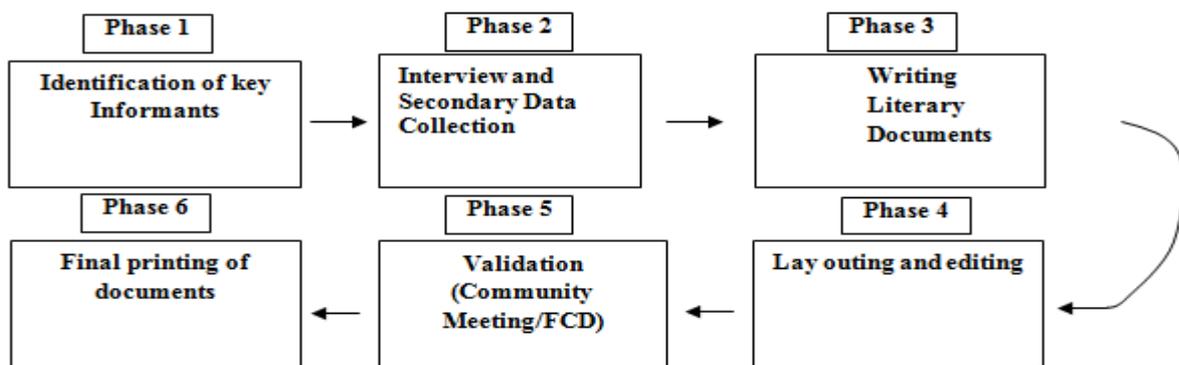


Figure 1. The research paradigm showing the process flow of the activities.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Procedure

The study made use of the Interview and Purposive Sampling methods of research. Documentation, Literature writing, and Expert Validation of the gathered data were made. A Documentary which shows a compilation of the chronicles of survival was also made to display the experiences and survival mechanisms of the key informants during the war.

The researchers conducted interview (unstructured) with limited key informants from Barangay Marag and asked permission from the key informants to take photos during the conduct of interview.

The researchers also took pictures of some sites connected to the war such as the settlements and camps of both rebel returnees and the military, and the battlefield of the two opposing forces.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Marag Valley, Luna, Apayao which was the former stronghold of the NPA and was the place where the desolating war happened.

Respondents of the Study

Key informants from barangay Marag were taken as respondents of the study.

Results and Discussion

The following key informants were asked to tell their stories about the NPA occupation, the war, and their coping mechanisms during the said hostilities.

4. CHRONICLES OF SURVIVAL

Cafgu Primo Agpuldo Jr. & Assistant Commander Joe Sagun

The two members of the CAFGU were not present during the war but they have shared what they have heard about the war.

In the year 1989 to 1982, in Bucao Marag Valley, *Tura-Tura* and helicopters were used by the military as means of transportation in going in and out of the valley.

The military forces bombarded the camps of the rebels. According to them, there were hundreds of soldiers that came in the valley.

The place named “Mapog” served as the training ground of the rebels.

There were landmines in the valley during those years.

Sources of supply of food for the soldiers were from Conner, a municipality in Apayao.

Mr. Mc Arthur Balungday

Mr. Balungday is an ex-rebel returnee. He said that in the year 1980s, Marag Valley was declared as “no man’s land”.

Barangay Cagandung served as the transient place for civilians. The group of rebels allotted PhP30.00 per head for their food.

To have source of foods for the duration of the hostilities, the rebels helped the civilians in planting and harvesting of rice.

In June, 1993, after the rebels surrendered, the government implemented an amnesty program wherein rebels were obliged to surrender or return all materials and weapons issued by the rebels returnees’ officials at Marag River.

Mr. Victor Dugay

A resident of Bucao, Marag Valley said that he was only 12 years old when he witnessed the coming of the rebels. Due to the pre-war, his schooling was affected. According to him, there were returnees at night. When asked about how rebels

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treated the civilians, he said that the returnees were not harmful. But he said that when the military forces took place, the chaos also came in the land.

“Idi addan dagiti military, naggulo. Kariten da uray dagiti marabian laeng nga aggapu iti talon a civilian. Alas sais iti rabii ngamin iti curfew ket medyo nalwag met paylaeng. pagkamalian daamin nga civilians idi nga NPA,”(*When the military forces arrived, the place became chaotic. They hurt civilians who come home late. Six o'clock was then the set curfew but it was just starting to turn to dusk. They suspected many civilians as rebels,*)he said.

