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Melvin G. Holli

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Texts and Documents

*A View of the American Campaign Against "Filipino Insurgents": 1900**

MELVIN G. HOLLI

In an age that witnessed the climax of the great imperial outreach of Western Europe, the American acquisition of the Philippine Islands in 1899 after the conclusion of the Spanish American War presented the United States with an unprecedented problem—that of extending American rule over a people who were unrelated in culture, custom, religion, and race, and removed by thousands of miles from American shores. In addition, the United States was faced with an island-wide native insurrection.

Colonel Cornelius Gardner's account of campaigning against the Filipino insurgents in Luzon in 1900 presents many striking parallels to the problems met by the American forces in Viet Nam today. The difficulties of the terrain, officer demoralization, inflated casualty totals of the enemy dead, the futility of interdicting gunrunning, the unwelcome intervention of American forces in a civil war, the tenacity of the guerrilla forces, the job of protecting innocent civilians in areas of American military operations, and the problem of restoring cohesiveness to a native society that was alienated from its only source of authority and leadership, all have a familiar ring to the reader of today's press.

Colonel Gardner was convinced that Filipinos should be guaranteed a self-determined, free government for he feared that American occupation of the islands would bring inept white civil governors, dishonest political hangers-on, and Protestant missionaries who would disrupt

* This document taken from the Pingree Papers of the Burton Collection is being published without emendation and as originally written by Colonel Cornelius Gardner.—EDITOR.

the fabric of Filipino society. Gardner also described at some length the primitive agricultural system of the Islands and prescribed how economic rehabilitation should begin with a practical educational system, free of religious control. Finally Gardner's reading of racial conflict seems timeless. The Colonel feared that white-skinned pro-consuls could not rule dark-skinned peoples peaceably in a nation that knew the American record toward the Indian on the plains and the Negro in the South.

Cornelius Gardner was born in Holland, Michigan, graduated from West Point in 1869 and spent much of his early career in the American West where he won his fighting spurs against the Cheyennes and later the Apaches and Utes. In 1893 Captain Gardner was placed in charge of the Nineteenth United States Infantry and appointed commandant of Fort Wayne, near Detroit, Michigan. While there, Gardner became acquainted with Detroit reform-mayor Hazen S. Pingree and entered into the reform scene in a major way. Gardner helped to formulate and to direct one of the most publicized relief programs that emerged from the depression of 1893, Pingree's famous "Potato patch" plan which provided garden plots and seed for the unemployed, foreign born in Detroit. Following his reform instincts Gardner supported the presidential bid of William Jennings Bryan in 1896 and proselytized among his men for free silver.

Although he was still a military officer Gardner remained a confidant and adviser to then reform Governor Pingree who stoutly opposed the declaration of war against Spain in 1898. Commissioned by the governor, Colonel Gardner took command of the Thirty-First Michigan Volunteers and prepared his regiment for federal duty in Cuba. Although he was known as a martinet to his men, Gardner enhanced his reputation as a professional by strictly enforcing sanitary procedures and practices at Southern and Cuban encampments and kept his unit relatively free of diseases that staggered other units. When the Michigan Volunteers were mustered out in 1899, Gardner assumed command of the Thirtieth United States Infantry which was assigned to the Philippines to pacify the insurrection led by General Emilio Aguinaldo.

With a keen intelligence and a critical eye, Gardner viewed the war which he was waging from an uncommon view: a reformer who saw the perils of the "White Man's burden" from the field. Acquainted with the literature of imperialism, he cited Kipling in relating the problem of controlling the conduct of American troops. Written but a few years after Kipling's *Recessional* heralded the retreat of the New Imperialism, Gardner's letter to Governor Pingree begins by recording America's first major thrust into the Far East with the invasion of Luzon.

Headquarters 30th. Infantry, U. S. Volunteers
Tayabas, Luzon, Feb. 21st, 1900.

Hon. H. S. Pingree.

Dear Governor:—

The month of January has been quite a busy one for the regiment. On January 4th, the regiment left San Pedro Macati near Manila, and started south as part of Schwan's Expeditionary Brigade to invade the provinces of Laguna, Batangas and Tayabas. The column was composed of three regiments of Infantry, nine troops of cavalry and six mountain guns. We started with army wagons for transporting our supplies, but in less than a week all these had to be abandoned and we took only what we could carry on the horses or men's persons, then it came down to half rations of hard tack and bacon and coffee.

