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Rodney J. Ross

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## The Philippines in World War II Surveys

*Rodney J. Ross*



Throughout the Second World War British and American strategists focused on Europe and planned for victory over Germany first. Even before Japan's Pearl Harbor attack in late 1941, Anglo-American policymakers had forged ABC-1, agreeing to give priority to Hitler's defeat and to allocate disproportionate resources to that objective once the United States became a belligerent. Echoing ABC-1, Rainbow 5, the U.S. strategic plan, mandated an early allied offensive in Europe while relegating the Pacific to a secondary and defensive posture. The U.S. Navy's prewar design for conflict with Japan, War Plan Orange, which Rainbow 5 had replaced, had also suggested Europe's importance in the minds of naval strategists, virtually conceding the loss of the Philippines after the outbreak of hostilities unless the Pacific Fleet could relieve Fil-American forces within six months. However, Japan's raid on Hawaii effectively neutralized the American fleet, precluded reinforcement of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFPE), and brought about the general's March 1942 departure for Australia two months before the archipelago fell to Japanese invaders.

Eager to redeem his pledge to return to the Philippines, General MacArthur criticized the European orientation of the Allies as well as naval strategy concentrating on a Central as opposed to a Southwest Pacific advance toward Japan.<sup>1</sup> MacArthur believed military operations pointing against the Axis in Europe would be less decisive than those in the Pacific. He not only urged the assembly of larger allied forces in the East but also advocated a primary drive targeting the Japanese homeland by way of the Southwest Pacific through New Guinea and the Philippines. His approach, MacArthur argued, would be more expeditious, less costly in lives, and permit the use of land-based air power to greater advantage.

Forced by policymakers to accede to simultaneous advances across the Central and Southwest Pacific, General MacArthur then coun-

tered the Navy's proposed shunt of the Philippines that featured a direct push on Japanese-held Formosa. Pressing President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his naval strategists to invade and liberate the archipelago instead, MacArthur reasoned that landings in the Visayas and Luzon would provide requisite bases if an eventual campaign against Formosa became necessary. Yet the general emphasized forceful moral and political imperatives as well, believing his promise to free all Filipinos represented an obligation that influenced America's future in Asia: "... if the United States should deliberately bypass the Philippines, leaving our prisoners, nationals, and loyal Filipinos in enemy hands without an effort to retrieve them at earliest moment, ... we would probably suffer such loss of prestige among all the peoples of the Far East that it would adversely affect the United States for many years" (Cannon 1954, 4). The World War II surveys selected for examination here describe more than the implementation of a preferred allied strategy across widely spread theaters of conflict. Their texts also mirror the boundaries of their authors' perceptions. Owing to their Eurocentric and imperial biases, the British works in particular lack literary symmetry, neglecting U.S. Pacific campaigns as they emphasize European operations. Their American counterparts, on the other hand, are less inclined to skew the Far East and appear, at the least, to try for textual balance. Still, as this note demonstrates and nationality aside, most recent publications and their precursors either slight or misrepresent the prominent role of the Philippines within the context of the Pacific war.

### British Authors

Seldom have British historians devoted much attention to the Philippines in surveys concerning the Second World War. Early works by Arnold-Forster, Young, and Hart were Eurocentric, selective, and, above all, dash off without reference to official histories (Arnold-Forster 1974; Young 1966; Hart 1972). For example, merely two of fifteen chapters in Arnold-Forster's *The World at War* and only nine of thirty-eight chapters in Young's *World War 1939-1945: A Short History* bear upon Asia, notwithstanding the latter's publisher's blurb that "all the far-flung drama" was "encompassed in this encyclopedic volume." Besides, both Arnold-Forster and Young write lengthy depictions of the 1944 Leyte Gulf naval battles without commensu-

rate mindfulness to the 1944-1945 Philippine land campaigns.<sup>2</sup> As a pattern, Young's narrative simply mentions landings on Leyte, Mindoro, Luzon, and the southern islands, describes the Leyte ground action in three paragraphs, yet gives liberally three pages to the Leyte Gulf naval engagements. Errors as well as distortions plague Arnold-Forster's account. He mislabels the prewar Philippine Commonwealth an independent republic, cites an inflated casualty figure for Filipino and American losses during the 1942 Bataan death march, and unfairly holds Lt. Gen. Masaharu Homma directly responsible for the trek to Camp O'Donnell.

