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one Soldier at a time*

Voices of the Past

THE PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION

Highlights:

- Filipinos took up arms against the United States after failing to gain their independence after the Spanish-American War.
- Unable to defeat the U.S. Army in head-on battle, the insurgents began using guerilla warfare tactics that took advantage of the American's lack of knowledge of the terrain and geography.
- American forces responded by adopting counter-insurgency warfare, dividing the Army into small regional units charged with pacifying the own area.
- The Army slowly wore down the insurgents while building schools, roads, and other improvements for the local population.

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The Philippine Insurrection

(Philippines 1899-1902) By the end of July 1898, 13,000 U.S. Volunteers and 2,000 regular troops arrived to take control of the Philippines from the Spanish as part of the Spanish-American War. Together with the Filipino revolutionary army, numbering about 13,000, they faced off against 13,000 Spaniards in Manila. The Americans and the Filipinos shared the common goal of defeating Spain, but afterwards the Filipinos wanted independence, while the U.S. wanted the Philippines as a territory. It was a difference bound to lead to conflict.

The Spanish governor in Manila

realized his situation was hopeless but wanted to put up at least token resistance for honor's sake and to avoid a court-martial back home. He also feared that Filipino rebels might massacre his troops. The Americans also wanted to avoid a massacre, and to deny the rebels the political legitimacy they would gain by taking the city. So they cut a secret deal: the Spanish would offer minimal resistance if the Americans promised to keep the Filipinos out. On August 13, after a short battle in which 17 U.S. Soldiers were killed and 105 wounded, U.S. Soldiers occupied Manila and shut out the Filipinos.



Spain laid claim to the Philippine Islands in the early 16th century. About 350 years later, the Filipino people opposed their European colonial masters. They yearned for sovereign rule. With the United States' assistance during the Spanish American War, freedom seemed inevitable. However, the United States claimed the islands from Spain, thus leading to new hostilities during the Philippine Insurrection. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC.



At age 29, Emilio Aguinaldo became the Philippine President. As an insurgent leader he challenged both Spanish and American rule. In 1901, he swore an oath of allegiance to the United States. A year later the Philippine Insurrection ended. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC.

Under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, the Philippines became a territory of the United States, not an independent country. The U.S. Senate still needed to ratify the treaty, but the Filipinos did not wait to see what would happen. They established a republic with a capital at Malolos and prepared to resist any U.S. attempt to assert the treaty. As Soldiers on both sides waited anxiously, relations between the allies deteriorated and scuffles became common. It was only a matter of time before full-scale violence erupted.

On the night of February 4, 1899, Filipino and American patrols traded shots near a disputed village. The firing quickly spread, and at dawn the Americans launched an attack. To this day no one knows who fired the first shot, but the war was on.

In Washington, the Senate narrowly ratified the Treaty of Paris on February 6. Having formally purchased the Philippines from Spain, the United States declared its new possession to be in a state of insurrection.

The Nationalist Army of Liberation of the Philippines had 40,000 troops plus local militia, but lacked training, discipline, and equipment. They also suffered from incompetent and inexperienced leadership. U.S. troops numbered less than 20,000 men, most of whom were state volunteers who expected to go home now that the war with Spain had ended. Nevertheless, the volunteers fought well and in late February they had driven the Filipino army from Manila crushing a revolt within the city itself. By the end of March, they had captured Malolos and inflicted a series of sharp defeats on Filipino forces.

The campaign slowed during the summer of 1899. The small U.S.

force struggled to operate far from their base in Manila. Disease and fatigue reduced some regiments by 60 percent. When the monsoon season hit, the Army came under political pressure to send the state volunteers home.

Congress responded by authorizing a force of volunteers for Philippines' service. Unlike the state volunteers of 1898, these units were organized by the federal government. By September 1899, the new U.S. Volunteer regiments, together with additional units of regulars, began to arrive. With the departure of the state volunteers, the U.S. was left with an effective force of just under 27,000 men. Pressing the attack, the Volunteers destroyed much of the Nationalist army, scattering the rest. The Nationalists responded by switching to guerrilla warfare.

The change of tactics worked in their favor. The terrain, consisting of a labyrinth of rice paddies, mountains, and jungles, pierced only by rough trails and a few primitive roads, gave Filipino guerrillas numerous advantages over the Americans, who struggled with the unfamiliar geography and harsh climate.

The Nationalists reorganized into regional commands, complete with a "shadow" government, to wage a war of ambushes, raids, and surprise attacks designed to keep the Americans off balance. Guerillas disguised themselves as non-combatants, blended with civilians, and used a combination of charity and terror to ensure the support of local populations. The Nationalists sought to sap the American will to fight and achieve political, rather than military, victory.

The U.S. also divided its troops, giving regional commands responsibility for pacifying a particular



Rosario Street and Binondo Church from Pasig River, Manila, Philippines. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC.

The Philippine Insurrection:

area. Troops manned hundreds of small posts in or near towns that served three purposes: to protect the population from guerrilla intimidation, to interfere with the ability of the population to provide food and recruits to the guerrillas, and to provide bases for small-unit patrols and raids into the bush in search of the enemy. Dividing the troops caused supply, morale, command, and control problems. Disease and fatigue threatened to undermine the effectiveness of many small garrisons. Nevertheless, the strategy kept the guerrillas on the run and wore down their ability to fight.

President McKinley ordered the troops to “win the confidence, respect, and admiration of the inhabitants of the Philippines”, so U.S. forces also worked to restore civil society by building schools and roads, refurbishing markets, improving health and sanitation, and offering amnesty to guerrillas. They restored government services and gradually transferred political control to the Filipinos. Despite this progress, the fighting lasted another full year. The new commander, General Arthur MacArthur, permitted greater use of imprisonment, deportation, execution, and the confiscation and/or destruction of property to punish guerrillas.

These sterner measures, together with the continued promise of equitable treatment and representative government, ultimately broke the back of the resistance movement. The last major revolutionary commanders surrendered in the spring of 1902; and on July 4 the United States officially proclaimed the insurrection to be over.

In his official report, Secretary of War Elihu Root concluded, “it is evident that the insurrection has been brought to an end both by making a war distressing and hopeless on the one hand and by making peace attractive.”

Ultimately, over 126,000 regular and volunteer soldiers served in the Philippines between 1899 and 1902. Of these, 1,000 died in battle or of wounds received in battle, 3,000 more died of disease and other causes, and nearly another 3,000 were wounded.

Adapted from:

Chapter 15. American Military History, Volume 1. “Emergence to World Power 1898-1902.” U.S. Army Center of Military History. <http://www.history.army.mil/books/AMH-V1/ch15.htm>.



The wall of fire, part of the line near Pasig, March 15, 1899. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC.