

**THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF AND APPELLEE, VS.
PEDRO PULIDO ET ALS., DEFENDANTS. PEDRO PULIDO, IRINEO
BOÑGOG AND TITO T. QUINTO, DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS.**

G.R. No. L-2447. March 04, 1950

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PER CURIAM:

Those who go up to Baguio by car may remember or may be familiar with that stretch of road between the town of Sison and the beginning of the Kennon road that goes up to Baguio, near the Kennon bridge. For several hundred meters, this road follows the contour of and hugs the mountains to the right, while to the left is the Bued river, wide but shallow, part of whose bed is dry during the summer months. On this highway is to be found the concrete Doñgon bridge, scene of the ghastly crime involved in this case.

At the beginning of the Pacific War, and when the Japanese landed on Northern Luzon, In their retreat toward Bataan, the USAFFE forces blasted the southern end of this bridge which then became impassable until repaired about the end of 1947, or about the beginning of 1948. In the meantime, people driving up to Baguio from Sison, at a point still far from said bridge, had to make a detour to the left until they reached the road running from Rosario to Baguio, then turned to the right, crossed the Kennon bridge and then turned to the left to go up Kennon road toward the Summer Capital. So, the Doñgon bridge became an isolated spot. This explanation is deemed necessary in order to understand the sketch (Exh. "O"), trace the route taken by the parties involved in this case, from the barrio of Artacho, Sison, Pangasinan to Doñgon bridge on the afternoon of June 12, 1947, as well as establish the nature of said bridge as a secluded and uninhabited place. Late that afternoon, two women and four men accompanied by one of the appellants and conspirators, named Irineo Boñgog, all riding in one Jeep, were lured into and held up on this Doñgon were killed bridge. Three of them were killed by gunfire and then despoiled of their belongings, principally money amounting to P33,000.. Later about midnight Boñgog, because he was not given his share of the loot, and apparently to simulate innocence, reported the hold up and killing to the police in Sison, but without revealing the identity of the robbers and killers, much less, his connection with the conspiracy.

Very early the next day, police authorities from Sison went to Doñgon bridge where a most gruesome spectacle met their eyes. On the bridge itself was a burned jeep and under it was the charred body of a man who later was identified as Frederico Sarmiento. Behind the jeep toward the north and on the left embankment of the road was the dead body of Margarita Surisantos Maneclang and further north below the embankment or rather on a dry portion of the bed of the river was the dead body of Leonor Calderon. The three bodies bore several mortal bullet wounds. The nearest house to the scene of the killing was about 200 meters away up the mountain side to the right. All these details are graphically shown on the sketch (Exh. "O").

As a result of the investigation of the police authorities, Irineo Boñgog was suspected as forming part of the gang that effected the hold up and the killing and so was detained. Pedro Pulido and Crestituto Quinto, alias Tito Quinto, were later arrested. Pulido was taken to Doñgon bridge where in the presence of Capt, Hidalgo and Lt, Perez and two soldiers, all of the Military Police, he re-enacted the hold up and shooting which resulted in the killing and robbery of the three victims. Still later, Delfin Gomez and Nicasio Magdaraog were arrested. During

their confinement and investigation by the Military Police in Dagupan, prisoners Quinto, Bongog and Pulido signed and ratified before the Justice of the Peace of Dagupan, three statements (Exhs. G, H, and I), respectively. The five prisoners, and Benjamin Esuagen alias "Ben" and Santiago Sipos alias "Ago" both of whom have never been arrested, were charged with multiple murder before the Justice of the Peace Court of Sison, which court after proper proceedings sent the case up to the Court of First Instance of Pangasinan where the Provincial Fiscal changed the charge to robbery in band with multiple homicide. This new complaint was preliminarily investigated by the Justice of the Peace of the capital of the province who later elevated the case to the Court of First Instance. In that court, the complaint was further amended, dropping Esuagen and Sipos as defendants for the reason that they were still at large. Before the trial, upon the recommendation of the prosecuting attorney, Delfin Gomez was discharged from the information in order to utilize him as a Government witness.