Despite its Eurocentric and strategic focus, Hart's *History of the Second World War* analyzes comprehensively military operations in the Philippines. Nevertheless, Hart resembles Arnold-Forster when he questions the strategy calling for a protracted ground campaign aimed at the liberation of the whole archipelago. Arnold-Forster would have bypassed Luzon after Leyte's seizure. Hart also doubts the value of mopping-up Japanese resistance east of Manila and south of Luzon during mid-1945. And both authors fail to mention any contribution to the war effort of the Philippine popular resistance to Japanese occupation.

Publishers' pufferies to the contrary, recently issued British surveys repeat many of the shortcomings of their predecessors. As an example, *Total War* by Calvocoressi, Wint, and Pritchard belies a *New York Times Book Review's* claim to cover "everything essential that happened, why it happened, and how it went." Even with the listing of official army histories in their extensive bibliography, the authors commit errors of omission and commission when the Philippines becomes the topic. Their text chronicles lopsidedly campaigns in Britain's imperial possessions such as India and Malaya at the expense of the Philippines. Omitted are descriptions of the U.S. preparations for war in the archipelago, MacArthur's beach defense plan, the Fil-American retreat into Bataan, and the ensuing Points and Pockets battles. Once more, major landings on Leyte, Luzon, and Mindanao receive brief comment while the authors lavishly detail the Leyte Gulf naval action. Unnoticed are the Filipino guerrilla resistance to the Japanese and the 1945 Battle of Manila.<sup>3</sup> And mistakes also burden *Total War*. In addition to a map on page 980 confusing Cebu with Negros, Calvocoressi, Wint, and Pritchard misinterpret General MacArthur's withdrawal into Bataan as an adaptation to changing tactical circumstances when, in fact, the general was reverting to the prewar Orange plan. In like manner they understate Fil-

American force totals on Bataan, overstate Japanese numbers, and give the erroneous impression that Corregidor's surrendered garrison took part in the Death March.

Two surveys issued by British authors in 1989 also promise complete coverage of the Second World War on all fronts. The end cover of John Keegan's *The Second World War* concedes that "to write history," is to choose," yet his work is advertised as "comprehensive history." Similarly, R.A.C. Parker's *Struggle for Survival: The History of the Second World War* (1989) is lauded as "a short but comprehensive history" that "traces the key events of both the European and Far Eastern wars" and is "written from a truly international perspective." Moreover, Parker (1989, v) maintains "I have tried to escape any British prejudices in considering the conduct of the allies." Instead, both writers have produced anything but complete and balanced texts. Both sidetrack the wartime Philippines as a military sideshow while focusing on European, British colonial, and Central Pacific campaigns. The reader must penetrate almost half of Keegan's work before the Pacific war begins and only three of Parker's eighteen chapters regard Asia. Such imbalances again point up Eurocentric, imperial, and naval preoccupations as opposed to any interest in ground operations in the Philippines. The authors' indices reveal the extent of their slant. The Burma campaign, for example, receives more citations than the Philippines. Besides, their texts dedicate pages to the Leyte Gulf battles while reserving only lines to amphibious assaults on Leyte, Mindoro, and Luzon. Regretably, Keegan and Parker also demonstrate little understanding about the wartime Philippines. Parker (1989, 92) repeats the troops' disparity myth by insisting wrongly that "superior Japanese forces soon isolated the Americans in the Bataan peninsula" whilst Keegan (1989, 265) is off the mark in writing that the Philippines was "never an American colony," in concentrating General MacArthur's USAFFE on the outskirts of Manila in 1941, and in naming Gen. Edward P. King, Jr. as "MacArthur's successor" in 1942 (Keegan 1989, 266). Like Calvo-coressi, Wint, and Pritchard, Keegan's *The Second World War* (1989) fails to recognize both the calculated nature of the Fil-American strategy of voluntary withdrawal to Bataan and the protracted siege of the peninsula whereupon Keegan (1989, 266) says Japanese invaders "forced MacArthur to fall back into" Bataan. Finally, Keegan exaggerates Death March losses and simply acknowledges but does not retell the story of the Filipino guerrilla movement.

