

TITLE:

This Bloody Blundering Business

CAPTION:

"Once upon a time, there were some idyllic isles in the Far East..

There were plenty of coconuts for everyone, and the natives danced because they were happy."

These islands were the Philippines and they were the colony of a European power.

That power was Spain and the time was 1898.

Spain had been a great imperial power but now was weak.

The Filipinos were in armed rebellion against Spain, for they wanted Independence.

Across the sea thousands of miles away, the American people watched the struggle with interest. They too had once fought for their independence and they were concerned about their "Little Brown Brothers."

The leaders of the rebellion were highly praised in the American press as cultivated, humane, and intelligent men. Foremost among them was Aguinaldo, who was compared with George Washington, Father of the American Nation, and another leader of the rebellion against colonial rule.

When Spain was almost defeated by the Filipinos, McKinley, President of the United States, declared war on Spain by popular demand. He ordered his navy to attack the Spanish Fleet in the Philippines.

CAPTION:

"The American Fleet steams towards the mysterious Orient".

At Manila Bay in the Philippines, Admiral Dewey's superior guns destroyed the Spanish Asiatic Fleet with the loss of one American sailor - who died of heat stroke in the boiler-room.

CAPTION:

"As for the Roman Generals of yore, a triumphal arch is prepared for the hero of Manila Bay...

The parade in New York for Admiral Dewey

Troop-ships are dispatched to the Philippines...

Our boys wave goodbye to their loved ones, and to the land they love"

By the time the Americans troops arrived, Aguinaldo, the Filipino general, had been declared President of the new Republic of the Philippines.

CAPTION:

"American troops arrive to liberate their brown brothers

The native porters are primitive and lazy"

There was a minor engagement between the Americans and Spaniards to save the honour of Spain.

And then the Spanish general, worn out with fighting the Filipinos, surrendered his sword - to the Americans.

With the surrender of the Spanish, the Filipinos thanked the Americans for their help, and said, Wasn't it time they went home now?

The Americans, surprised and hurt with this lack of hospitality, stayed on... and on... and on...

The White Man's burden, so lightly picked up, would not be easily laid down.

And President McKinley had a vision:

"One night late it came to me this way, that we could not leave the Filipinos to themselves. They were unfit for self-governance, and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there, worse than Spain was. There was nothing left for us to do but take them all and civilize and Christianize them. And then I went to bed and went to sleep and slept soundly"

Without consultation with the Filipinos, McKinley signed the peace treaty with Spain. For the sum of 20 million dollars, the Philippine Islands were ceded to the United States.

It seemed too good a chance for the Americans to show they were as good as the European powers at the territorial game.

The Philippines made a splendid stepping-stone to China, which was just being opened up as a huge market for the European Imperialist power, and some Americans feared that if they did not grab the Philippines, the Japanese or the Germans would.

Andrew Carnegie, the multi millionaire philanthropist, prophesized that American men who had enlisted to fight the oppressors in the Philippines would end up shooting down the oppressed.

Two days before the Senate was to vote on annexing the Philippines, with opposition very strong, there was a shooting incident between American troops and the Filipino liberation forces.

On the first day of the fighting, the Americans lost 250 men. Filipino losses were estimated at over 4000.

Thus in one day more men were killed and wounded than the entire Spanish-American War.

The Americans claimed the Filipinos had fired first.

Reacting to this aggression, the Senate voted for annexation of the Philippines.

And so began a savage jungle war in an Asian territory thousands of miles from the American mainland, a war that committed 120,000 American fighting men against a people motivated by nationalism and anti-colonialism, a war that was rabidly racist, a war that lasted over a decade and strained the American conscience to the limit.

Uncle Sam claimed that it was his destiny to teach democracy to other races. He neglected to say how long the lesson would take.

President McKinley stated that his aim was the speedy suppression of the rebellion, the establishment of peace and tranquillity, and a government under the undisputed sovereignty of the United States.

Troops were poured into the Islands.

The Spanish had called the Filipino patriots "Insurrectos", rebels against authority. The Americans kept the name. It made it easier to shoot them.

CAPTION:

"Getting behind enemy lines - a daring manoeuver.

Major Funston swims the Baglag River.

The Insurrectos are put to flight - a great victory is won"

For this exploit - which he never in fact performed - Funston became a war hero for a people tired of peace

Confronted by superior American firepower, the Gatling gun, artillery, and the repeating rifle, the Filipinos turned to hit and run guerrilla war tactics.

There were few major battles and in the newspapers the progress of the war was recorded in terms of body counts.

But the war did not end with the rising death toll among Filipinos.

The Officer, commanding in the Philippines, General Otis, assured the American nation that he would suppress the rebellion within a few weeks.

Every month he repeated this assurance.

Every month he reported spectacular victories.

Every month, General Otis asked for more troops.

The American troops had to pursue the enemy into a tropical jungle strange to them.

They had to build roads through the jungle, and where that was not possible, they had to wade the rivers.

They were subject to sudden ambushes, and they watched their comrades die. They discovered that a native hut takes flame easily.

The enemy was everywhere and nowhere, and frustration grew;

There were daily skirmishes where a few men died.

The Americans had to patrol constantly and stay alert.

A smile could conceal an enemy.

It drained the soldiers' nerves.

The weary soldiers began to realize, although few at home would admit it, that the entire population was their enemy,

War correspondents who went into the field protested:

"The people of the United States have not received the correct impression of the situation in the Philippines. The military dispatches erred in the declaration that the insurrection can be speedily ended."

General Otis imposed press censorship.

The Americans held the large towns and established colonial rule.

They enjoyed the support of the rich elite that had earlier collaborated with the Spanish.

American business began to stretch out for the Philippines as their captive market was opened up - the Philippines had to be made safe for American beer. In their secure enclaves, the military and their families began to live the pampered life as colonials that white Europeans enjoyed in their empire

But fighting outside the safe areas went on. General Otis was relieved of his command.

Once home, he blamed the failure to end the war on his political superiors, who imposed impossible limitations on the military

The American people could not understand why Aguinaldo, the elusive guerrilla leader, would not give in to Uncle Sam and come over and join Cuba and Puerto Rico and Hawaii, sheltering in the American camp.

Hard pressed, Aguinaldo asked for a cessation of hostilities in order to ascertain the desire of the Filipino people.

But the only peace terms offered by the Americans was that the Filipinos should submit to being a colony of the United States.

The Insurrectos replied, "Why should a nation with your Constitution seek to make a colony of a distant people who have been so long fighting against Spain to secure the same rights that your constitution gives?"

The Americans rejected Aguinaldo's request for an armistice.

He was denounced by the New York Times as the enslaver, the criminal aggressor, the designing tyrant. Where before he had been a liberator, he was now a cunning monkey who only hated Washington.

Reports were circulated of the barbaric tortures inflicted by the Insurrectos upon American prisoners of war.

But by now American veterans of this annoying war in the Philippines were beginning to return home.

After their triumphant parades through the streets of San Francisco, some of them gave their own accounts of the war that was being fought in America's name.

"We made our advance against Caloocan. Secret orders were passed down our lines to burn the town of Caloocan and take no prisoners. And I know that the town of Caloocan was burned. There was not a bamboo shack left standing. And I have every reason to believe that there were not any prisoners taken."

A country boy wrote a letter to his mother that was published in a newspaper.

"We never left one alive. If one was wounded, we would run our bayonets through them."

A front page in a Philadelphia paper carried the eyewitness account of a large scale slaying of civilians by Americans: "American troops have taken prisoners, people who have peacefully surrendered, and an hour later, without an atom of evidence to show that they were even Insurrectos, stood them on a bridge and shot them down one by one, to drop into the water below and float down as examples to those who find their bullet-ridden corpses."

The reporter went on: "It is not civilized warfare, but we are not dealing with a civilized people. The only thing they fear is violence and brutality, and we give it to them"

There was widespread disgust in the United States at these reports. An anti-war movement, led by the Anti-Imperialist League of America, developed and spread out of New England. Mass meetings of protest took place throughout the country. Teach-ins against the war were organized at universities.

Edward Atkinson of Boston sent some anti-war pamphlets to Manila, but they were seized before they left the United States. But Atkinson's point had been made. Imperialism abroad would lead to the repression of Civil Liberties at home.

Mark Twain suggested that the American flag be redesigned, with the white stripes painted black and the stars replaced with a skull and crossbones.

Proudly he pronounced himself a traitor to the American cause in the Philippines.

Carnegie, the millionaire-philanthropist, offered to buy the freedom of the Philippines with a personal check worth 20 million dollars.

The Anti-Imperialists were accused of giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

It was stated that without their support, resistance in the Philippines would have collapsed long ago.

But at the height of their strength, the Anti-Imperialists numbered half-a-million members, and could not be completely ignored.

To their thinking, American imperialism was in fundamental contradiction to democracy.

It was now 1900 and an election year. The war of annexation in the Philippines became a major election issue.

But McKinley, the incumbent President, whose only election campaigning took place on its own door-step, was re-elected.

McKinley sent a Commission to the Philippines, which reported back that the Filipino insurrection would soon be completely suppressed.

Shortly after the findings of the Commission were published, it was announced that public lands in the Philippines would be sold to Americans for development.

Americans thought that the rebellion would only be finally broken with the death or capture General Aguinaldo, the elusive guerrilla leader.

He was finally captured by a daring trick.

CAPTION:

"A bold capture"

"The taking of Aguinaldo, the wily Filipino outlaw"

"General Funston poses as a captive of the Insurrectos"

"He and his men are taken to the Insurrecto hideout..."

"Surprise! The captors captured!"

General Funston, the man who has captured Aguinaldo, returned home to defend the American conduct of the war.

"The natives violated all the rules of civilized warfare and they knew perfectly well what they were violating.

"Yet, in return, our men were wonderfully kind and considerate to the wounded and prisoners.

"This was the most humane war against a half-civilized people that the world ever saw.

"The stories of brutality on the part of American soldiers were simply lies."

In the Senate, Senator Hoar of Massachusetts waged a lonely war against the hostile majority.

"You wasted 600 millions of treasure.

"You have sacrificed nearly 10,000 American lives, the flower of our youth.

"You have devastated provinces.

"You have slain uncounted thousands of the people you have desired to benefit."

On the other side, Senator Beveridge argued passionately against withdrawal:

"To halt before every guerrilla band opposing us is exterminated will prolong hostilities and leave alive the seeds of perpetual insurrection.

"To treat at all is to admit that we were wrong.

"It has been charged that our conduct of the war has been cruel.

Senators, it has been the reverse. Within our lines, the Filipinos may plow and sow and reap and go about the affairs of peace in absolute liberty, and yet all this kindness was not understood. "Senators must remember that we are not dealing with Americans and Europeans. We are dealing with Orientals.

"The news that 60,000 American soldiers have crossed the Pacific that, if necessary, the American Congress will make it 100,000 or 200,000 men will do more to end the war than the soldiers themselves. And the report that we even discussed, the withdrawal of a single soldier at the present time will blow into a flame once more the fire our soldiers' blood has almost quenched.

"Mr. President, reluctantly and only from a sense of duty am I forced to say that American opposition to the war has been the chief factor in prolonging it.

"The Filipinos believe that they only have to fight, harass, retreat and break up into small parties as they are doing now, but by all means, hold out until the next presidential election, and our forces will be withdrawn.

"All this has aided the enemy more than climate, arms and battle. I have seen our mangled boys in the field. I have stood on the firing line and beheld our dead soldiers, their faces to the pitiless southern sky. And in sorrow, rather than in anger, I say to those whose voices in America have cheered those misguided natives on to shoot our soldiers down that the blood of those dead and wounded boys of ours is on their hands."

While the argument went on in America, it was the population of the Philippines that suffered most, caught in the cross-fire. Reports began to come out of the Philippines of the use of torture on captured Filipino prisoners and suspects. The Army at first denied the use of torture, then attributed it to the Macabebes Scouts, Filipinos who had fought for the Spanish against their own people, and now served the Americans. But through a Senatorial enquiry, it came out that the

use of torture was systematic and practiced widely by American troops. A former army sergeant who testified before the Senatorial investigation insisted that the only chance of pacification "lies in an inundation of human blood that will purge the islands of treachery."

It was widely felt by Americans in the Philippines and at home that the Filipinos were inferior to Anglo-Saxons and therefore their lives were of small account. American soldiers gave them the nickname of "Goo-goos".

A San Francisco paper wrote:

"We do not want the Filipinos. We want the Philippines. The Filipinos don't care to make money and they occupy land which might be utilized to much better advantage by Americans. Therefore, the more of them killed, the better. It seems harsh, but they must yield before the superior race."

President McKinley termed the business of pacifying the Filipinos and subjecting them to rule by the United States "Benevolent Assimilation."

Three years into the Philippine pacification program, President McKinley himself suffered the same kind of "benevolent assimilation" at the hands of an assassin.

CAPTION

"Death of a President"

President McKinley was succeeded by Theodore Roosevelt, a hero of the Spanish-American War, who continued his predecessor's policy in the Philippines with gusto.

