

A Glimpse into the Conventional Phase of the Filipino-American War in Luzon

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ABSTRACT

The Filipino-American War saw the victory of the United States over the nascent First Philippine Republic. This paper aims to show to the reader the on-the-ground situation of the conflict through the use of firsthand sources written by American military personnel who fought in the war, as well as painting a clearer picture of the Filipino soldier's capabilities and qualities as a fighting man when confronted by a conventional conflict even from the eyes of his erstwhile adversary in the initial months of the war.

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KEYWORDS

Filipino-American War, Northern Campaign

BACKGROUND

Over the course of the Filipino-American War, the First Philippine Republic was forced into a series of fighting withdrawals in the face of the American advance. President Emilio Aguinaldo, his cabinet, and his army, led by Antonio Luna, retreated northward. This journal aims to give a closer look at the weapons, tactics, qualities, and performance of the Philippine Army as a conventional military during the Filipino-American War in Luzon prior to the guerrilla war ordered by President Emilio Aguinaldo at Bayambang, Pangasinan, on 14 November 1899.

In imagination and perception, the Philippine Army of the Revolution and the subsequent Filipino-American War is remembered as a poorly-armed force, scraping by with its meager supply of weapons, as a holdover from the days of the Katipunan, against the superiority of the American military. This was not always the case; the Philippine Army took delivery of munitions to carry out its campaigning, as exemplified by the delivery of the steamer *Abbie* on the 31st of August, 1898. Prior to the ship's seizure, it had managed to unload its cargo of weapons that have been smuggled in through fake funerals.¹ Indeed, as late as August 1899, during the height of the military campaign, the Philippine government even attempted to procure heavy weapons for use.

James H. Blount in his *The American Occupation of the Philippines 1898-1912* (1913) speaks of the politico-military dimension on the U.S. home front in the opening days of the war, as well as providing figures into the balance of the total American forces deployed in-theater: under General Elwell Otis there were approximately 21,000 men, of which 838 were officers, and 20,032 enlisted men, further broken down as composed of 15,500 volunteers raised from U.S. states while the remainder were part of the Regular Army.

Blount's figures were further complicated by the division of labor of the American forces and their casualties prior to the outbreak of the Filipino-American War; from the 21,000 men mentioned earlier, the troops dispersed in Iloilo and Cavite reduced their numbers to a mere 14,000, further reduced by the 3,000 serving as the Provost Guard of Manila, bringing down their real combat power to 11,000 men, a little over half of their total strength. They were opposed by the nascent Philippine Army that was, in the words of Secretary of War Elihu Root, "two or three times that number, well-armed and equipped, and included many of the native troops formerly comprised in the Spanish Army,"² corroborated by a report by General Otis on 7 February 1899. Blount also made a glowing account of Emilio Aguinaldo courtesy of General Arthur MacArthur's statement to the Senate Committee of 1902.

*Yet every American soldier who served in the Philippines at the time knows that Aguinaldo held the whole people in the hollow of his hand because he was their recognized leader, the incarnation of their aspirations.*³

The northern theater of war featured the Dagupan Railway as a strategic feature as the only railway in the Philippines, “which runs from Manila in a northwesterly direction about 120 miles to Dagupan.”⁴

The Filipinos on the eve of the arrival of the Americans were dug in around Manila in defensive earthworks,⁵ with lingering tension between them and the Filipinos; after the Spanish capitulated, the Americans either ordered to leave or disarm any Filipino soldiers they encountered within Manila.

American outposts outside the city were subjected to provocations by Filipino troops. The Filipinos themselves had taken over much of the Spanish defense system that surrounded Manila from attack, consisting of blockhouses interconnected by trenches. The Americans however, controlled Blockhouses numbered 8, 10, 11, and 12. The Filipinos’ combat preparations went undisturbed through this tense period and they were given free rein to wander in the American sector. Karl Irving Faust writes that the Americans themselves were contained within their perimeter and that the Filipinos, had they attacked, would have found a weak point in the American line, broken through, and exploited it. The Americans, for their part, were to hold their current positions against any Filipino attack. Faust assessed the balance of forces with the Filipinos having a numerical advantage, but his side had the benefits of discipline, fire support from the U.S. Navy and a consolidated territory.⁶

Joseph I. Markey's memoir, *From Iowa to the Philippines: A History of Company M, 51st Iowa Infantry Volunteers*, has a clear jingoistic bias against the Filipinos. His book does not name William Grayson, and neither does it include Pvt. Grayson's shooting incident at the Filipino probe into American lines. Most telling was his critique of General Emilio Aguinaldo and Filipino aspirations, with clear undertones of benevolent assimilation.

Peace might have been established had Aguinaldo been less like Caesar, "ambitious," and his followers intelligent enough to realize that our government meant only their good. Aguinaldo had dreams of a kingdom, and his men, lately flushed with what they considered their own victory over the Spanish, had begun to presume that the kind treatment they have received at the hands of the "Americanos" was due to the fact that we were afraid of them. How wrong their estimate was of the American soldier can best be attested by a view of their rice fields covered with the bodies of their dead brothers.