Two additional British books should be noted. Martin Gilbert's *The Second World War: A Complete History* (1989) is factual and comprehensive. Gilbert, the biographer of Winston Churchill, does not interpret nor analyze. His anecdotal work contains errors about the wartime Philippines, yet his chronological record of World War II can be dismissed since it contributes little to our understanding of either the war or the Philippine role therein. More important is H.P. Willmott's *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War* (1989), praised by the publisher as the "best balanced one-volume history of the Second World War in its coverage of all the major themes and all the fronts." Willmott's analytical study questions the strategic wisdom of seizing the Philippines instead of Formosa. Doubting the military value of the islands, he reasons that actually both Luzon and Formosa could have been skipped in favor of a direct attack on Okinawa. The decision to retake the archipelago was more attune to the beat of domestic American politics in 1944 than any compelling strategic imperative, he charges; hence, the consequent campaign for the Philippines was as wasteful as it was unnecessary. Willmott ignores the Filipino resistance and makes no mention of its contribution.

### American Authors

Many American-written surveys share some of the weaknesses found in British publications when they review the Philippines in World War II. A sampling of previously published texts by Dupuy (1969), Snyder (1960), and Stokesbury (1980) reflects errors, imbalance, and selectivity. For example, Dupuy's *World War II: A Compact History*, according to his publisher, "met an exceptional challenge in compressing the wide-ranging action of World War II into a compact narrative that sweeps around the world." Yet geographical and historical mistakes blemish his study. He misplaces Clark Field in Manila's environs and Lamon Bay to Luzon's far south. He also suggests Cebu is separate from the Visayas. Despite his use of relevant secondary works including official histories, he writes unclearly about the operational difference between General MacArthur's beach defense and War Plan Orange. Similar to Calvocoressi, Wint, and Pritchard after him, he believes MacArthur's retreat into Bataan was prompted by a worsening tactical situation rather than a strategic

design. Furthermore, Dupuy sets aside merely two pages for Leyte ground operations but describes the Leyte Gulf naval battles in five.

Less comprehensive than Dupuy are Snyder's *The War: A Concise History, 1939-1945* and Stokesbury's *A Short History of World War II*. Snyder's (1960, xii) purpose is "to present in concise form the dramatic story from Warsaw to Tokyo Bay," and his "account is on the essential" as "an attempt has been made to extract the most important events, incidents, and trends" in "a comprehensive picture of broad military movement." But his text runs counter to his stated intention as far as the Philippines is concerned. For instance, Snyder neglects tactical accounts of the Bataan and Luzon campaigns. He stresses naval engagements in the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf but slights ground warfare on Leyte itself. Finally, he strains geographical credibility by situating "O'Donnell prison camp in the jungles of Arlac[Tarlac] Province," mislabels Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita the "Tiger of the Philippines" instead of the Tiger of Malaya, and has probably offended Filipino nationalists by tagging Emilio Aguinaldo a "pliable minion" of the Japanese (Snyder 1960, 219, 523, 225). On the other hand, Stokesbury's *A Short History of World War II* is more balanced but less detailed than Snyder's work. Major campaigns on Bataan, Leyte, and Luzon are tendered with few specifics. As a consequence, his narrative overlooks General MacArthur's beach defense plan, Bataan's Points and Pocket battles, and protracted Japanese resistance east of Manila during the liberation. Stokesbury offers little interpretation of wartime events in the Philippines but, fortunately, his text is almost errorless. Still, he is wrong to hold General Yamashita responsible for electing to fight a last ditch stand in Manila in 1945, a decision actually made by the local Japanese commander in defiance of Yamashita's order to evacuate the capital. To their credit and contrary to their British counterparts, the above American authors do at least acknowledge the existence of a Filipino resistance movement with Dupuy admitting its service to the war effort.

