

Behind the Nationalist formation, there was another group of policemen armed with Thompson sub-machine guns. Eye-witnesses and photographs show how completely trapped and cornered the Nationalists were--and how weaponless. Two news photographers had taken positions on the balcony of the home of a prominent Ponce family, the Amy family. (George Amy, an outstanding Puerto Rican artist, had worked for the old New York Globe for many years.) These photographers took many pictures. One, taken by Jose Luis Conde, seconds before the shooting, shows the police coming in toward the people from the north, that is, from Aurora Street. It also shows large groups of people, men, women and children--nearly all of them gathered at the corner of Aurora and Marina, almost in front of the Nationalist Club. The photo also shows the Cadets in formation, followed by the nurses, and right behind them the police detachment with machine-guns under the command of Chief Perez Segarra.

Just remember that Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco, who had apparently expected ferocious acts from the Cadets, had left for a sight-seeing drive around town. Captain Blanco later declared that nobody was left in command of the police and that the auxiliary chiefs, Soldevila, Bernal and Perez Segarra, each one commanding a separate group of policemen, had not received any instructions.

The Cadets were completely surrounded with no chance of escape. It is obvious from the police formation that it had but one purpose. And that purpose was not simply to break up the Cadets' parade or dissolve a riot. The classical dispersion and anti-riot tactic is to give those being attacked a chance to disperse. This chance was deliberately denied to the Puerto Rican Nationalists on that fateful Palm Sunday afternoon of March 21st, 1937.

The purpose was to frighten the whole Puerto Rican people with a show of crude brutality, a massacre.

THE FIRST SHOT

In a situation like this, anyone might shoot first. And each side would naturally claim to have been the victim of the first shot. But in his report to the American Civil Liberties Union, Mr. Arthur Garfield Hayes, who investigated the Ponce Massacre, writes:

"Carlos Torres Morales, a photographer for *El Imparcial*, being aware of the menacing attitude of the police, raised his camera to his eyes. Before he had focused, a shot was fired, perhaps two, he was not sure. He took the picture.

"In his photo we can see practically all the policemen at Aurora

and Marina Streets (maybe 17 or 18) ready to fire against the people. All of them have weapons in their hands. We also see a policeman at the moment he fires his revolver. Although we have used the testimony of experts, it was really unnecessary, as the firing policeman appears with the upper part of his arm toward the flying crowd. His forearm is hidden by another person, but in accord with the direction of his arm and beyond the other person there is a white cloud and the smoke of the shot. The shot is being fired directly at the people on the sidewalk. The firing policeman can be clearly seen.

"This Committee has not been able to understand why this policeman and other officers fired at the crowd and not the Cadets, unless they wanted to clear out the front side of the Nationalist Club on whose sidewalk and surroundings they were standing. Or perhaps the purpose was to terrorize them.

"We are not saying that this photo shows the first shot. In fact, the testimony of another witness directly identified another policeman as having fired the first shot.

"We have tried to understand why the government did not use these photographs, all of them widely published. They show the police in action. They show the Nationalist Cadets --the Army of Liberation--50 to 70 in number, standing in silence and motionless, their hands hanging at their sides. At their front stands their commander in white uniform. Beside them there is a boy, black-shirted, his arm around a comrade's shoulder. Behind them is the Cadets' flag-bearer. All of them look somewhat surprised, patiently waiting for the disaster to strike. No one looks ready to run, not ready to even make a movement. Behind them are the girls, in white, some of them running away. One of them has almost reached the sidewalk. This in itself corroborates the photographer's statement that he took the photo immediately after the shooting began. Behind the band is a police platoon, some 15 men, armed with machine-guns and rifles. Nationalists and non-Nationalists were murdered."

THE BLOOD AND THE SPIRIT

At the first shot the police went crazy. Volleys from all sides fell on the Cadets and the people. For about ten minutes they were submitted to cross-fire. When the last volley had done its work, twenty lay dead. More than 150 were wounded. Another boy died in a nearby hospital; some were maimed for life.