

# Toppled Philippine Church Cross Overlooks Typhoon's Destruction

A church spire, its cross hanging loose, looks down on smashed houses, wrecked cars, toppled power lines and snapped trees, as dazed survivors try to count the cost.

A bare-chested man in white shorts squats and wails. Another attempts the once-normal task of washing dishes in a container in a mangled van, as bodies lie abandoned around him.

Two days after one of the world's most powerful typhoons slammed into the Philippines, as many as 10,000 people are believed to have died in a single city: Tacloban.

It is near here where U.S. General Douglas MacArthur's force of 174,000 men landed on Oct. 20, 1944, in one of the biggest allied victories of World War II.

Today, men, women and children tread carefully over splintered remains of wooden houses, searching for missing loved ones and belongings. From the air, television footage shows trees pulled from the ground by their roots and ships washed ashore.

Not one building seems to have escaped damage in the city of 220,000 people, the coastal capital of Leyte province, about 580 km (360 miles) southeast of Manila.

Survivors queue in lines, waiting for handouts of rice and water. Some sit and stare, covering their faces with rags to keep out the smell of the dead.

One woman, eight months pregnant, describes through tears how her 11 family members vanished in the storm, including two daughters. "I can't think right now," she says. "I am overwhelmed."

At the airport, people wait in mud and water after trekking three hours by foot from Tacloban City, hoping to be evacuated by military aircraft. Roads to and from the city are impassable, littered with debris and fallen trees. "We are trying to get to Cebu or Manila," one distraught tourist says. "I must go out."

Only 110 people can squeeze on to each flight. The elderly, sick and children are given priority. Two soldiers carry a man who can't walk.

Jenny Chu, a medical student and local resident, can't recognize her village. "Everything is gone. Our house is like a skeleton and we are running out of food and water. We are looking for food everywhere."

"Even the delivery vans were looted," she adds. "People are walking like zombies looking for food."

Lieutenant Colonel Fermin Carangan of the Philippine Air Force recalls how he and 41 officers struggled to survive huddled in their airport office as winds approached 195 miles per hour (313 km per hour) with gusts of up to 235 mph.

"Suddenly the sea water and the waves destroyed the walls and I saw my men being swept by waters one by one." Two drowned and five are missing.

He was swept away from the building and clung to a coconut tree with a seven-year-old boy.

"In the next five hours we were in the sea buffeted by wind and strong rain. It was so dark you couldn't see anything. I kept on talking to the boy and giving him a pep talk because the boy was telling me he was tired and he wanted to sleep."

He finally saw land and swam with the boy to a beach strewn with dead bodies. "I think the boy saved my life because I found strength so that he can survive."

Some expressed anger at the slow pace of rescue efforts but the country's defense chief, Voltaire Gazmin, denies being ill-prepared.

"How can you beat that typhoon?" he says. "It's the strongest on Earth. We've done everything we can."

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