In contrast to the surveys already scrutinized, the recent works of Leckie and Lyons provide the most complete treatment of the Philippines at war. Called by the publisher "The First Complete one-Volume History," Leckie's *Delivered From Evil* is touted as "a thorough recounting of World War II" that "manages to include everything a reader could possibly want to know." Although Leckie snubs British campaigns in Asia and concentrates on personalities, he does

address major land operations in the Philippines, giving a critical assessment of MacArthur's leadership as well. Despite his expression of appreciation for the Filipino guerrillas, he asserts brashly that in combat the "Filipino broke and ran" (Leckie 1987, 352). Besides, his interpretations that the "Filipino scouts[Scouts] were less than fair" and the only reliable units were American regulars seem colonial-minded and do not square with recent scholarship (Leslie 1987, 350, see Whitman 1990, 116, 301, 307, 522, 592). As stated by the book's blurb, Lyon's *World War II: A Short History* (1989) "has successfully created a balanced account that does justice to both the European and Pacific theaters of operations." With one exception, Lyon's overview of the war in the Philippines is exemplary. He describes the strategic debates affecting the islands, pens a sketch of Gen. MacArthur, and records symmetrically sea and land actions. His rendering of the campaigns for Bataan, Leyte, and Luzon are exact and replete. But inexplicably and unlike the work of Dupuy, Lyon's narrative ignores the Philippine resistance and its wartime role.

## Conclusion

Russell F. Weigley's remark about how Japanese historians "who specialize in military history are . . . isolated from other academic historians" might help to explain the parochial scope of most of the surveys under review (Weigley 1992, sec. 7, 1). This essay has demonstrated that most of their authors scant if not misrepresent the experience of the Philippines in the Second World War. Without heed to Michael H. Hunt's plea for an international history, British works, to an unusual degree, manifest little cross-cultural perspective and sustain a national myopia for European, naval, and imperial matters (Hunt 1991, 1-11). Since British historians have not succeeded in distancing themselves from a political culture inhibited traditionally by limited resources and the memory of World War I, they lean obviously, as did policymakers before them, to strategies that husband manpower, avoid mass concentrations of the enemy, and utilize indirect avenues to accomplish military aims.<sup>4</sup> American historians tend to treat the Philippines less peripherally and more accurately than their British counterparts. Nevertheless and surprisingly, they slight, with two exceptions, and this despite easy access to official histories and other sources, the unconventional popular resistance to Japanese occupation. Such inattention to the heavy sac-

rifice and substantial aid contributed by Filipino guerrillas is truly beyond explanation in light of America's Vietnam encounter, ongoing New People's Army activity in the archipelago, and official historian Robert Ross Smith's observation that "it is, indeed, difficult to imagine how the Southwest Pacific Area could have undertaken the reconquest of the Philippines in the time and manner it did without the predominantly loyal and willing Filipino population" (Smith 1963, 658).

### Notes

1. Apparently General MacArthur's anxiety about the United States' preoccupation with campaigns outside of the Southwest Pacific area had some validity because "[w]hile [General] Eisenhower's army commanders in Europe—Omar Bradley, George Patton, and others—had been featured on the covers of *Time* magazine, Walter Krueger [commanding the Sixth Army in the Southwest Pacific] remained veiled in anonymity as he and his men rolled up an unbroken string of victories" (Breuer 1986, 40).

2. Most surveys under review here ignore both the impact and scale of ground operations in the archipelago. For example, "Japan's inability to hold the Philippines had made her ultimate defeat clear and certain" and "the Luzon Campaign was by far the largest of the Pacific war. It entailed the use of more U.S. Army ground combat and service forces than did operations in North Africa, Italy, or southern France and was larger than the entire Allied commitment to Sicily" (Smith 1963, 652, 658).

3. Such disregard is inexplicable since nearly "100,000 Filipino civilians died in the battle for Manila—almost six times the number of soldiers killed on both sides . . . Of all Allied cities, only Warsaw suffered greater damage during the war than Manila" (Spector 1985, 524).

4. By late 1943 the United States had developed leap-frogging in the Pacific, "a by-passing method that was a variant of the strategy of indirect approach" (Hart 1974, 258).

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