After trial the lower court presided over by Judge Ceferino de los Santos acquitted Nicasio Magdaraog, but "declared, the defendants Pedro Pulido, Ireneo Boñog, and Tito Quinto guilty as principals beyond reasonable doubt of the crime with which they are charged in the information and imposes upon them the penalty of DEATH by electrocution; to return or pay, jointly and severally, the amount of P22,000 to the heirs of Margarita Surisantos Maneclang, and the sum of P11,000 to the heirs of Federico Sarmiento; to indemnify, jointly and severally, the heirs of each of the victims Margarita Surisantos Maneclang, Leonor Calderon, and Federico Sarmiento in the sum of P8,000.00 for each victim; and, to pay three-fourths of the costs." This case is now here for review.

Piecing the different pieces of the evidence consisting of the testimonies of the witnesses for the prosecution and the defense, the written statements or admissions made by the appellants and the other exhibits, like we do in a cross word puzzle, the resulting picture may be described briefly as follows.

With the establishment of the American Military and Naval Bases in the Philippines after Liberation, particularly in Northern Luzon, such as Base M in San Fernando, La Union and the Munitions dump at Rosario, same province, through pilferage, sometimes, with the active connivance of the persons in charge thereof as well as those detailed to guard the same, explosives, such as dynamite and blasting caps, in large quantities were channeled from said bases into the hands of civilians, especially fishermen who used them to illegally catch fish in rivers, particularly in Lingayen Gulf. There developed an illegal traffic in this prohibited commodity on a more or less large scale, and the business of "buy and sell" with its inevitable agents and middlemen, with which tie have become familiar during the Japanese occupation flourished anew, but with an innovation or added factor. There sprang groups of people who because of lack of capital could not engage in the business, or, spurning the illegal, tho profitable traffic in this prohibited article as being too slow or its profits as insufficient, found and developed a shortcut or easier way of making money by pretending to have dynamite or blasting caps, luring prospective buyers to a lonely spot and robbing them of the purchase money carried by them, even killing them in order to eliminate all chances of detection thru witnesses. This was exactly what happened in the present case. The three appellants in this case—Pulido, Bongog, and Quinto and their associates Esuagen and Sipos, were engaged in this highly profitable but infamous business or racket off and on during 1947.

About June 10 of the same year, these five men met in the barrio of Artacho, town of Sison, and decided to renew or to give more impetus to their slackening business. Pulido, Boñog, and Quinto were designated to look for prospective buyers of blasting caps. That same day, the three met Delfin Gomez who was passing by the barrio of Artacho, Sison on his way to his town, Sual, Pangasinan. Boñog who was acting as spokesman for the three asked him if he was interested in blasting caps. Gomez who saw profit in the business said that he would look for buyers, and to assure a reasonable margin of profit for himself, he bargained and succeeded in having the price of P8,000 a box reduced to P7,500. In the afternoon Gomez accompanied by Boñog went to Dagupan and contacted

Leonor Calderon, an agent who also promised to look for blasting cap buyers. After staying in her house Gomez and Bongog returned to Artacho, Sison, in the morning of the 12th with the assurance of Leonor that later she would follow; them with a buyer. True enough, that same morning Leonor arrived at Artacho, accompanied by a buyer, Margarita Surisantos Maneclang who had with her P22,000 in bills, some of which were in large denominations.