There were rebels in the valley but according to him they still can sleep wherever they wanted. The rebels were not harmless so long as you do not do anything bad.

During the war, they were trapped in Mapog also known as Kimmallugong(*Hat-like*). “Aglilimmeng kami idi nu adda dagiti military.” (*We hide when the military comes.*)What shows positivity despite the war was this statement,” Madama idi iti gubat, ngem agga ayam kami iti basketball. Mangngeg mo dagiti putok. no natured ka, mapan ka agbuya.”(*War was ongoing then, but we were playing basketball. We merely could hear the sounds of firing sounds. If you are brave, you can go and watch(the war).*) When asked if he was not afraid to die, this was his answer ,”No gasat mon, gasat mo talagan.”(*When it's your time(To die),it's your time.*)

What did he do when the military forces were away? “No awan military, mapan kami agtalon.”(When the military are not around, we go to the field.)

“Pan kami aglibas nga aggapas ti rabii no adda da dagiti army. No adda mangngeg mi nga putok a ket, sumang-at kami.”(*During the night,we get the chance to go to the field and harvest(palay). when we hear firing sounds, we get up(from harvesting).*)

Was he traumatized? “Haan. Kaslang awan iti napasamak.”(No. It's as if nothing happened.)

The conversation moved to the recruitment of the rebels for self-defense and family protection purposes. He said that it was inevitable that even civilians were accused as rebels because of the guns that they own.

Mr. Dugay also shared that the training ground of the rebel returnees was at Mapog, a part of Barangay Cagandung The popular training ground was at the mountainside of Siamsiamdarie, one of the tallest mountains at Marag Valley. The place where the hanging bridge was built was not actually a river before. It was the battlefield of the two opposing forces.

When asked about the war, he stated that it was purely a battle between the rebels and the military. Civilians were excluded. The rebels made sure that no civilians will be compromised. They see to it that civilians were on their safe hideouts before they provoke war.

Some He also stated that there were booby traps found in the place. He was asked about where the rebels' weapons came from. He said that these weapons were the guns and war-related weapons that they took from the slain soldiers. Supplies also came from Places such as Abra, Cagayan, and Ilocos .

Finally, he ended up his testimony.” Napintas nga narigat daydi gubat. Tumaray ka. Aglilimmeng ka tapno maisalakan mo ta bagim.” (*The war was somewhat enjoyable and difficult. You run. You hide to save yourself.*)

Mr. & Mrs. Rolando Agpuldo

In the year 1982, their child which they named “Merlan” was born. They were trapped in the place. According to them, The death of Lolo Rolando's nephews was their reason to get out of the valley.

Lola Mercy said that the rebels used to walk along the way.

What frightened them was the death of Lola Mercy's Brother-in-laws.

The two men, as Lola shared, thought that the valley was then peaceful that's why they went back to Marag without knowing that the war was still raging.

“Kaasi Ti Apo, adda kami paylaeng. Nalasatan mi iti nakaam amak a gubat,”they finally said.(With God's grace, we are still alive. We have surpassed the dangerous war.)

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Mr. and Mrs. Romualdo Dugay

Exporting fruits such as bananas(*saba*) was one of their businesses before the war. Another was sari-sari store. They were supplying goods in Pamplona, Cagayan. The couple also had a farming business.

Lola Linda, Lolo Romualdo's wife said that Marag Valley was declared as "no man's land" in the year 1982. But she said that it didn't mean that the place was vacated. "no man's land" means that no man can go in and out of the place. they have four children who were then schooling. When the war started, they children needed to stop but had to study at their own home.

They still pushed through with their business before which was exporting goods. They encountered rebels along the road but they were not inflicted. Lola Linda said that one of her children's teachers was also suspected as a rebel because people generalized that people who come from Marag were rebels.

To survive from the war, Lolo Romualdo and Lola Linda decided to go to Ilocos. They lived there for ten years. The people of Ilocos suspected them as rebels and even wanted to cast them out of the place. When Marag Valley's Ravaging War has ended in the year 1992, the couple together with their children went back to Marag and continued their business which up to now is a growing business.

But Lola Linda's story didn't end up there. She shared some her unforgettable moments about the NPA and Military Occupation. Their house served as the boarding house for both rebel returnees and soldiers. "Sanga labba nga sardinas iti maipasida kadagiti NPA."(We can spend a basketful of sardines for their rebel returnees' viand). The same is true when the soldiers came.