To a column of such size the Insurgents offered little resistance at places where resistance was expected. The column did not stay together very long, as it became necessary to leave garrisons behind in all the places occupied, until the end of January the operations were mostly by separate Battalions. Of course every town we entered was defended to some extent by the Insurgents and we generally had a skirmish or two. About twenty or more cities and towns of importance were occupied. The entire route was strongly defended by entrenchments and places for ambush, especially so the steep mountain trails. But seldom, however, did the insurgents stay in them long enough to inflict much loss on us, for we generally tried flanking movements. We marched in all about 260 miles, two-thirds of this distance was over almost impassible trails, through canons, over mountains, wading rivers and climbing rocks. Few men carried blankets or even ponchos. Reveille at 4:00 A.M., on the march at six. One day we made 40 miles in 26 hours for my regiment. Every town and city we entered was entirely deserted by all inhabitants, except here and there a very sick or dying person. All movable goods were packed off into the far away villages off our route or to the mountains. No food of any kind, except occasionally some rice was left. Cities of from twenty to thirty thousand

inhabitants were deserted in this manner. The insurgent forces alone remained. Wealthy natives, families of refinement and culture, merchants with their stocks of goods, children, babies, the aged, the sick, the infirm all gone and living in the mountains and canons under trees in the open or perhaps in a hut. Rain half the time, hot sunshine the rest.

Surely a people who would suffer like this for a principle, for the right of self government, are entitled to it. Only the chinese remained as neutrals in the towns, and as these are generally of a low class, they did considerable plundering.

Then came the soldiers. Of course the best houses in every town were occupied by them, and every hidden place ransacked in hope of the booty of Eastern lands, so often read of in novels; dreams of buried treasure in graveyards, churches or vaults. I do not know that the American is worse than other soldiers, but surely it was bad enough, and a month's campaigning against the "Niggers" so-called is very demoralizing and bad for discipline. "To the visitor belongs the spoils" as an aphorism, has perhaps done more harm than the saying that "No Indian is a good Indian, except a dead one." One of the regiments in the column had but just arrived on the Island, all raw recruits, and not very good ones at that, organized at the time when it began to get hard to get recruits, the "leavings" as you might say. These set a bad example to my men, they looted everything and destroyed for the fun of it. Every church and some graveyards were thoroughly gone through. However, in towns where my regiment came only, no church has been entered or looting done, for I placed guards immediately to prevent it. A man at home who would not take a pin, will here steal anything he can lay his hands on, and under some plea or other make himself, and try to make others believe that this is alright here. This is the land you know "East of Suez" where "there ain't no ten commandments" to worry a fellow.

Up to date we have had six men killed, about 12 wounded, including one officer, and the insurgents have taken eight men prisoners. I am speaking of my own regiment. The prisons were taken when about one hundred and fifty insur-

gents ambushed forty of my men escorting a pony pack train loaded with rations. These men are now hidden in the mountains in the Camarines, about 100 miles south of here. There is no longer any organized resistance. The Insurgents are in small bands, each acting for itself without central authority and they move from place to place in the villages. We have had altogether about a dozen fights and our troops do not fear the insurgents at all, because even when they ambush a column at from 50 to 100 yards distance they seldom hit anybody, whereas our men can shoot straight enough to kill any man they can get sight of. It is almost impossible to use flankers on the march, the underbrush is so thick and there are so many deep ravines. When parties are small, say even a single company, it has a "Point" of four men. If the road is wide enough they march in two parallel columns of files, one on each side of the road and about six feet apart between the men, so that in case of ambuscade the men will not be bunched and either end of the column can swing around the brush and outflank the enemy.

