

District of Ponce and neighboring towns, to parade along the streets of Ponce!

"I wish to inform you that, according to instructions from my superiors, the Police will not permit this celebration, and by this letter, in fulfilment of my duty, I so notify you."

On March 21st, and for some days before, a significant concentration of police was taking place in Ponce. They were well armed: rifles, carbines, Thompson sub-machine guns, tear gas bombs, hand grenades, plus the usual police clubs, etc., a force of 200 men in addition to the routine Ponce police garrison.

Colonel Orbeta talked things over with Captain Blanco. They decided to see Mayor Tormos and convince him to cancel the permit. It was not until after midday that they located the Mayor, who made it very clear that he had granted the permit.

Colonel Orbeta tried to impress the Mayor with the dangers involved. He said that he had information that the Nationalists planned to come armed and that he had particular information concerning armed groups coming from Mayaguez. Nevertheless, under later cross-examination by the Investigation Committee, the Colonel said that he had told the Mayor that such a parade was scandalous, that he had no information, but any one of the Nationalists might act as an insane man and throw stones at the shop windows or commit any number of disorderly acts. As a matter of fact it was proved beyond doubt that the group of 50 persons from Mayaguez (composed of women and children, as well as men) was unarmed, as were all the other Nationalists.

After long discussions the Mayor gave in. He immediately called the Nationalist's leaders and told them he had overlooked the fact that it was a religious holiday, Palm Sunday, and that the Paulist Fathers had asked him not to allow the parade.

The Nationalists knew he was lying, but ignoring this, they told him that the people coming to the parade were already in Ponce, that the parade would be held in orderly silence, and that they would inform the Paulist Fathers to that effect. At this point the Mayor cut the interview short and said that the permit was canceled.

Present at the last interview, in addition to the formerly mentioned Ponce leaders, were the Acting President of the Nationalist Party, lawyer Julio Pinto Gandia, and the Acting Secretary General, lawyer Lorenzo Pineiro.

From this moment until 3:00 P.M. a series of discussions took place

between Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco on one side and the Nationalists leaders on the other. While these discussions were taking place the police concentrated heavily on all streets around the Nationalists Club and at the corner of Marina and Aurora Streets. The Nationalists were entering the club with their wives and children. There is plenty of evidence that those who were not Nationalists were told by the police not to go into the area between Marina, Aurora and Jobos Streets.

But Nationalists (easily recognizable because many were in uniform and those in civilian clothes were wearing insignias) were allowed to go across the police lines. About 80 uniformed Cadets were permitted among them.

Shortly before the shooting, Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco visited the area. The very air was tense. The police were already there and the Nationalists were surrounded. Colonel Orbeta and Captain Blanco then left. They said afterwards that they had given no orders to the police. According to Colonel Orbeta's story, they went around Ponce and its surroundings in a police car, looking at the beautiful scenery.

They returned after the shooting was over.

MUSIC AND FIRE

At about 3:15 the Cadets lined up for the march in a column of three abreast. Behind them was the Nurses' Corps in white uniforms. Trailing the Nurses was the band, which consisted of only four musicians. The band played the National Anthem, 'La Borinquena' and Cadets and Nurses stood at attention.

The reader can now study the small map which shows the relation between the police, the cadets, the nurses and the public. Marina Street runs from north to south. It is first crossed by Luna Street here. A little farther up, it is crossed by Aurora Street. On this corner the Nationalists had their club. Then comes Jobos Street. Between Luna and Aurora, a group of police were lined up on the east side of Marina. Just off Marina a large group of police was standing ready in the middle of Aurora Street. Other groups formed on both sides of Aurora. On the west side of Marina, another group of Police stood in front of the Nationalist Club. All were armed with rifles, tear gas bombs, carbines, etc. The Cadets were standing at attention on the south side of Aurora.