

## **Dead Teachers Tell No Tales: The Mysterious Narrative of Chad Booc's Death**

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### **An Untimely Death**

On February 24th, 2022, Chad Booc, a Lumad volunteer teacher was killed along with four others—collectively known as the New Bataan 5—in New Bataan, Davao de Oro by military troops. Among the five victims are fellow volunteer teacher Gelejurain Ngujo II and Elgyn Balonga, a health worker.

The 10th Infantry Division of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) broke the news in a press release, echoed by media outlets Daily Tribune, Cebu Daily News, Manila Bulletin, Pilipino Star Ngayon, The Philippine Star, Manila Times, and Manila Standard.

On February 26, 2022, Brig. Gen. Jesus Durante III said in a press conference that the victims, including Chad, were “NPA fighters and indigenous people (IP) recruiters.” Additionally, firearms and personal belongings were recovered at the “encounter” site following the alleged 15-minute gun battle.

This claim was corroborated by Rurelyn Bay-ao, a former student of Salugpungan school, who said that she was recruited by Booc to be an NPA member. In a [Facebook post by the 10th Infantry “Agila” Division](#), Rurelyn was quoted saying “Malinaw sa akin kahit tinatago pa ito ng Save our Schools Network at ng mga front organizations na connected sila sa NPA movement. Pagbukas ko pa lang ng cellphone ko, bakit nandoon si Sir Chad sa bukid kung saan nila ako dinala noon, nung Marso 22 hanggang 27, 2021 dun sa Davao de Oro.”

However, on the dates she mentioned, where Chad was allegedly in Davao de Oro on March 22 to March 27, 2021, Chad was still detained in Cebu after the illegal raid of the Lumad school in the University of San Carlos - Talamban on February 15, 2021. Chad and the rest of the Lumad 7 were not released until May 14, 2021, when all the [charges against them were dropped](#) for lack of evidence.

Bay-ao has already graduated from the Lumad school and is now a college student taking up Political Science at the University of Mindanao. However, in an [interview with Rappler on](#)

[October 2021](#), she said she has never experienced any experience that could be likened to “communist recruitment”.

Directly quoting her in the article, she said “Wa ko naka experience na gitudluan mi’g kanang gani mag pusil pusil... Karon pako ka experience sa college kanang sa NSTP na mag ligid ligid, mag marching marching. Never jod namo na nabuhat sa Lumad school before,”

*(I never experienced being taught how to shoot guns... It’s only now that I’m in college, through NSTP, that I’ve experienced rolling around and marching. We never did that in Lumad school.)*

“Kung naga-ingon sila nga naay NPA wa jod mi nakita kay kung kanang gani makita nimo sa estudyante na naa pa gani ka sa gate, pangitaon na ka ID,” she added.

*(If people are saying there are NPA, we never saw them. When you’re still by the gates, they even look for your ID.)*

Now, Bay-ao frequently appears on the National Task Force Against Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC)’s Facebook page, detailing her experiences as a “former CPP recruit”.

The Information Office of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) also clarified via Twitter that the “AFP’s encounter ‘claim is an outright lie,” denying any encounter between the New People’s Army (NPA) unit and the military in the area. In contrast, the CPP had always admitted when their camp had participated in armed combat, and they have always paid tribute to their fallen members, usually addressing them by their “*nom de guerre*”. This happened for red fighter Kerima Tariman, honored as “Ka Ella”, who died in an ambush in August 2021, and an artist named “Ka Parts” but there was no tribute issued for Chad’s death.

Additionally, the CPP also [published a statement](#) saying, “This would not be the first time that the AFP has resorted to such type of disinformation in order to conceal the cold-blooded murder of civilians and unarmed people, especially peasants and Lumad people, as well as activists and revolutionaries.”

Chad Booc started as a volunteer Lumad teacher at the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV) Lumad School back in 2016. He is widely known on social media for his posts about the Lumad culture and about the militarization of

Lumad communities. With thousands of followers on Twitter and through his Facebook posts, his profiles have become a source for news about Lumad communities.

However, Chad has also been a known target for state-sponsored violence. Since becoming a volunteer Lumad teacher, he had become a victim of incessant redtagging and threats, whether it be by Twitter trolls, outlets of the Philippine National Police, or even the NTF-ELCAC's own spokespersons.