At the various entrenchments here around Tayabas we have captured about a dozen bronze cannon of old pattern. The other day I used five companies to operate in a square, about eight miles on each side of the square. On one side was the ocean and I put two companies in ambush on two sides, ten men at each trail crossing the main road and then sent in on the other side three companies on various trails. We released three Spanish prisoners, captured five rifles, but got no insurgents. The insurgents are generally very kind to our prisoners. About two weeks ago on a hill on the march in the province of Laguna one of our flankers got out too far and was captured by them. We had given him up for lost. He turned up the other day. It seems about 20 surrounded him and he was forced to surrender. They took him to the mountains where he became sick together with a man from the 35th, also a prisoner. They brought both of them into Santa Cruz to the American forces there carrying both in a litter, and whenever they passed through a native village they pretended to have dead men going to bury them.

The prisoners were well treated and given money when they left.

There are still some Spanish prisoners, called friars, left in the hands of the Filipinos. We have released probably five or six thousand prisoners so far, for it must be remembered that while Manila was being besieged the Philipinos captured every Spanish garrison on the Islands, except one. Here in Tayabas they were besieged 56 days and every building is riddled with bullets. The friars are particularly hated by the natives, for the latter were tormented and tortured by them for centuries; hence they are hanging onto the friars in their hands as prisoners.

The chapter of infamies committed by priests and friars here in the past is a horrible one. The revolution was not so much against Spain as it was against the rule of the friars, for the friar controlled the government here. Take the City of Tayabas at present The ecclesiastical buildings cost probably half a million, Mex., equal to \$225,000 gold. The value of all the other buildings in the town will not exceed \$1000,000, Mex., and so it is everywhere. The church here is larger than any I know of in the United States. The income of the Padre was \$1000 Monthly, in spite of the fact that the people are as poor as they can be, and except a dozen merchants, live in thatched huts. Every time a bell rings it costs somebody some money. It costs to be born, to be married and to die, just about all that a man can save in a life time, and this all went to the priest. Teachings of all kinds and the entire system of education was religious, out of religious books, and its whole tendency to inculcate, that the people must give implicit obedience to the king and the civil power, and that to rebel was to suffer eternal damnation. *That was teaching patriotism.* Then that the priest was the dispenser of eternal happiness, and had it in his power to grant rewards or punishment hereafter, and that his person was sacred; *that was teaching religion.* All Filipinos stand in awe of authority, both secular and divine, and are an easy people to handle if treated alright. As I have stated in some of my former letters, I have never seen so moral and sober a people. There

are no native Filipino drunkards or prostitutes, except perhaps of the latter a very few in Manila. They are intuitively honest. The woman occupies relatively a more prominent position in family life than she does with us. She is the exact equal to the husband, and among the peasant generally manages the finances. Their wants are few. They are frugal and hard working. Rice is the general food, with fish near the sea coast, and pork, chickens and eggs inland. Rice is cultivated in what is called "Rice Paddies". The land which must lie of a slope, with a stream of water near the highest point, is terraced and diked with small embankments a foot or more high, and if the ground slopes in two directions, divided into small plots, each of which must be level and below those near the stream. The ground is plowed and then water let in until it is a thick mud, the rice is then planted in small stalks about eight inches apart. All during the season the water runs from the highest through the intermediate ones all the way to the lowest paddy, every square being covered by about an inch of water. At the end of the season the ground is allowed to dry. In all the mountain towns cement ditches about a foot deep and two feet wide run under all the houses and through all the streets and have a stream of water in them to carry off sewerage and washing. The pure water ditches are on one side of the street and the impure on the other, right and left. This water, both pure and impure, is used below the town in the rice paddies, also the impure was used before it entered town and had probably flowed over a half mile of rice paddies. Every town has one or more mills run by water power to hull rice. The unhulled rice is called "Palay". The milling is done by a crude process, by immense iron shoed stamps, lifted up by cogs in a wheel and dropping down in circular holes slightly smaller on top than elsewhere, dug out of an immense log, about a dozen in a log and about two feet apart.