In the meantime, and independent of and alien to the plan and measures made and taken by the three accused and their associates, Nicasio Magdaraog acting as an agent on his own, had been trying to interest Frederico Sarmiento of Urdaneta, Pangasinan in the purchase of No. 7 blasting caps. But Sarmiento was interested only in No. 10 blasting caps. In going to the town of Rosario where the military munitions dump was located looking for No. 10 blasting caps, Magdaraog accompanied by Jesus Ostrea, counsins-in-law of Sarmiento, met Leonor Calderon and learned from her that Bongog and his associates had plenty of blasting caps for sale, apparently the kind wanted by Sarmiento. Ostrea was dispatched to Urdaneta to call his cousin-in-law. Later that afternoon of June 12, 1947, Ostrea arrived at Artacho accompanied by Sarmiento who brought with him P11,000, with which to buy blasting caps. Pulido who seems to be, if not the mastermind, at least the most active member of the gang, told the prospective buyers that he had five cases of blasting caps but which he dared not bring or show in public because of their prohibited nature. At the beginning, Leonor and Margarita were insisting that they be shown samples of the blasting caps before they would seriously consider the purchase thereof. Pulido, pretending to secure samples, left but later returned saying that he did not succeed in his mission for the reason that the Military Police were confiscating blasting caps and furthermore, his uncle who was really the owner of the blasting caps refused to open any of the boxes in order to get samples therefrom. Magdaraog showed some impatience and said that as long as Pulido and his companions had the stock for sale, they could very well dispense with seeing samples thereof. The parties—the buyers Sarmiento and Margarita and their agents Magdaraog and Delfin Gomez and Leonor, on one side, and the accused represented by Pulido, on the other, finally closed the deal. Pulido left them ostensibly to secure the mythical five cases of blasting caps and place them at the disposal of the buyers at a secluded spot secure from the eyes of the Military Police. He instructed the buyers to follow later and go to Doñgon bridge and once there, call out his name "Pedro". His associate Boñgog was detailed to accompany the purchasers. Pulido had gone to make the final arrangements and put the finishing touches to their dastardly scheme. He rounded up his companions Qulnto, Esuagen, and Sipos and took them to Doñgon bridge to await the arrival of their victims. Pulido and Quinto were provided with a carbine and a Qgrand rifle, respectively, while Sipos carried a Thompson Submachine gun.

About 6:00 o'clock that afternoon the party of purchasers left Artacho, Sison, in a Jeep bound for Doñgon bridge. Sarmiento was at the wheel. To his right were the two women—Margarita and Leonor, and at the extreme end of the front seat was Nicasio Magdaraog. Seated on the back seat were Jesus Ostrea on the left and to his right was Gomez. On the right tool box was seated Boñgog.

As stated at the beginning of this decision, the party could not take the direct road straight to Dongon bridge because the road from Artacho to that bridge was impassable; and so they went around to the left until they reached the road from Rosario to Kennon road, turned to the right and crossed the Kennon bridge. To apprise drivers of other vehicles who may be coming from the opposite direction, Sarmiento snapped on his headlights but after leaving the bridge and turning to the right toward Dongon bridge, he put out his lights and continued driving up to their destination. On reaching Doñgon bridge, the party saw that a large branch of an acacia tree, with fresh leaves, had been placed across the southern end of the bridge so as to bar any further advance of the vehicle. This, aside from the fact as already stated that the southern end of the bridge had been blasted. Sarmiento got down from the jeep and walked forward presumably to see or investigate the condition of the blasted end of the bridge and to look more closely at the acacia branch laid across it. In order to give way to Bongog, who went

down the jeep in order to give the signal, Magdaraog had to go down first but later it seems that he returned to his seat. Boñgog walked forward about seven meters in front of the jeep and called out the name of Pedro about twice. Almost immediately thereafter, a burst of fire from at least two guns greeted the party. Sarmiento visibly hit, held up his hands and retreated but the firing continued and he fell to the ground dead. Magdaraog got down from the jeep in a hurry and ran northward and was able to escape. The two women also jumped down from the jeep and scurried northward behind the vehicle in a crouching position either to avoid the continuous fire or because they had already been hit. Delfin Gomez before and in the act of jumping down from the jeep and attracted by the source of the fire, distinctly saw Pulido in a kneeling position in front of the jeep and about six meters away firing a gun in the direction of the jeep. Three meters behind him was Quinto also firing a long gun whom Gomez also saw and identified. Jesus Ostrea told the court that he also saw Pulido firing a gun in the position already described but although he saw a man behind him also in the act of firing, he could not identify said person. Both Gomez and Ostrea, running northward and away from their assailants were able to escape by jumping off the road into the ravine and later making for the mountains. During their flight they both saw the two women crouching and crawling away from the jeep.

Thereafter, Pulido, Quinto, Bongog, Esuagen and Sipos searched and robbed their three dead victims—Sarmiento, Leonor and Margarita. Esuagen lifted the body of Sarmiento, placed it under the jeep and then set fire to the vehicle. The bodies of the two women were flung down the embankment.