For the past month, the insurgent forces have gradually assumed the aggressive and as far as I can at present learn the fight [the beginning of the Filipino-American War on 4 February 1899] was started in this manner: the Nebraska regiment was in camp up the Pasig river at Santa Mesa doing outpost duty. They were continually bothered by the insurgents crossing their lines in spite of repeated orders not to do so. On the night of February 4th, at 10:30, a squad of insurgents started through the Nebraska outposts. The sentry, obeying orders, first

called, "halt." This was unheeded whereat the sentry fired a shot into the air. This was answered by a volley from the insurgents. Soon a general fire was opened on all the outposts, the Nebraska men retiring to their reserve. With the insurgents, this was undoubtedly a premeditated move. Another thing that goes to show they were only waiting for a chance to open hostilities is the fact that but a few days before all the Filipino clerks and laborers employed by our government were not to be found at their accustomed work. They had gone out to take their places in the army. I simply state these things to prove to those whose views might be Puritanical, that what followed the opening of this battle was not slaughter, but simply the price the perpetrators paid for ignorance and fanaticism⁷

The Filipino Way of War: Irregular Warfare Through the Centuries by Fernando M. Reyeg and Ned B. Marsh details the strength of the Philippine Army of the time, citing information from Cesar Pobre's *History of the Armed Forces of the Philippines*, and Ricardo Jose's *The Philippine Army, 1935-1942*. Aguinaldo's government considered that the establishment of a professional standing army would serve as a showpiece to the world that the Philippines is a civilized nation capable of independent self-government, built along conventional lines of contemporary armies with its service arms; battalions were organized as a provincial command, ranging from four to six companies dependent on the province's significance. The companies, in turn, were to have 100 enlisted men, including four sergeants, eight corporals, and 88 privates, led by a captain and his

first and second lieutenants. Lieutenant colonels served as battalion commanders, with two majors to assist, a color lieutenant, a commissary officer (logistics), and a gunsmith. Antonio Luna was charged with the professionalization of the Philippine Army.

In the manpower, the Philippine Army in January 1898 was estimated to have 50,000 troops in Luzon, 20,000 of which were armed with a variety of rifles. There was a further 20,000 men in Visayas and Mindanao, 8,000 of which were equipped with firearms. Those without guns were given bolos, bows, clubs, and bamboo spears. During the phase of the war in which the Philippine Army insisted on fighting in a conventional fashion, they met their American foes headlong at their advanced columns in established defensive positions. This had backfired, for the massed Filipino formations only made themselves vulnerable to American heavy weapons and naval gunnery, as demonstrated in the battles of Caloocan, leading the Philippine Army to adopt guerrilla warfare as a doctrine from November 1899.⁸ The Filipinos possessed some artillery pieces, taken from their former Spanish adversaries or turned over by the Americans before the war, but there was a shortage in munitions production due to the underdeveloped industrial base.⁹

The Philippine American War 1899-1902 by Brian McAllister Linn, also cited by Reyeg and Marsh, collated various first-person accounts of the American military leadership. The book also referred to the Philippine Army as the *Army of Liberation* and provided a brief introduction

to the politico-military situation on the Filipino side; Aguinaldo and Luna's relationship became strained, with the former having turned to Luna due to military exigency to reorganize the Philippine Army as an efficient and disciplined fighting force. The book concludes that it was the correct decision, with Luna conscripting former regiments of the Spanish Army, purging incompetent officers, and turning the Pampanga River and the route to Malolos into fortified zones.

CONFLICT BEGINS

MANILA. (Received February 5, 1899–8.05 a.m.)

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY, *Washington*:

Insurgents have inaugurated general engagement yesterday night which is continued to-day. The American army and navy is generally successful. Insurgents have been driven back and our line advanced. No casualties to Navy. In view of this and possible future expenditure, request ammunition requisition doubled.

DEWEY.¹⁰

MANILA. (Received February 5, 1899–10.55 p.m.)

ADJUTANT-GENERAL, *Washington*:

February 5. Have established our permanent lines well out, and have driven off and punished the insurgents severely.

(...) The country about Manila is peaceful and the city perfectly quiet. List of casualties to-morrow

OTIS.

MANILA. (Received February 6, 1899–1.12 a.m.)

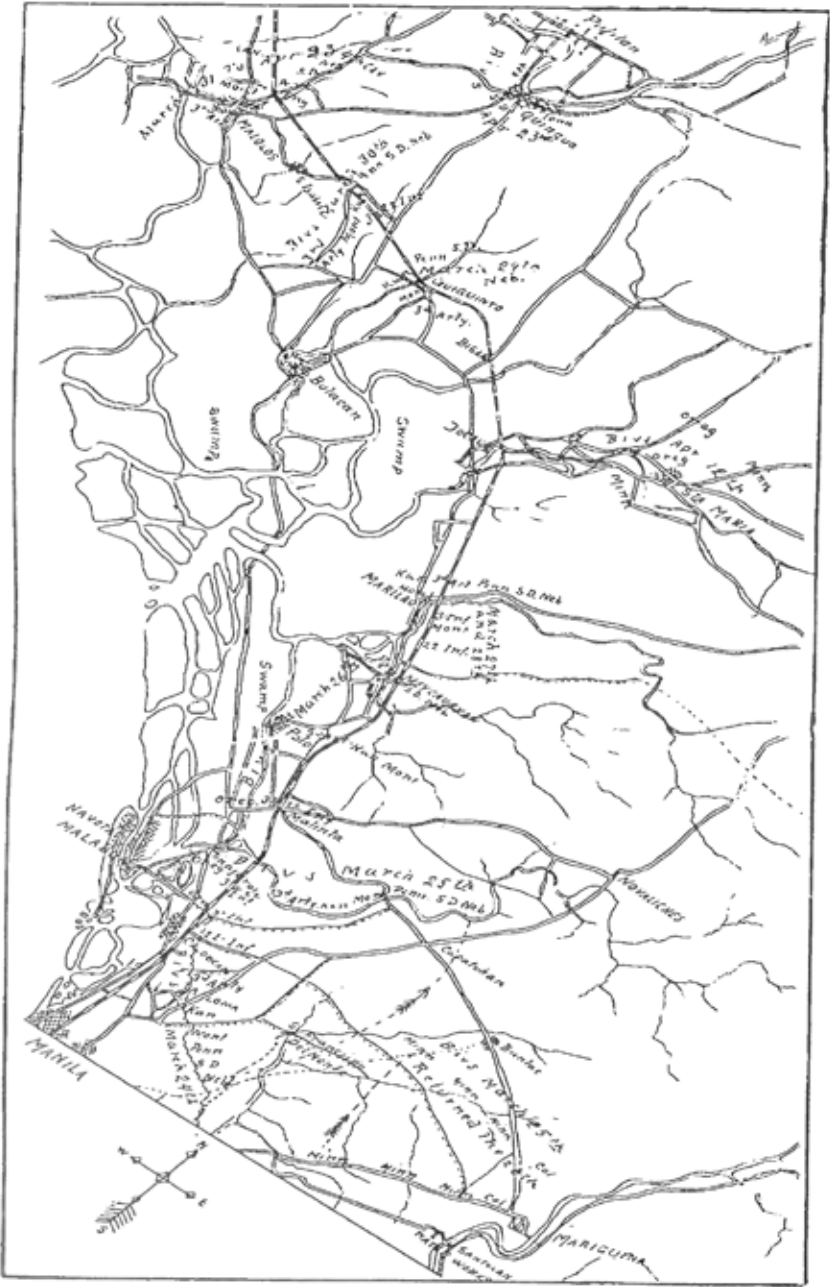
ADJUTANT-GENERAL, *Washington*:

Situation most satisfactory; no apprehension need be felt; perfect quiet prevails in city and vicinity. List of casualties being prepared and will be forwarded as soon as possible. Troops in excellent health and spirits.

OTIS.

The milieu of the northern American advance in pursuit of Aguinaldo was the campaign in Caloocan and Bulacan; at the conclusion of the Caloocan skirmishes, Frederick Funston gave a balance of forces between the Americans and Filipinos; in the battles around Malabon and Caloocan, Funston gave a figure of 9,000 American troops deployed over a front line eight miles (13 km) wide, with a Filipino force of “about equal strength, well-armed, with an abundant supply of ammunition, and occupying an almost continuous line of trenches and fieldworks.”¹¹ Funston’s assessment of Filipino defenses and logistics was reasonable, for Malolos was the Philippine capital by then, and would understandably be heavily defended. Further, Funston implied that they were taking the Filipinos as adversaries seriously upon seeing them “working with feverish haste in improving their defenses,” resisting “the

THIS MAP SHOWS THE OPERATIONS OF MACARTHUR'S DIVISION IN THE ADVANCE FROM CALOOCAN TO NAJOLON.
Made by P. R. Lamar, the official map maker for this division.



Copyrighted by P. R. Lamar.

Taken from Karl Irving Faust's *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 161.

temptation to stir them up with a fusillade,” with the concern that they might get cut off from their own side. Almost immediately, upon nightfall of 5-6 February, he described a Filipino attack from the Caloocan church in vivid detail:

(...) a lively rattle of fire opened up in the direction of the enemy's lines, and bullets began striking about us and whistling overhead. I was of the opinion that it was a mere spurt and would die down, but nevertheless rose and walked over to the trench (...). The firing increased in volume, and apparently was not coming from the enemy's trenches, which were eight hundred yards on our front, but rather from a point about half-way to them. (...)

As the firing on our front increased they thought a charge was coming, and, kneeling behind the low shelter, worked their old Springfields for all they were worth. (...) The men were in as close a line as they could be and work their rifles, and they crammed cartridges into them and fired as rapidly as possible. The roar was deafening, while the rapid spurts of flame along the whole line made in the darkness a show of fireworks that was not to be despised. (...) But the insurgent fire had absolutely ceased, the [Filipinos] having stirred up more of a hornets' nest than he had bargained for.¹²

Funston bemoaned the weapons his men were armed with compared to the Filipinos:

They were armed entirely with Mausers so that they had no smoke to interfere with them, while our Springfields produced the usual prairie-fire effect.¹³

Early in the morning after the Filipinos and Americans traded fire for the first time, American warships sailed close to the Manila waterfront and began bombarding the city through the fog with impunity, “throwing up great clouds of dust and debris at every shot,” destroying the Malabon church,¹⁴ followed by land-based artillery and small arms fire. Manila was bereft of people; “the streets were almost deserted, most of the native population having joined their [Aguinaldo’s] forces.” Filipino troops, called “insurgents”, were reportedly materializing between Manila and the advancing American forces, sniping passers-by from the trees. Despite the Americans’ heavy use of artillery,¹⁵ the Filipinos remained tenacious:

Our troops have always thought that they hadn’t the courage to stand before artillery but in this they were mistaken. It is possible that no body of men ever before stood the gallant fire from land and sea that these men did in the rice fields back of Malate or the woods of Malabon to the left of Manila. For nearly three whole days our ships poured shell into them, only stopping their fire for the guns to cool. (...)

