



**O**UT OF THE DEEP darkness of the night came a huge rumble. The noise had awakened a Moslem family of five in Lanao whose home, typical of those in the area, was literally built on the shallow sea, some 100 meters from the coast. With the noise came a severe shaking of the earth.

In a matter of moments, the wooden hut—built on bamboo stilts that kept it above the tide—collapsed. As the occupants struggled out of the debris, they were surprised to find themselves on sand. The lake seemed to have been drained of water.

Then, in the distance, faintly visible under the moon glow—a line appeared, which stretched from one end of the lake to the other. The line grew bigger and bigger. It was a boiling wall of water rushing towards the beach.

As the great mass of water roared onwards, letting off a sound like the tremendous

hiss of a locomotive releasing steam, the terrified villagers raced for the cliffs along the shore. Many of them were caught by the first wave halfway to the beach. Children—too afraid even to cry—disappeared under the churning sea.

It had all been too swift.

Some of the men and women who made it up the slopes and who waited for the great waves to stop now saw the splintered huts, the shattered boats hurled against the rocky cliffs, the ugly erosions on the shore, the scythed down trees. Climbing down the hills, there was little else

First of a series

# TRACKING THE TIDAL WAVE

By AURELIO B. CALDERON

they could do but look at death and devastation in the face.

In the case of the Moslem family of five, the mother and all three of her children were lost. Only the man survived.

This tragedy happened in 1955. Some 434 lives were lost. No less than 10,000 people were rendered homeless, their 1,827 homes destroyed. And in the days that followed, the spectre of hunger and disease stalked all 27 coastal districts of Lanao.

## Lanao disaster

What hit the coastal towns of Lanao was a tidal wave caused by an earthquake. It can happen to any Philippine town along the coast of the Pacific Ocean or the China Sea. But should it happen again, the chances are Filipinos who live along the coastal areas will be warned of the impending disaster.