The defense of alibi interposed by appellants Pulido and Quinto was correctly rejected by the trial court on the ground that even assuming that they were really at the places where they claim to have been that afternoon of June 12, 1947 they could well and easily have gone to the scene of the crime to commit it. Moreover, although Pulido claims that afternoon he had borrowed a horse from a friend and ridden it in search of an astray cow, a disinterested witness for the prosecution, who lived not very far from Dongon bridge, told the court that shortly before 6:30 that afternoon he had seen Pulido and Quinto riding on a horse pass near his house.

Boñgog, one of the appellants herein, naturally, could not put up the same defense of alibi for the reason that he was riding in the same jeep with the persons who were held up and killed by his co-defendants. But he insists that he merely went to accompany the party that was supposed to buy blasting caps from Pulido and his companions at Doñgon bridge. There are several reasons for believing and finding Boñgog as having taken part in the conspiracy, at least to rob the victims if not also to kill them. When Bongog, Pulido, and Quinto tried and succeeded in interesting Delfin Gomez in the purchase of blasting caps on June 10, 1947, it was he (Boñgog) who acted as spokesman for the trio. In fact he accompanied Gomez to Dagupan to look for prospective buyers, and that fateful afternoon of June 12th, it was he who accompanied and acted as a guide to the party of agents and buyers, and, what is more important, upon their arrival at Dongon bridge, it was he who gave the signal for the hold up and, possibly, also for the firing, by calling out the name of Pedro Pulido twice. If he were an innocent party, merely asked to accompany the purchasers, without any understanding or connivance with the robbers and killers, he could very well have called out the name of Pedro Pulido from his seat inside the jeep, but that would have imperiled his life because at the start of the shooting the assailants' fire was mostly concentrated on the jeep and its occupants. So, he had to get down from the vehicle which he did. Furthermore, the fact that in spite of the intense firing from Pulido, Quinto and Sipos, Bongog received not even a scratch, while Sarmiento who had also gotten down from the jeep and walked forward and was standing not far from him, was hit, showed that the firing was not intended for him, and that it was purposely withheld until he had negotiated a sufficient and safe distance from the jeep and its passengers. Moreover, his written statement (Exhibit H), definitely links him with the conspiracy.

In this connection, we shall have to rule upon the admissibility and competence of the three written statements

(Exhs. G, H, and I) of Quinto, Boiigog and Pulido, respectively, for the reason that the three appellants claim that said statements were given under duress and to avoid further torture by the Military Police. We have carefully examined the evidence on this point and we are convinced that all the three statements were given voluntarily without undue pressure and without any promise of clemency or reward. With the exception tat of Pulido, the defendants were unable and failed to show either to the trial court or to the provincial fiscal or the justice of the peace, anything on their persons showing any sign or trace of any torture or maltreatment. When they appeared before Justice of the Peace Hermitaño to sign and ratify their statements they made no complaints or remark in this regard. It is true that at the trial Pulido, alleging manhandling, showed a scar on his forehead, but it was satisfactorily explained by Capt. Hidalgo and Lt. Perez to the Court. According to them, one day upon returning to Dagupan from Doñgon bridge where Pulido had re-enacted the commission of the crime, they were overtaken by a six by six truck and Pulido who was in their jeep and under custody, jumped from it, almost right in the path of the truck, either to commit suicide or to escape. Fortunately, the wheels of the truck missed him by a matter of inches. The two military police privates guarding him in the jeep jumped down and handled him rather roughly believing that he was trying to escape, and the wound on his forehead may have been caused by said rough handling or by his rolling over and along the road after he jumped from the running jeep.