Faust considered the Filipino soldier to have almost-fanatical morale:

They were practically all sympathizers of Aguinaldo, and the men were with the army so far as they could

*be furnished with arms. As there were many more men than arms, there seemed to be a constant change in the personnel of the rebel army, a simple change of clothing sufficing to transform a ferocious warrior to a peaceful citizen, and vice versa.*¹⁶

General Otis' transmission on the 7th of February corroborated Blount's assessment of the Philippine Army as a heavily armed force, but poorly coordinated:

Positive insurgent attack not ordered by insurgent government, which has shown inability to control army concentrated around Manila (...), numbering over 20,000, possessing several quick-firing and Krupp field guns; good portion of enemy armed with Mausers, latest pattern. Insurgents fired great quantity ammunition. Quite a number of Spanish soldiers in insurgent service who served artillery.¹⁷

The Philippine Army remained steadfast, massing a "considerable force between Manila and Caloocan, where Aguinaldo reported to be, and threatened attack and uprising in city."¹⁸ The focus of the northward American advance was centered on the railway, with the Filipinos and Americans giving it equal strategic value.¹⁹

The report by General Otis received the morning of 18 February 1899 stated that the Filipinos were not idle, with a possible 5000 troops "five miles south of [Manila]," with a "much larger force eight to ten miles north and east."²⁰ Faust placed the Americans' strength by the time of their offensive from Manila to be 950 officers and 23,000

men, with further reinforcements *en route* to garrison the city without threats of attrition by tropical sickness. The Filipinos sustained their war through continued taxation, donations, or extortion of local funds as a war chest to purchase weapons, with troop levels estimated at 30,000 men that fluctuated over time. The American strategy was to use sufficient forces to surround and capture Aguinaldo and his army at the capital, which served as the impetus of the northward American advance.

Over the evening of the 22nd and early in the morning of 23 February 1899, amidst a scorched-earth strategy, the Filipinos mounted a counterattack near Caloocan, the town bearing witness to street-fighting behind barricades; some Filipinos infiltrated behind American lines with about 1,000 troops entrenched, only to be routed by General MacArthur.²¹ Funston's account describes the incident as an attack by "a thousand of the best [Filipino] troops," crossing the waterway in the middle of Malabon and Tondo, focusing on setting the suburbs ablaze,²² the results of which can be seen from Caloocan. The day after the Filipino scorched-earth attack, Funston also bore witness to the results of a Filipino artillery strike, which, he presumed, was fired by Spanish prisoners held under duress using a Krupp coastal artillery piece and aimed towards MacArthur's headquarters, digging up "half a wagon-load of earth" with its blast and missing its target by a mere "hundred and fifty yards short." Further into the advance to Malolos, Funston's unit encountered a Nordenfelt field gun; one of its projectiles that landed in the American lines in Caloocan was revealed to be a dud and did not detonate; it weighed eighty pounds, and six-inches wide. They later

found the gun sited in their target city. Counter-battery fire from American warships soon silenced those guns.²³ Further, prior to their northern advance, he describes how the Filipinos dug “a zigzag trench (...) done under cover of dense undergrowth (...) within *seventy-five yards* of the left flank of the regiment.”

The Americans considered the situation in Manila to be grave, with engagements every passing day²⁴, and were concerned about their forces being too meager and over-extending themselves on the offensive:

MANILA. (Received February 20, 1899—4.30 p.m.)

ADJUTANT-GENERAL, *Washington*:

Insurgents acknowledge Manila and outlying districts lost to them unless they dislodge our forces before the arrival of reinforcements (sic); therefore making utmost effort to concentrate and attack, relying for assistance on simultaneous rising of inhabitants of city. Twentieth Infantry expected latter part of week; Twenty-second on 2nd of March; transport *Grant*, March 4.

Our lines thin; no more extended than safety of entire city and waterworks system demand. Hold four regiments in city to suppress attempted interior violence. My long dispatch to Washington of November 27 last, in cipher, calling for regular troops, gives number of troops to hold islands as 25,000; to conquer them 30,000 at least necessary, with continued assistance from Navy.

To the south, there was an estimate of 5,000²⁶ Filipino infantry and 700 cavalry stationed in San Roque, Cavite. As the Americans approached, the Filipinos resorted to a scorched-earth attack and burned the city prior to their arrival.²⁷ Filipinos who had gone over to the Americans were regarded with suspicion, with incidences of what is now known as “insider attacks.”²⁸ Spanish prisoners freed from Filipino captivity reported that “the insurgents are determined to hold out to the last.” Morale was reported to be high on the Filipino side, with the belief that the forces of the First Republic would be able to conquer Manila before the onset of the rainy season.²⁹

It is said that the insurgents are in such numbers that to kill them only means an instant vacancy in their ranks which is filled by other men waiting for their dead comrades' guns.

The Philippine Army did not remain quiet; they launched a counterattack in Marikina, in particular the waterworks of the river, in skirmishes from the nights of 5-7 March and were driven back by the Americans with naval fire support.³⁰ Despite the City of Manila splitting the First Philippine Republic's Army, the Filipinos seemed to have no problem coordinating from Malolos to the forces south of the Pasig River; the Americans soon launched a campaign to secure their flanks by attacking San Pedro de Macati (Makati) on 13 March, all along Guadalupe, Pateros, Taguig, and San Pedro Tunasan. They fought continuously throughout the week, reaching Cainta on the 16th of March and consolidated their lines by the 19th. The Filipinos destroyed the towns as they retreated, reportedly losing “not less than 2000 men” over the entire campaign.³¹

A telegram received by Washington on 15 March 1899 reported a Filipino counterattack in force against General Wheaton, with the strength of “three thousand insurgents” in Pasig and Pateros, which he repulsed.³² By 14 March and the capture of Caloocan, however, Filipino operations had slowed to a “minor nature” of “small bands of insurgents.”³³



Taken from Karl Irving Faust's *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 156.