Because they ran out of supply of coffee, they just sip hot water just to heat their stomach.

She also uttered that she always left their house clean and shiny. But when she arrived home, it was messy. She could see the rebel returnees playing guitar and singing songs.

She said that they might have died if they chose to give up but despite all the odds, they stayed firm and got through the ravaging war.

Mrs. Sinamar Agpuldo Busay

"Disi-sais nak laeng idi ngem addan asawa ken tagibik. Naggigiyan kami idiy Cagandungan. Agum-uma kami idi."(*I was only 16 years old then but I was already married and had a baby. We lived at Cagandungan. We were farming then.*)

These were the starting lines of one of the respondents. She said that she had a lot to tell us about her experiences but due to an important appointment, she only stated some of their cruel and heart-breaking experiences during the war which happened years ago.

"Nu makasabat kami iti gayem(pertaining to the rebel returnees), aglelemeng kami. Likliklikan mi ida."(When we encounter rebels along the way, we usually hide. We evade them.)

"Gapu kadaydiay nga gubat, saan kami a nakamulmula idiy pagumaan. Agmula kami iti kahoy, sa kami agtiliw iti ikikan par iti kanen mi."(Because of that war, we were not able to plant in our rice field. We planted cassava, then catch fish for our food.)

"Rabii kami laeng nga agluto idi ta mabuteng kami ngarud. Agabung-abung kami. Maatepan la ketdi, mayaten."(We only cooked food during the night. We make tents or impermanent houses. As long as it has a roof cover, it was okay.)

Mrs. Busay stated that they moved from one place to another carrying their families and even their pets. She said with teary eyes that the military forces gun down every person who comes across their way. According to her, she and her family were suspected as rebel returnees.

She had a reason of engaging herself to early marriage. "Nagasawa kami a nasapa ta isu ti kuna dagiti nagannak kami. nga nasaysayaat a makita da kami nga nagasawa kamin tapno han da kami i-recruit dagiti NPA"(Our parents told us to marry at an early age so that the rebels won't recruit us.)

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How did she and family survive? “Adda krisis idi. Masukat iti kanen mi. Aglugaw kami tapno makawaras laeng.” (*There was famine then. We measure our food fairly before. We cook “lugaw” just to cater everyone with food.*)

She also said that when she gave birth to her eldest child, there were no midwives around. She thought that that would be the end of her life. But she survived.

“Adda pay tay magmagna kami, amangan ta adda ngayam bomba iti sangoanan mi. Idi “No man’s land”, napupok kami dito. Nag-alla-alla kami.” (There were times before that we were frightened by booby traps that explode while we were walking along the way. When The place was declared as “no man’s land”, we were trapped inside the valley. We wandered from one place to another.)

Due to fear that they might get killed by people of either of the two forces, they never lived normally. They even climbed the highest peak of Marag named as “Siamsiamdarie” or “Siamsiambirri”. Her husband also took charge in carrying her sister who was suffering asthma then.

She felt protected by the rebel returnees before. According to her, the rebels were not harmful. Instead, they even helped the civilians and make them feel safe.

The war according to her was one of her unforgettable moments in her life. Sometimes, when she thinks of it, she would cry, but also smiles coz the war didn’t only bring into he and her family’s life unpleasant experience. Hence, it taught her many lessons.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

To summarize some important points from the stories of survival, the researchers made a Coping Mechanism Matrix which shows the survival mechanisms or strategies done by the key informants to survive from the war.

Area	Strategies or Coping Mechanism
Search for food	Midnight cropping Food Allowances Root Cropping Food Alternatives
Shelter	“Abung-abung” making/ Tent Making
Hideouts or Place of Refuge	Cave(hiding), mountain hiking, and forest hiking
Health Issues	Self-medication First Aid personnel
Education	Home study Joining class sessions of the rebels

Conclusion

Based from the results and discussions of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- ✓ Most of the respondents were of young age when they experienced the war;
- ✓ Some of the respondents are within the side of the rebel returnees; some are within the military forces;
- ✓ Hidden stories which some information from the internet does not provide were revealed.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion, the following are recommended:

- ✓ Gather additional information that explains the side of the civilians, the rebel returnees, and the military.
- ✓ Conduct an identical study of this research containing a deeper cultivation of the history of Marag Valley’s destructive war

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