Four officers have handed in their resignations since the regiment came to this province. They can't stand the isolation. It takes six weeks, sometimes two months, to get letters and papers from the United States to Manila, and perhaps another month till a steamer comes from Manila to bring us

rations, and to get answers to letters takes away four months. Life here is even worse than on the plains in the early days. One cannot go out of town $1/4$ mile without danger of being shot at from ambush. We must have pickets and outposts out all day and night, besides patrols at night. The last papers we have from the United States is Dec. 16th, and this is Feb. 21st. There is no place to drill except the streets. There is no room for parade ground or to have parades. Our band arrived the other day. During our "hike" of 300 days we had left them at Manila. The poor fellows came overland with an armed escort, but were shot at from ambush four times, "like to scared them to death." Night before last the "Star Spangled Banner" was played for the first time in these parts. We are about six hundred feet above the level of the sea at the base of a mountain which rises 7300 feet above the sea. The mountain is inhabited to its very top by people. The lowest layer are civilized Tagalos; higher up the so-called Fanaticos or Infidels who did not believe in priests and are semi-outlaws and remnants of an ancient tribe conquered by the Tagalos, and near the very top still wilder people, a good deal like you find them up in the mountain regions of East Tennessee and West Va.

Now what on earth we shall do with these islands is more than any of us can tell. We cannot induce immigration from the United States, or if we did, they would not stay here very long, the climate is against the white race; even now in February it rains on an average of three times a day and a little at night. We have 50000 troops or more on Luzon alone, and yet we have not half enough to garrison the towns, let alone the barrios, (villages). Unless we govern wisely and humanely with a view to improve the conditions of the people here, and not with a view to make money out of them, we will have continual revolutions. Liberty and independence is very dear to these people. It has been their hope for generations, yet when Spanish power was crumbling, when they had taken prisoner every Spanish Soldier on all these Islands, except Manila and one other place, there came a stronger power with limitless wealth to take Spain's place and undo all that had been done for independence.

The thousands and tens of thousands who died for ultimate Filipino independence they now believe "to have died in vain."

The Filipinos are not ignorant. They have read history. Many read English fluently. They have read our race antipathy to any person of dark skin. They have read of our treatment for 100 years of our Indians. They read of how we burn and torture niggers in the south; how a nigger has in the south no right which a white man is bound to respect. You cannot blame them when they predict that there will be a similar fate upon the advent of civil government administered by ward politicians and that element which has outlived its usefulness in American politics, but is willing to take a four year job of office holding in these Islands. No man will come out here and "live for his health", as the Indian Agent used to say of old, he will come out and in four years, possibly eight, he will expect to get rich and return to the United States. Let us hope it will be otherwise.

There is unanimity of opinion among officers here, and they all say that we should stay in these Islands not a day longer than is necessary to reestablish order and rebuild the government which we have destroyed. It must be remembered that civil government was in good working order everywhere under the Filipino authority. Now there is no government of any kind, except the will of the Military Commander. Whenever we rebuild civil government in towns and cities we must necessarily use the very element we have kicked out, that is, prominent Filipinos to fill local offices. That is the case in every barrio on the Island. Now unless we govern honestly in the administration of the islands, unless we give back to the people the lands which the friars have stolen from them, and unless we keep permanently out of the Islands, the friars and Catholic orders which have been the cause of all revolutions, we will have constant revolutions on our hands and the prominent people in office will of course again be the leaders. During this entire war we have not killed enough Filipino soldiers to make much difference in the available number hereafter for the same purpose. The num-

bers killed by our troops have been ridiculously exaggerated. They have about the same number of rifles they ever had, for we have not captured in all perhaps over 1000 serviceable ones. It is true they have lost a few serviceable canon, but cannon are not a necessary adjunct to guerrilla warfare. Now when the ports are open there will not be much difficulty to bring in arms and ammunition for insurrectory purposes. It seems to me there is but one sensible course for our nation to take and that is to assure these people by congressional enactment that after ten or fifteen years we will grant them independence. Filipino are much like Japanese, and they would like the same independence as a nation. Permanent good will towards us there can never be, a racial feeling comes in which can never be overcome. Imagine ourselves being conquered and ruled by chinese, it would make no difference how good the government was there would always be bad feeling. Let them see this in time and act accordingly. Let us guarantee independence to Luzon, which is in every way capable of self government and wait with the rest of the Islands, more or less civilized? We could take Subig Bay just north of Manila as a naval and coaling station. Subig Bay is large enough to hold the navies of the world and Island locked. After granting independence let us apply the Monroe doctrine to the entire Philippine archipelago and say to the nations of Europe "hands off, this is our foster-child", a republic in Asiatic waters. Let become a haven to overcome tyrants and monarchs in the orient, this our children will be more proud of than the role we are now playing.