It is noteworthy that in none of the three statements (Exhs. G, H, and I) did the affiants admit having taken part in the killing. Boñgog, although admitting having taken part in the conspiracy, limited the object thereof to merely holding up the victims & not to inflict any injuries, much less kill them. Pulido and Quinto, although admitting having carried a carbine and a Garand rifle, respectively, said that they did not take any part whatsoever in the killing because although he (Pulido) pressed the trigger of his carbine three times, it did not fire; and as to Quinto, he said that his Garand rifle was snatched away from him by Ben Suagen. If there had really been undue pressure, intimidation, or torture by the Military Police to the extent that the three affiants no longer had a will of their own and merely followed whatever the police wanted and indicated, to insure conviction for the killing of the victims, it would have been easy and convenient to have included in the three affidavits admissions and statements of a conspiracy not only to rob but also to kill, even actual participation in the actual killing. But this was not done. Besides, the affidavits contain so many details that could, have been known only to the three appellants but which was difficult or even impossible for the Military Police to invent and include in the affidavits. Another consideration which should not be overlooked is that although Delfin Gomez and Nicasio Magdaraog were strongly suspected by the Military Police as being members of the conspiracy and were in fact arrested and held by the Military Police, to say nothing of their being included in the complaint or information, unlike the three appellants, these two did not subscribe any affidavit linking themselves with the conspiracy. All these circumstances persuade and convince us that the three statements (Exhs. G, H, and I) were made voluntarily and are competent and admissible evidence.

The fact that Bongog reported the robbery to the police authorities of Sison, may at first blush appear perplexing if not intriguing, and his counsel seizes upon this circumstance to bolster his argument that Bongog would not have done this if he were really guilty. Of course, the perpetrators of a crime, especially one as hideous as that we have under consideration, do not usually report the matter to the authorities just to be, arrested and punished, unless they have a good defense, such as self-defense in a crime of homicide or physical injuries. But as the trial court has well observed, Bongog may have made the report in order to divert suspicion and lead the authorities to believe that since he reported the crime, he could not have possibly have taken part in it. Another explanation which the record reveals is that Bongog, despite his connection with the conspiracy and his active participation in executing and carrying it out, was, according to him omitted in the apportionment of the loot, this, altho he knew that there was much of it. Furthermore, in making the report to the police of Sison, he was careful in excluding himself from any connection with or participation in the commission of the crime. He pictured himself as an

innocent passenger in the jeep, merely requested by the two women victims to accompany them and act as their guide. To his simple mind, at the time, in making the report he was leading the authorities away from his trail because he made himself appear as a mere innocent bystander, but at the same time getting even with his co-conspirators who had double-crossed him.

As to the identification of Pulido and Quinto, we are satisfied that the two were seen and sufficiently identified by Gomez while he was seated in the jeep and while jumping down from it to flee from the fire. According to him, Pulido was not more than six meters away from the jeep at the time, while Quinto was only about three meters behind Pulido, both in the act of firing their guns. Ostrea who was sitting beside Gomez on the back seat also saw these two men in the act of firing. He could identify Pulido, but not the man behind him. The fact that Ostrea did not identify Quinto, although he could have done so without much fear of contradiction, speaks well for his sincerity and truthfulness.

As to whether at the time of the hold up and shooting, it was still clear and bright for one to see and identify a person several meters away, the evidence reveals that at about 6:30 p.m. that month of June, although the sun may have been setting or may have even set, it was still bright. It will be remembered that in driving from Kennon bridge southward to Doñgon bridge, Sarmiento did not use the lights of the jeep, showing that there was sufficient light from the sun either direct or reflected from the sky, to permit safe driving over a mountain road.

It is true, of course, that at the time the three deceased were engaged or were engaging in illegal traffic, trying to buy a prohibited article. They were not exactly innocent, law-abiding citizens. At the same time their open, even habitual disregard of the law could not in any way minimize the enormity of much less justify this cold-blooded slaughter. There was absolutely no necessity or reason for the killing, at least from the standpoint of a successful execution of the plan of robbery. It was not necessary to fire a single shot to bring the jeep to a stop because it was already at a standstill, and besides, its further progress was blocked not only by the acacia branch purposely laid across the bridge but also by the blasted condition of the southern end of the said bridge. There was no necessity for killing the victims because surprised and caught unawares, in all probability, they would not and could not have offered any resistance against Pulido, Quinto, Esuagen and Sipos, three of whom were armed with automatic weapons. This, aside from the fact that Ireneo Boñgog, a co-conspirator was armed with a revolver and in case of resistance by the victims would assuredly, have helped his co-conspirators. The only conceivable object for the massacre was to liquidate all possible witnesses to the robbery. This may be inferred from the fact that after the shooting, one of the accused remarked that three of the party, obviously referring to Gomez, Ostrea, and Magdaraog were able to escape; and forthwith, the conspirators dispersed to hunt them but because of the ensuing darkness, rough terrain and vegetation, and inasmuch as they had a head start while the conspirators were busy robbing their dead victims, Gomez, Ostrea and Magdaraog were able to escape.