On the 17th of March, General Otis' 8th Corps were split between a defensive garrison in Manila, and an offensive force tasked to pursue Aguinaldo north into Malolos, capture the Philippine capital and destroy the Philippine Army's units deployed in its defense:

To capture Malolos, the 8th Corps would have to advance against a natural defensive position dotted with villages, scrub thicket, bamboo, marshes, and rice

*paddies; it would cross six major rivers, several without bridges, as well as innumerable creeks, gullies, and estuaries.*³⁴

The Americans utilized a brown-water navy of gunboats to maintain fire support; by 19 March 1899, General Otis purchased all the Spanish gunboats in Philippine waters, numbering 13, with “half” in serviceable condition, and used them on patrols in Laguna Lake, with its “troops, inhabitants, and property onshore” at their mercy.³⁵

On 25 March 1899,³⁶ with the strength of “950 officers and 23,000 men,”³⁷ the American forces began their advance to Malolos, acknowledging that a week of continuous fighting awaited them against Antonio Luna, “the ablest and most aggressive leader in the service of Aguinaldo,” under whose command was a force “equal in strength to [the American] division” composed of “former native regiments of the Spanish Army” that sided with the First Republic and had kept their organization and commanders with them.³⁸ Faust estimates the strength of the Philippine Army as “about 30,000 men” but with erratic numbers from time to time. The Americans aimed to envelop the Filipino Army, expecting the “rebellion” to end after Aguinaldo’s capture.³⁹

The marching route was less-than-ideal for the Americans during the Malolos Campaign; the lowlands parallel to Manila Bay were waterlogged by numerous esteros. The open terrain beyond the foothills near Caloocan into the plains of Central Luzon was crisscrossed by rivers that restricted their mobility and served as a natural defense for the Filipinos. Had the Americans

attacked in the rainy season, their infantry would have been mired in the paddies. The railway tracks afforded a degree of mobility, but considering the vulnerability of troops marching in the open in contested territories, the Americans opted to cut through the fields, fighting across the line of advance with very little in the way of major, decisive, pitched engagements.⁴⁰

almost level plain, and nearly all of the two brigades could be seen at one time, as they silently advanced in a long, irregular line toward the woods that sheltered the enemy's outpost line. (...) It looked like a maneuver, but it was war. Already the woods fifteen hundred yards (approx. 1.5km) on our front were crackling and popping and the bullets were kicking up dust spots on the dry ground.⁴¹

With the Filipinos using the foliage for cover and concealment, the Americans resorted to leapfrogging their infantry platoons to approach the thicket that the Filipinos had turned into an outpost. As they came within 700 yards of the thicket, they opened fire.



Taken from Karl Irving Faust's *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 111.

Otis reported that their advance “met heavy resistance over difficult country (...), six miles north of the line from which advance was taken up;” Funston described where “woods and bamboos came very close, the ground cut up by shallow ravines,” allowing the Filipinos to dig in unnoticed, and becoming harder to cross with a broken bridge⁴² as General Loyd Wheaton’s brigade advanced 11 miles north, with Caloocan serving as a violent flashpoint.

General Antonio Luna ordered that towns be burned as the Philippine Army retreated. Otis described it as “much country north in flames,” specifically the towns of Malabon, Malinta, and Meycauayan.⁴³

Although General Arthur MacArthur repulsed the Filipino counterattack, the rugged terrain and the Philippine Army’s prepared defenses from Caloocan to Malolos forced him to detour to the railway south of Polo, allowing Aguinaldo’s forces to evacuate further north. Aguinaldo’s ranks were replenished with native troops that formerly served under the Spanish army. As the battle unfolded, MacArthur managed to go past Meycauayan, with Filipinos “stoutly resisting behind succeeding lines of intrenchments,” from which the Americans continually drove them. General Hale advanced on 26 March toward Polo, a terminus on the Dagupan railway and a hub of Filipino military activity. The Filipinos retreated to Meycauayan because of its better-prepared defenses. Despite retreating, the Filipinos committed to a fighting withdrawal around the rugged terrain of the Meycauayan rail bridge, described as “contend(ing) foot by foot for the ground.” The Filipinos fought “All through the afternoon”, keeping up “a desultory fire from the woods

across the plain to the north and a bitter enfilading fire along the north bank of the river.” By nightfall, Filipino reinforcements “apparently” arrived by rail from the north and took positions to match MacArthur’s line of advance, and almost immediately “began a hot fusillade all along our lines.” The Filipinos were on the offense, as the American troops were under orders to hold their fire until the Filipinos were a mere 600 yards away from the American lines, their Mausers continuing to outrange the American Springfield. An American countercharge soon routed the Filipino attack for two miles.⁴⁴

By the 27th of March, it was reported that MacArthur had taken Marilao,⁴⁵ with “severe fighting” amidst a fighting retreat by Filipinos, personally led by Aguinaldo, destroying bridges to slow the American advance. Funston provided a more detailed look into the battle, where the Filipinos turned the river, “eighty feet wide and ten feet deep” into a defensive bastion, “sheltered in good trenches” while the Americans were left in the open as easier targets. However, the capacity of the Americans to sustain their volume of fire suppressed the Filipino defense. Upon the conclusion of Funston’s engagement, the Americans confiscated then disposed of 4,000 Filipino cartridges.⁴⁶ To keep MacArthur’s advance supplied, the railway was prioritized for repairs.⁴⁷ Upon crossing the Marilao River, the American bridgehead came under fire from the Filipino defenders, but as the Filipinos retreated to Bigaa as more Americans poured through the railroad bridge, the Filipinos piled into the train and withdrew further, burning the town behind them amidst American shellfire, damaging the railroad bridge at Guiguinto, and entrenched at the woods

at the river's northern bank, from which they withdrew after the Americans poured machinegun fire and charged.⁴⁸

By the end of March, General Arthur MacArthur's 2nd Division, 8th Army Corps advanced twenty miles north between Manila and Malolos and took the Philippine Capital,⁴⁹ which was described by Funston with no strategic importance but held great morale value. However, there was no decisive clash in Malolos, for the Filipinos gave only token resistance in the city and scorched Aguinaldo's residence and the Hall of Congress,⁵⁰ with the Americans using artillery to send the Filipinos retreating from one battle line to another on the Tuliahan River.⁵¹ By the time the Americans reached Malolos, a "considerable portion of [the] city [was] destroyed by fire" by the retreating Filipinos, their defensive capabilities having been spent at the towns leading to it. After its capture, the Americans settled in for preparations to launch a more sustained campaign;⁵² Funston's division needed three weeks to continue to its next phase.⁵³



ARRIVAL OF FIRST TROOPS AT MALOLOS—CITY IN FLAMES.

Taken from Joseph Markey's *From Iowa to the Philippines; a history of company M, Fifty-first Iowa Infantry Volunteers*, 208.

The Philippine Army, “despite the numerous drubbings they had received, [was still] full of fight” under General Luna’s leadership, and did not remain idle, launching counterattacks at towns recently taken by the Americans, harrying them with night fights.⁵⁴ To the south, General Lawton captured Santa Cruz, Laguna, “without destruction [of] property” in a message to Washington, received 11 April 1899. At the same day, the Filipinos counterattacked against MacArthur’s forces “with considerable force” at Bocaue, near the railroad between Malolos and Manila, which General Loyd Wheaton repulsed.⁵⁵ The next day, General Lawton continued an eastward advance from Santa Cruz, capturing the lake’s vessels that included Spanish gunboat(s).⁵⁶



Taken from Karl Irving Faust’s *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 152.

By mid-April 1899, General Elwell Otis was enthusiastic about victory with the current conditions:

MANILA. (Received April 19, 1899–11:40 a.m.)

ADJUTANT-GENERAL, *Washington*:

(...) Movement to north projected, employing 7,000 troops. Insurgents much scattered; retreat before our force; await opportunity to attack detachments. Better class of people tired of war, desire peace. Enemy build hopes on return Volunteers. Its army much demoralized and losses by desertion and death large. Will probably prosecute guerrilla warfare, looting and burning country which it occupies. Excessive heat and lack of roads and transportation makes campaigning difficult. Health and spirits of troops good.

OTIS.

However, the follow-up report showed that the Philippine Army continued to be a clear, present, and serious threat that could materialize anywhere the Americans were not⁵⁷:

MANILA. (Received April 20, 1899–9.31 a.m.)

ADJUTANT-GENERAL, *Washington*:

Prudence will not permit reduction November estimate of 30,000 [American troops]. Anticipate difficulty in Luzon and extreme southern islands. Can now capture any place on coast or in interior, but permanent occupancy in many instances necessary as withdrawal of troops

always followed by reappearance of enemy who terrorize inhabitants whatever their desires. (...)

OTIS.⁵⁸

General Otis' 19 April message on the Philippine Army's demoralization proved too enthusiastic and duplicitous; he remained adamant about the number of troops to be deployed into the Philippines as the American soldiers—divided in thousands-strong columns, under generals Lawton and MacArthur, respectively given 3,700 and 4,000 men—were ordered to march into Bulacan.⁵⁹

On 23 April,⁶⁰ a reconnaissance mission in Quingua, Bulacan, six miles northeast of Malolos escalated into a major battle that involved “4 battalions of infantry and 4 pieces of artillery” against Filipinos in “strong intrenchments” amidst a patchwork of woodland and open fields.⁶¹ The Americans brought their railway artillery into the battle; after its initial salvo, the trenches in the battle of Quingua “had come to life, straw hats bobbed up and down” with the signature sound of Mauser gunfire from the Filipino defenders, “from a line of invisible trenches extending (...) along the entire front of the brigade for a distance of nearly a mile.”⁶² Amidst the open cornfields on the opposite bank of the Filipino trench line, the Americans would have been easy targets had they not used their artillery for suppression fire, with the bridge at the Rio Chico having been more thoroughly destroyed.⁶³ On their advance towards Calumpit, General Hale's forces “encountered fierce opposition,”⁶⁴ with a Filipino defense



Taken from Joseph Markey's *From Iowa to the Philippines; a history of company M, Fifty-first Iowa Infantry Volunteers*, 219.

“the strongest [Funston] had yet been brought against,” with the Rio Grande river acting as a 400-foot wide moat to be overcome by the Americans, and “four thousand [Filipinos] occupying elaborate trenches” with “excellent head cover, long slits for firing through, reinforced by bamboo and roofed with steel rails taken from the railway,”⁶⁵ and “three pieces of artillery and a Maxim gun,” credited by Funston to be the works of General Alejandrino, chief engineer of the Army of the First Philippine Republic. Protected from American artillery, the Filipinos launched counter-battery salvos from their gun pits,⁶⁶ albeit inaccurately; upon the capture of one such gun pit by the American advance, it was discovered that its ranging sight was missing.⁶⁷ The

Americans managed to cross the river by improvised rafts with guide ropes swam through by a few volunteers. Around the time the Americans silenced the crew of the Maxim machine gun, the Filipinos withdrew, with General Loyd Wheaton pursuing them to Apalit, the Filipinos continuing to put up resistance as he did. “Hundreds of rifles and many thousands of rounds of ammunition” were confiscated by the Americans following the battle.⁶⁸



American troops crossing the *Rio Chico*
Taken from Frederick Funston's *Memories from Two Wars*, 275.

The successful passage of the river must be regarded as a remarkable military achievement, well-calculated to fix the attention of the most careless observer and to stimulate the fancy of the most indifferent.

- General Arthur MacArthur



TRENCHES AND BRIDGE AT CALUMBIT.

Photo by Latta.

Taken from Karl Irving Faust's *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 169.

MANILA. (Received May 4, 1899—11:29 a.m.)

AGWAR, *Washington*:

Colonel Summers with six battalions (...) of Lawton's Division, proceeded north this morning to Maasin; crossed river, charged enemy in strong intrenchments, driving him northward and inflicting considerable loss. (...) Both Wheaton and Hale, of MacArthur's Division, found enemy in force strongly intrenched and commanded by Commander in Chief Luna about four miles south San Fernando. (...) MacArthur proceeds to San Fernando in Morning. Delayed by partial destruction of bridge across

river. Not believed enemy will make another determined stand until he effects retreat to Mount Arayat, short distance from San Isidro.

OTIS⁶⁹

By the end of the first week of May 1899, the Americans had reached as far as Maasin and Baliuag (Lawton), while MacArthur now held San Fernando, consolidating their gains and awaiting supplies for a renewed push, with American gunboats combing the rivers, clearing “country west of MacArthur of Insurgents.” However, the Philippine Army south of Manila, numbering about 6,000, were “hold(ing) together; still, threaten an attack on [Manila].”⁷⁰

Late May, 1899, Otis reported that the Philippine forces were “disintegrating daily; Luna’s force at Tarlac much diminished; has destroyed several miles railway in his front. (...) Insurgent disintegration progressing though large force still maintained.”⁷¹ Again, this proved highly optimistic; on the 23rd of May, the Filipinos launched another counterattack against the Third Infantry Division in Baliwag which was repulsed. Another Filipino attack was launched in San Fernando.

Furthermore, despite Otis’ glowing reports of the collapse of the Philippine resistance, he remained adamant about demanding 30,000 American troops to militarily quell the Philippines, from the 24,000 total forces he was to have on the arrival of further reinforcements, after factoring in the Filipinos’ stubborn resistance.⁷²

Seemingly secondary to their goal of pursuing Aguinaldo, the southward American advance from Manila began early June 1899, almost three months after their northern offensive, in Parañaque, Las Piñas, Taguig, and Zapote Bridge, the offensive having seen “severe fighting” and “engagement”, in particular the beginning of the advance and at Zapote Bridge, with the Filipino troops having been “driven from heavy and well-constructed intrenchments, which they held tenaciously.”⁷³

In a report received by Washington on 16 June 1899, the Filipinos launched another unsuccessful counterattack in the north, as a “concentrated large force near San Fernando, and early this morning attacked MacArthur’s troops (...). Preparations for this attack in progress several days; believed to be under personal direction [of] Aguinaldo.”⁷⁴ In a follow-up report received by Washington four days later, General Wheaton’s forces encountered and overcame a Filipino force numbering 2,000 strong in his advance from Imus to Dasmariñas.⁷⁵

By late June, the campaign tempo of the Americans slowed with General Otis’ report received by Washington:

MANILA. (Received June 26, 1899—4:30 a.m.)

ADJUTANT-GENERAL, *Washington*:

Rainy season. Little island campaigning possible in Luzon. We occupy large portion (of) Tagalog country, lines stretching from Imus south to San Fernando; north, nearly sixty miles, and to eastward into Laguna province. Insurgent

armies have suffered great losses and are scattered; only large force held together about 4,000 in Tarlac province and northern Pampanga. Their scattered forces in bands of fifty to five hundred in other portions Luzon; in Cavite and Batangas provinces could assemble possibly 2,000, though demoralized from recent defeat; mass of people terrorized by insurgent soldiers, desire peace and American protection; no longer flee on approach our troops unless forced by insurgents, but gladly welcome them; no recent burning of towns; population within our lines becoming dense, taking up land cultivation extensively; kept out of Manila as much as possible, as city population becoming too great to be cared for.(...)

OTIS⁷⁶

In early July, negotiations had been in progress for six weeks and were “Now approaching completion” to surrender Cavite.⁷⁷ The rainy season postponed American military activity until a report dated 9 August 1899, when General MacArthur’s 4,000 men attacked San Fernando, driving them five miles back toward Angeles. They advanced further to Calule, while the Filipinos retreated from Porac, destroying the power works as they did so. By the message received by Washington on the morning of 16 August 1899, the Americans had advanced all the way to Candaba to Angeles, having taken Santa Rita, Guagua, and Bacolor, with their artillery shelling the Philippine defenses at the outskirts of Angeles, manned by an estimated 2,500 Filipino soldiers. On 11 August, General Young’s forces attacked northeast of Manila, “through Maraquina (sic), San Mateo, into mountains.” Another

Filipino counterattack was launched toward Baliwag from the east, by a 500-strong unit, to retake the railway, but was beaten back to the north. American military intelligence discovered as well that the Filipinos were attempting to “acquire rapid-fire guns in Europe.”⁷⁸ It was soon followed by another report “that eight batteries of German field artillery have been purchased” by the Filipinos.⁷⁹

By late September 1899, the Americans received orders to advance once again, with Lawton moving in the direction of Mexico, Guagua, Bacolor, and Santa Rita in Pampanga; Wheaton and MacArthur toward the West, to Porac. They met little Filipino resistance.⁸⁰ Early into October, another Filipino counteroffensive from the south of Manila unsuccessfully attacked the Imus-Bacoor line, which delayed further American advance northwards. After repulsing the Filipinos, the Americans, numbering 1,726-strong, led by General Theodore Schwan, advanced from Bacoor to Noveleta, “encountering heavy opposition” and capturing two guns, subsequently taking Rosario. In their follow-up operations, the Americans advanced further into Santa Cruz de Malabon, as Filipino forces in the province “disintegrated and retired on divergent roads impassable for artillery or wagons,” prompting the Americans to decide that Cavite was not worth occupying due to having “no strategic importance.”