These threats materialized when Chad and six others—collectively known as the Bakwit School 7—were illegally arrested while seeking refuge at the University of San Carlos-Talamban Campus in February 2021. They were illegally detained for three months until they were cleared of their charges for kidnapping and child abuse for lack of evidence and lack of probable cause.

After Chad's release, he immediately went back to volunteering for the Save Our Schools Network, and was frequently active on his Twitter account, occasionally hosting Twitter Spaces that made societal discussions more adaptive and accessible to the platform's users.

### **Those Left Behind**

[Several organizations](#) vehemently condemned the statements released by the AFP and the media outlets asserting the military line. Save Our Schools (SOS) Network Cebu says that contrary to an "armed encounter," what happened to the New Bataan 5 was a 'bloody massacre', adding that nearby residents heard of no gunshots in the area at the time AFP claimed the encounter took place. [SOS Network](#) added Chad Booc's presence in the area was due to a community visit as part of the organization's research work.

The UP Association of Computer Science Majors (UP CURSOR) [published a statement](#) shortly after Chad's death, who was an alumni of the organization. "After graduating as cum laude, he chose a path less traveled instead of pursuing a career in the IT industry. He boldly and selflessly went out to serve the indigenous communities as a volunteer mathematics and science teacher for ALCADDEV, a Lumad school in Surigao del Sur. Since then, he had devoted his life to serving the people in whatever way he could," UP CURSOR said.

The Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) doubled down on the initial reportage of Chad Booc's death, saying that multi-sourcing and verification was essential especially in the current social and political context.

"Clearly the story of Chad Booc deserved much more from the media. Where the story involves claims about the dead, journalists should take care not to publish anything that could be proven false," The CMFR [wrote](#). "In this case, there were enough signals to warn the media against merely relying on military sources. Multi-sourcing is in fact a standard journalism principle in making sure that reports are truthful."

"This situation clearly calls for more nuanced coverage (...) Reports about the supposed links of individuals to communist groups call for background. And that background should not be dictated by the military and the short-sighted officers now assigned by Duterte to eliminate the alleged threat of Communism," they added.

### **The Damning Truth**

On March 10, forensic pathologist Raquel Fortun released Chad's autopsy findings, which showed "intent to kill", ruling out his death as a homicide. Organizations and individuals then called for an immediate investigation into Chad's death. "[He] sustained multiple gunshot wounds and, on top of that, it looks like many things are being concealed," Fortun told the Inquirer.

She stated that there was no information on where the alleged encounter occurred or how the bodies were discovered at the scene. Thus adding there was a lack of information pertaining to Chad's death.

The SOS network claims that the AFP has "further dehumanized the New Bataan 5 by parading their corpses online like war trophies."

"These actions of the state must be condemned to the highest degree, as we sustain our calls for justice." The SOS network says. "With this new development, the Save Our Schools Network, friends, families, and fellow advocates urgently call for the Commission on Human Rights and other independent bodies locally, nationally and internationally to conduct a swift, impartial and thorough investigation of the New Bataan 5 massacre (...) There can be no peace until there is justice for their deaths and all victims of state-sponsored killings."

Given these facts despite initial reportage by the AFP, Chad Booc was a civilian and a non-combatant. According to International Humanitarian Law and the Rules of War, there is no reason for Chad's death to be justified.

The government has influenced the news narrative surrounding Chad and his death through feeding the media scoops, their own official accounts, and interviews with 'former rebels'. And when various organizations spoke out disproving their narrative, the state rebuts through trashing their stories and discrediting their sources.

The situation mirrors Noam Chomsky's Five Filters of Mass Media—The theory that media operates through 5 filters: ownership, advertising, the media elite, flak and the common enemy. In the flak filter, efforts are carried out by the state to "discredit organizations or individuals who disagree with or cast doubt on the prevailing assumptions which are favorable to established power." This is reflected with how the AFP has responded against SOS Network and other organizations' accounts. The fifth filter comes into play when those in power create a common enemy to help corral public opinion and manufacture consent. In this case, communists and terrorists are the target. The narrative that the state pushes being that Chad was a part of the NPA, recruiting and teaching the Lumad children to become 'child warriors' had only been manufactured. In reality, he was simply a young teacher eager to serve and help those he cared for.

His death then sends a chilling effect as to how the Philippine government—and consequently the common people—treats activists and human rights defenders. Chad's death, as well as those who came before him, reflects a disturbing social reality that demonizes their advocacy and themselves as a person through manufactured narratives.

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