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Guardians of Empire, by Linn

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Book Reviews



Guardians of Empire: The U.S. Army and the Pacific, 1902–1940. By Brian McAllister Linn. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. xvi + 343 pages.

There are many books covering the military history of the Philippine-American War (1899–1902) and the years of World War II in the Philippines. Military history in the Philippines during the period between 1902 and 1941, however, has remained a territory unexplored by serious historical study. There have been specialized works dealing with the U.S. Navy, the Philippine Army, the Philippine Constabulary and the Philippine Scouts during portions of this period, but nothing specifically on the U.S. Army. This pioneering work seeks to fill the gap in what the U.S. Army did in the Philippines and Hawaii between the two wars. In so doing, Dr. Linn presents a wide-ranging and detailed account of the U.S. Army in the Pacific—its plans, fears, problems and operations—during peacetime. He fills the void and adds depth and understanding to American military history, Philippine history, and the history of Hawaii.

Linn is a professional military historian. His first book, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899–1902*, is a detailed, scholarly military study of that conflict from the American side. *Guardians of Empire*, which in a way is a sequel to that first book, is also a very well researched book based on archival sources and contemporary professional articles.

Linn's new book covers a wide area, spanning forty years and encompassing the Army's strategic and tactical plans, doctrine, morals, community relations and social life, among others. Two potential threats to both the Philippines and Hawaii—Japan and the native population—were recognized and dominated by planning, operations and Army organization. Linn asks the obvious question: if Japan had been identified as a danger early on, and if plans had been formulated since the beginning, why then were the Japanese able to surprise the U.S. forces in Hawaii and defeat the Philippine-American forces in the Philippines? The answer is a historical truth that cuts across time and space: no matter how good the plans were, if the will

or the money to carry the plans out was not there, the plans were bound to fail. And so the reader finds throughout Linn's book the battles fought by Army officers to get their plans approved and updated and given the means to carry them out.

Guardians of Empire focuses on five major themes. The first theme is U.S. military strategic thinking regarding the Pacific, the respective importance given to the Philippines and Hawaii, and the strategic war plans devised to cope with U.S. policy. The evolution of the oft-cited War Plan Orange is carefully laid out. Perhaps more interesting to Filipinos, however, is the framing of War Plan Brown, where a major Filipino uprising was seen as a major threat to the U.S. interests and security in the Philippines.

The second theme is the tactical aspect of the Army in Hawaii and the Philippines—specific doctrines and tactics to carry out the strategic war plans and deal with the potential threats. The Army's tactical doctrine changed radically in the forty years under study: balancing internal and external security missions, which meant adopting techniques ranging from "pacification" operations, to countering offshore naval bombardment, to repelling enemy amphibious landings. Hardly had the lessons of the previous war been learned when new technologies and weapons forced major changes in tactical doctrine.

The third theme is related to the second theme, focusing on the suspicions of the Army towards the local population. The U.S. army was, after all, not only protecting the people of both the Philippines and Hawaii, but was also charged with controlling them. Thus, it had to look both outwards and inwards.

Flowing from the third theme is the fourth, which is how to use local manpower to supplement the insufficient American garrisons. Fearing potential disturbances from Filipinos and Hawaiians, the Army was nevertheless forced to recruit them as a counterforce against the Japanese threat.

Finally, the book stresses the wide gap between military policy (as incorporated in the war plans) and actual practice. Linn explains that, in part, the history of the U.S. Army in the Pacific is "an account of well-conceived ideas falling victim to institutional inertia, financial constraints, parochialism, paranoia, tunnel vision, face-saving, egotism, and accidents of timing.... It is also the study of how modern military institutions, staffed by intelligent and committed professionals, can work devotedly and generate sophisticated projects and plans, but still not address the central issues that confront them." This description does not limit itself to the U.S. Army, nor to the book's time frame, but can also be applied to other institutions and other times, even to the present.

The book starts out with the arrival of the American soldiers and the pacification of the Hawaii and the Philippines, and goes on through the pacification campaigns in the Philippines after the official end (to the Americans) of the Philippine-American War. From then on it deals with strategic

planning, tactical thought, local conditions and problems in a roughly chronological manner. Some chapters deal with specific topics, while others deal with conditions of a particular time frame. Because of this, some jumping in time occurs, which can be jarring to the reader.

While Linn's focus is on military matters, he does not neglect the social side of the military. Discussions of the problems caused by racial discrimination, drunken soldiers, venereal disease and relations with local women, and even homosexuality in the Army are eye-opening and well-documented.

The book is on the U.S. Army and the perspective is mainly that from the military institution: official reports, letters, orders and so on. But perhaps the book tends to restrict itself too much to the Army, and hardly mentions the sentiments and views of the Filipinos or the Hawaiians regarding the Army. The Philippine independence question is not highlighted, even though this contributed to the confusion in Army planning. By the late 1930s, questions were already rising on whether the fortifications in Corregidor should be taken out and brought to the U.S. after the Philippines had become independent. There is also no discussion on the debates on post-Philippine independence U.S. bases. Linn mentions the Army-Navy Club in Manila as being the center of social activity for the Army, but does not mention that its being off-limits to Filipinos was one of the causes of friction between Filipinos and Americans, strengthening the Filipino clamor for independence.

Moreover, the discussion for the first thirty-five or so years of this century is quite detailed, but the last five years before World War II—including the Sino-Japanese War and the outbreak of war in Europe and their effects on military thinking—are glossed over. (China does not even appear in the index). The book ends quite abruptly and does not tie up the many years of planning and training to the hurried reinforcements in 1941 and the debacle that ensued. This is a pity, since Linn starts out very well but rushes through the last, and quite important, years before the war.

Another weak point is the lack of characterization of the many officers that Linn mentions. Several of the names are familiar to students of Philippine history: Gen. Douglas MacArthur and Gen. Leonard Wood, among others. However, the many names mentioned do not come alive, for they are not flushed out and brought to life.

It must be stressed, however, that this is a history of the U.S. Army in the Philippines and Hawaii, and its views on its missions, its problems and way of life from the turn of the century to the eve of World War II in the Pacific. The reader thus sees how the U.S. officers and men thought and viewed their world and their role in it. It is an important work, especially to military planners and students of military affairs, for the issues and problems faced over half a century ago are still, in many ways, current.

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