Of one thing I feel assured and it is this, unless we can give them hope for entire independence at some future date, no Americans can live here with safety, except where there is an American garrison. There will be perpetual guerrilla war and at intervals of a few years there will be revolutions. When education advances as we propose to advance it, when Filipinos acquire wealth, as we propose to advance opportunities of commerce, we prepare them for successful resistance. Hope for independence is too deep seated, it can never be eradicated, except by a destruction of the population. Spain has destroyed perhaps half the population in the last thirty

years in her efforts to crush the spirit, are we who boast of a Declaration of Independence written by Jefferson, to be forever a beacon light of liberty, to come into the orient and crush the spirit among the people as worthy to be free as we ourselves are, and who have for independence suffered in the past far more than ever our forefathers suffered.

Much of the business in the Islands is in the hands of chinese, who fill about the same position as jews do elsewhere. This is largely due to the fact that during the Spanish Regime a native who became influential, wealthy or educated was immediately an object of suspicion, and he was safest if he belonged to those who in our country sing "Oh, to be nothing, nothing, nothing." If he grew rich, he was taxed until he was poor, and hence all incentive to labor was destroyed. The Chinese being foreign subjects, although constantly annoyed in a similar manner, could leave after a while with their accumulation of property. I am convinced that no more Chinese should be admitted to the Islands, for there will be plenty of native labor and especially after the periodical killings have been done away with. The native Filipino is industrious, frugal and docile, if well treated. His wants are few now, but as his opportunities are increased his wants will also increase.

The educational problem is probably the most difficult one of all. Heretofore it has been entirely in the hands of the church. The text books were all of a religious nature, and only such things were taught as would assist the clergy in easily robbing and domineering the people. Well, the Monastic orders are gone, but for some time there will not be enough natives to take their place, either as priests or teachers. English is gradually becoming the language of the Orient. It is now spoken in India, the Strait settlement, Chinese treaty ports and considerably in Japan. I can see no advantage hereafter in teaching in the primary schools any language but Tagalo and English. Tagalo is a language of too great a poverty of words, except for elementary instruction; higher education should be in English. It will be a difficult question to get teachers in Tagalo, a much more difficult one to get teachers in English. No person, unless he is a religious

enthusiast will come to this island and remain long as a teacher, except perhaps in the large cities and for good salaries. The people here do not want or need religious enthusiasts or missionaries of any kind. If the object of religion is to make people moral and temperate, the object has been attained by the church of Rome, and it had best be let alone. The introduction of protestantism in its varied forms and different creeds would produce chaos, where now simplicity and order reigns. The clashing of the clergy proselyting each for his own sect and all against the present religion of the people would be exceedingly unfortunate for these people. A Missionary who was also probably an agent for an American Mercantile House might be killed, then the representatives of the prince of peace would demand satisfaction and war, as is now so often the case in China and Korea. No, the best interests of the people demand that their religion be not improved upon. They are already far more religious than we Anglo-Saxons are, in fact they have too much religion and too few kinds of gravy. They need to be taught not religion, but science and art and modern knowledge of things tangible. They need to be broadened not to be made narrow mentally. Modern machines for sugar refining, for cording hemp, for refining cocoanut oil, need to be introduced and men taught how to use them. They need teachers of science of government, but they do not need any more kinds of religion. Do not let us break down what could never again be so well rebuilt, but let us renovate and cleanse the present religious system which had become foul until this moral and religious people rebelled against the desecrators.

Apropos of how the average man will submit excuses and reasons almost enough to make himself believe himself that common honesty is not a part of the moral law "East of Suez" and that the ten commandments only apply among friends, came out very forcibly to me yesterday. About a week ago I sent three companies to scout Southwest of this city looking for Insurgent troops. The trail which one of the companies took led them through a barrio which was inhabited by people from Sariaya a town of some size, and which upon the approach of the American troops in January had been entirely depopulated and

every person in it had moved to the mountains or the rice field barrios. Upon the approach of one of my companies along a narrow and difficult trail, all the people in the barrio left their bamboo huts and fled in every direction towards the ravines and underbrush. As is usual in such cases the houses were ransacked and searched, and articles of much value found, to-wit: coin to the value of probably \$300, jewelry, diamonds, silverware to the value of probably \$600. To appropriate anything belonging to peaceable natives who offered no resistance was strictly against the orders of General Otis and my own. It was done, however, and all the above and much more was brought back to the barracks by this Company, both officers and men being a party to it. Unfortunately for the pockets of the captors, I had issued a proclamation upon arriving in the province that the American soldiers were not making war on women or children, or were not to rob the inhabitants, but to protect those who were peaceably inclined; that we proposed to institute civil government as soon as possible, and requested the co-operation of all those who had the welfare of the Islands at heart; that if any soldiers committed any wrong against any native and the matter was reported, that I would see that justice was done. I received a letter soon after the return of this company from an old widow lady of considerable education and refinement, who stated that upon the approach of my soldiers, she had fled from her house and that it had been robbed by them of \$260, and all the jewelry; that she had read my proclamation written in Tagalo, and that from its tenor she had mustered enough courage to write and tell me the facts, and that she had been robbed of all she had. By careful investigation I found that pretty much the whole company had been robbing houses on this trip and I then called the entire company together in a room and read the law to them. I mean the law "West of Suez", same as the one published on Sinai, before people got so they could argue it out of their way. When they saw that I knew all about what they had been doing and just how much had been taken and who had it, one after another began to give reasons why they had taken it. Here are some of them, "We found it in the bushes", "It was an insurrectos house,

because they are all insurgents down here", "If we had not taken it the ladrones or robbers would", "It didn't belong to anybody, it was lying around, we were not hunting for it." Then I took the floor and we had sort of a protracted meeting, and quite a number came to the front bench and one after another came up and acknowledged what he had, and tonight I have it all and have sent it back to the owners, and really I believe that the return of this property will, when it becomes noised abroad, have a great effect in the pacification of this province than the value of the property would have had if expended in Krag-Jorgensen bullets and let fly at them.

But as I sit here and write you my boys tonight, I remember that I read in the newspapers of the United States those same excuses for our own abandoning as a nation; of the principle laid down from all time for the government of honest men, whether it be by Moses, by Budhah, by Jesus, Confucius or Mohammed, to hold good on both sides of Suez, the same excuses that my soldiers had learned from the morality of imperialism, "That this case was different." But what I have related to you can best compare and think out for yourselves, but do not allow any one to convince you that whether the last two years there has been any change in the principle. "Do unto others as you would like to be done by", despite of the fact that we seem to have suddenly discovered as a nation that there is only letter in the way to make "Teum", "Meum", and what's one letter when our intentions are as good as just now. Why, if all south America had our moral influence to break from under Spanish yoke, if the Mexican government was rendered a possibility by the presence of our armies on the border, if Cuba, "by right ought to be free", shall we deny it to the Filipinos, except because we are greedy and hate to give up the jewel we have found, even if we discovered the owner. It is national dishonesty which will come home to roost some day. It is not intended that any Filipino government would at once be a perfect one. It takes evolutions and trials to reach that goal. Mexico and South America are well on the way. It cannot be done in a day. Everything must have a beginning. Let us give the Filipinos a chance to begin. If the people of the United States under-

stood how these people yearned for self government and independence, to be a nation, no honest man would deny them of it. They will some day get it, for any people who will fight for it, always get it in the end, but it will cost them lots of blood and desolation, for we are such a strong nation. I am on the ground here and these are many conclusions after careful investigation, not only in Manila, but at far interior towns and villages. Some of the people who make speeches and have been on commissions and then talk on the question when they reach the United States, have never been out of Manila. Manila is not Luzon. Havana is not Cuba, nor do New York ideas represent those of the United States generally. I belong to no party, I do not have to be loyal to any political faction, nor do I have to be loyal to any platform, which a few men who control parties choose to draft. I try to judge things by the right and the wrong of the thing and my convictions are formed on truth and principles of justice, not on political expediency. Here you have them.

Yours truly,

Cornelius Gardner.

"Not for publication."