Shortly after Roosevelt assumed the Presidency, Senator Hoar presented him with a petition calling for an immediate end to a conflict that had been degraded into an inhuman war of extermination.

This made no impression on Teddy Roosevelt, the new President.

The Americans now tried moving whole communities into a so-called "re-concentration camp" where they could be more easily controlled. It became a Senatorial scandal when it was discovered that hundreds of civilians have starved to death in these camps.

In the entire pacification program the only effective and permanent pacifier seemed to the frustrated American servicemen to be the Krag repeating rifle. On the march, they would sing hymns in praise of it.

"Damn, damn, damn the Insurrectos, cross-eyed cackiac ladrones.
Underneath the starry flag,
Civilize 'em with a Krag,
And return us to our own beloved homes."

One of those returned prematurely to his own beloved home for civilizing a native population too enthusiastically was Brigadier-General Jacob Smith.

Before a court martial, General Smith was charged as saying to his men:

"I want no prisoners. I want you to kill and burn. The more you kill and burn, the better you will please me. The interior must be made a howling wilderness."

Further, "Hell-Roaring Jake", as he was called, gave instructions that he wanted all persons killed who were capable of bearing arms. When he was asked for an age limit, he designated it as 10 years of age. Brigadier-General Jacob Smith was found guilty. He was sentenced to be admonished and was pensioned off.

About this verdict, Secretary of War Elihu Root stated:

"It is the duty of a General Officer, whose age and experience have brought him to a high command, not to incite his subordinates to acts of lawless violence, but to so explain to them the application of the Laws of War as to prevent transgression upon their part.

"In this, General Smith has signally failed. And for this, he has been justly convicted."

For the American people since its beginning, the little war in the Philippines had been a divisive factor in American politics. So, in 1902, President Roosevelt celebrated the Fourth of July by declaring the war formally over.

CAPTION:

“Now the simple natives can dance the dance of peace under the Stars and Stripes”

Nevertheless, two years later, an anti-war protester confessed wearily:

“We should all be glad to hear no more about military operations in the Philippines. Many of our countrymen are so tired and sick of the whole bloody, blundering business that they are ready to cry curses on anyone who talks about it.”

But he concluded that " in five years, the policy followed by the executive branch of our Government has practically changed the relation of the army to the nation. It is no longer the chief use of the army to defend the country and preserve the peace. It tends to become an instrument in the hands of whatever administration is in power for carrying out a policy of foreign aggression."

But the war was a long way away from the American people, and by this time was being fought by professional soldiers. Their deaths were regarded as being a small price to pay for being a great Pacific power. Beside that, native troops were being trained to take over much of the fighting in process of “Filipinization”

CAPTION:

“In the Philippines, Moro land was never conquered until the Americans came.

Their whole life is being transformed, and they express profound gratitude”

The country had been largely pacified by force. And Filipino leaders had been found who were willing to collaborate with the powerful Americans.

In the biographs at home, the American soldier in the service of imperialism was romanticized.

CAPTION:

“The American soldier in love and war”

Act I, Scene One.

“The soldier’s farewell.”

Act II, Scene One

“Serving his country in a foreign clime – the white man’s burden”

Act II, Scene Two

“A modern Pocahontas to the rescue!”

Act III, Scene One

“The savages of the isles acknowledge their master.”

Act III, Scene Two

“All’s well that ends well.”

“Finis”

Then in 1906, Major General Woods, commanding American troops, poetically reported a victory to President Roosevelt: “I have put 600 Moros under the sod, To go to meet their Mohammedan God.”

To which, Roosevelt cabled the reply:

"I congratulate you and the officers and men of your command upon the brilliant feat of arms wherein you and they so well upheld the honor of American flag."

Mark Twain, who had long opposed the war in the Philippines, bitterly questioned the brilliance or honor of a victory that included women and children in the body count, a count that next day rose to 900.

He pointed out that the victory came after American forces had trapped an all but defenseless tribe of Moros in a fifty-foot deep volcanic crater and fired on them with their artillery and rifles, not stopping until all were dead.

"The taste of our troops," he wrote, "remained what it has been for eight years in our army out there - the taste of Christian butchers!"

CAPTION:

(Not quite)

"The End"

The Filipino War of Liberation did not really end. But what got the Americans out was - coconuts! Coconuts and sugar cane.

Free trade between the United States and the Philippines was established in 1913.

Eventually, American farmers insisted on protection against competition from Filipino sugar and coconut oil. And this could only be done by granting Independence to the Philippines. And so closing the door to the free import of Filipino coconuts.