

Rev. Arthur Duhamel, SM – A Marist Missionary Priest

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“But you need not worry for me no matter what happens here. We can never tell just how things will turn out and just what are Japan’s plans. So far it is peaceful and quiet and I hope it remains like this..”

Reverend Arthur Duhamel, SM, thus reassured his brother from the Marist mission at Ruavatu, Guadalcanal on January 4, 1942. Eight months later he was dead - bayoneted by the Japanese.

Born in Massachusetts, Duhamel (1908-1942) felt called to religious life at a young age. However, both his father’s disapproval and his personal concerns about his academic abilities delayed his studies for the priesthood. Ordained as a priest in 1937 in the Society of Mary, he celebrated his first Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Methuen, Massachusetts where he had once served as an altar boy. Rev. John André, SM, who had encouraged his vocation, preached at the first Mass.

Two years after ordination, Duhamel arrived at the Marist Ruavatu mission in the Solomon Islands. His insecurities returned as he struggled to learn the native language. However, his years spent working in the mills in Massachusetts paid off as his mastery of tools and mechanics earned the respect of the natives from the very beginning. They called him “wonder-worker.” He contracted malaria, but persevered, writing, “...when we work for God, difficulties become sweet. My one desire is that God will give me health and the necessary means to keep on marching forward for the salvation of these poor Solomonese, among whom His Providence has called me to work.”

The escalating war in Europe created new challenges as his fellow Marist missionaries (Rev. Hendrik Oude Engberink, SM and Marist Missionary Sisters M. Odilia, M. Sylvia, and M. Edmée), all from



Europe, had their funding from home cut off. Thus, the contributions that Duhamel solicited from the United States became their only source of support. The arrival of the Japanese on the island, however, signaled a far more imminent threat.

The Marists refused to leave their mission, remaining there until the Japanese forced them to an internment camp. Sr. Edmée, SMSM was sick and stayed back with the children. There are several descriptions of what happened next. A contemporary account says that when the Japanese ordered Duhamel to carry a message to the U.S. Marines while they held the others hostage, he refused. Another version suggests

Duhamel visited some Americans, attending to their spiritual needs, despite Japanese prohibition. Still another says that Japan’s secret headquarters were bombed, and Duhamel was accused of informing U.S. troops of its location. A final version, from Rev. Emery de Klerk, SM, claims that “he was killed by the Japanese for war reasons.”

Although the precise cause for the Japanese executions may never be known, the four Marists were bayoneted by the Japanese in September 1942.

A mere five years after Duhamel’s ordination, Fr. John André, SM preached again at a Mass for him, this time as the eulogist at his funeral Mass held, appropriately, at Mount Carmel. André declared it “a day of sadness, as well as glory, – glory because Mount Carmel has been selected to offer such a sacrifice for the faith...an apostle has fallen, and he is one of your own.”