The crime committed was that of robbery with homicide. In its commission we should consider the following circumstances. Sipos, Pulido and Quinto were each carrying a Thompson Submachine Gun, a carbine and a Garand rifle, respectively, and actually used them on the victims. Boñgog was carrying a revolver, although he does not appear to have actually used it. The crime was therefore committed by a band. The trial court found that the crime was committed with evident premeditation. On this point we have our doubts. It is settled that evident premeditation is inherent in the crime of robbery. So, to warrant a finding of the attendance of this aggravating circumstance in the complex crime of robbery with homicide, it must be linked with and considered with the killing, (U.S. vs. Landasan, 35 Phil. 365.) But there is no evidence that the conspirators previously planned and agreed to kill the victims. The lower court also found the crime attended by the aggravating circumstance of treachery. That is correct. The sudden and unexpected attack with firearms resulting in the death of the unsuspecting and helpless victims constituted treachery. The commission of the crime was further attended by the

aggravating circumstance of craft. The victims were lured into going to Doñgon bridge which at the time was an isolated spot because it was the end of the road and no one would or could pass there because of the blasted condition of the southern end thereof (as shown by Exh. "O"), *U.S. vs. Gampoña et al.*, 36 Phil. 817. The crime was also committed in an uninhabited place. According to the Sergeant of Police who made an investigation on the spot, the nearest house was about 200 yards away up the mountain side (p. 940, t. s. n.), and from the data that can be gathered from the record, including the sketch (Exh. "O"), Doñgon bridge was not easily accessible because of the trees and other vegetation that stood between said house and the bridge, to say nothing of the rough terrain. There is even reason to believe that Dongon bridge was not visible from the house. It is also obvious that the bridge was purposely sought and chosen by the appellants in order to avoid detection of the crime and preclude any interference with its commission or any help to the victims. There was also the circumstance that the crime was committed by attacking a vehicle. With the attendance of all these circumstances, the case comes under the provisions of Art. 295 of the Rev. Penal Code, as amended by Republic Act No. 12, Section 2, which provides for the imposition of the penalty of reclusion perpetua to death corresponding to the complex crime of robbery with homicide in its maximum period, namely, death.

We notice however, that at the time Quinto testified in Court in December, 1947, he gave his age as eighteen, and there is no evidence to disprove his claim as to his age. It is, consequently, obvious that at the time of the commission of the crime in June of the same year, he was less than eighteen. We therefore have to apply the provisions of Art. 68, par. 2 of the Rev. Penal Code which provides that upon an offender over fifteen and under eighteen years of age, the penalty next lower than that prescribed by law shall be imposed. As already stated, the penalty imposed by the law on the crime herein committed is death. The penalty next lower is reclusion perpetua.

In view of the foregoing, we find the guilt of the appellants to have been established beyond reasonable doubt. On Crestituto (Tito) Quinto, the penalty of death imposed by the trial court is hereby reduced to reclusion perpetua. With regard to Pedro Pulido and Irineo Bongog, it becomes our painful duty to affirm the death penalty imposed upon them by the trial court. With this modification, the decision appealed from, is hereby affirmed with costs.

The penalty of death imposed upon Pulido and Boñgog will be carried out and executed on a day to be fixed by the trial court, within thirty days after the return of the record of the case to the said court.

Moran, C.J., Ozaeta, Pablo, Bengzon, Padilla, Tuason, Montemayor, Reyes, and Torres, JJ., concur.

Moran, C.J.:

Mr. Justice Ricardo Paras voted for the affirmance of the judgment of the lower court, but, on account of his being on leave at the time of the promulgation of this opinion, his signature does not appear herein.

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