In the north, they reached San Fernando, Guagua, and Floridablanca, capturing “officers, men, and property,” and subsequently repulsed two Filipino attacks toward Angeles.⁸¹ By their report received by Washington on 20 October 1899, they had reached San Isidro, Nueva Ecija, to

establish a garrison, after facing “considerable resistance.” By the message dated 27 October, San Isidro had become their new staging area, with “three months’ supplies” being sent in from the San Juan River. Washington received, by the first day of November, a report that their forces reached Aliaga and Talavera from Cabanatuan, capturing two artillery pieces, “considerable ammunition,” a significant amount of food, transportation, and a telegraph operator. By then, the Philippine Capital had been moved to Bayombong (sic) Pangasinan. Wheaton’s 2000-strong contingent headed to Lingayen on the 6th of November for sealift.⁸²

The conventional phase of the War ended upon the declaration of General Emilio Aguinaldo and the Secretary of War, Ambrosio Flores, on the 12th of November 1899, which established the politico-military command of Central Luzon, “comprising the provinces of Bataan, Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, and Pangasinan” where Filipino troops were to “maneuver in flying columns and guerrilla bands.”⁸³

The accounts coming from American soldiers who fought direct engagements showed that despite the ultimate defeat of the Filipinos in the war, the Philippine Army was not a disorganized entity that immediately collapsed despite the steadily deteriorating situation, but one that displayed aptitude in basic military tactics and determination by launching counterattacks in force; tactical acumen by utilizing the terrain to their advantage, luring Americans into open kill-zones or dense vegetation to minimize their coordination and mobility; and aptitude

in military engineering by creating defensive earthworks, using heavy weapons (Maxim machine guns and artillery), and even destroying infrastructure as a military necessity.

In sum, these key points can be inferred as the strengths and weaknesses of the nascent Philippine Army during its infancy and baptism of fire:

- There was definite, yet disjointed military organization, unit cohesion, and morale as evidenced by the Filipino capability to launch localized counterattacks in force and mass themselves to hundreds to thousands-strong military units, akin to modern-day regiments and brigades; however, Filipino combat efforts, offensive or defensive, tended to collapse due to lack of momentum and spotty morale.
- As for the temperament of the Filipino soldier, during the initial phase of the war, surrender seemed out of the question after having been used to fighting the Spaniards, who had given him “the same kind of quarter to the insurgents of Cuba.”⁸⁴ The Filipino soldier found it hard to capitulate in general, sticking to his fighting position until their “trenches were literally covered with their dead.”⁸⁵
- Over the same phase of the war, Filipinos displayed aptitude in the use of cover, concealment, and combat engineering in their fighting positions, while their technical service arms (heavy weapons and artillery) were holdovers from the former Spanish Army. Further, during the northern American advance, they routinely found the major bridges in varying states of impassability.

- The Philippine Government attempted to procure heavy weapons, as evidenced from the purchase of “fast-firing guns” from Germany.
- The Filipinos were consistent in preparing fighting positions, with the American advance routinely running into entrenchments where they made their stand.
 - The result of Filipino determination to hold ground also led to a high level of battlefield attrition on their regular units.
- At the politico-military dimension, the three-month gap between the pursuit of Emilio Aguinaldo to Northern Luzon (northward from Caloocan a few days after the commencement of hostilities) and the beginning of the southward Cavite expedition underscored the importance placed by the Americans on capturing the president of the First Republic.
- With most of the American efforts focused on capturing Aguinaldo for the conventional phase of the war, it had the direct consequence of leaving the rest of the adjacent provinces of Manila as grounds for continued resistance over the early days of the American occupation, most known among them were Macario Sakay in what is now Rizal Province, and Miguel Malvar in Batangas.

The Americans, for their part, exploited their strategic strengths of infrastructural engineering by restoring railways to improve their supply lines in their northern advance, and control of the waterways at will, using naval fire support from warships in Manila Bay, and sealift capabilities, ferrying brigades of troops within and beyond the Luzon theater of operations practically unopposed. Further, one has to consider the institutional heritage and

combined experiences of the United States Military at that point in time, having fought several major wars since their independence prior to the Filipino-American War, while the United States Navy had already sailed as far as China during the Second Opium War, marking it as an experienced, battle-hardened force by the time it reached Philippine shores.

NOTES

- ¹ *Campaigning in the Philippines* by Karl Irving Faust, 113.
- ² *The American Occupation of the Philippines, 1898-1912* by James Blount, 186-187..
- ³ Ibid., Blount, cited further in Senate Document 331(1902) (1926), 189.
- ⁴ Ibid., Blount, 195.
- ⁵ *Campaigning in the Philippines* by Karl Irving Faust, 75-76..
- ⁶ *Campaigning in the Philippines* by Karl Irving Faust (1899), 125-129.
- ⁷ Markey (1900), 166-167.
- ⁸ Reyeg & Marsh, *The Filipino Way of War: Irregular Warfare through the Centuries* (2011), 49-51.
- ⁹ Ibid., Reyeg, Marsh, 52-55.
- ¹⁰ *Correspondence Relating to The War with Spain including the Insurrection in the Philippine Islands and the China Relief Expedition, April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902*, Vol. 2, Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington, D.C. (1993), 893.

- 11 *Memories of Two Wars – Cuban and Philippine Experiences* by Frederick Funston (1914), 224.
- 12 Funston, 190-192.
- 13 Funston, 195.
- 14 Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 140-141.
- 15 Ibid., Funston, 200.
- 16 Ibid., Faust, 142.
- 17 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 896.
- 18 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 900.
- 19 Ibid., Blount, 207.
- 20 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 906.
- 21 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 915; corroborated by Funston's *Memories of Two Wars*, 219. The following page of Funston's memoir does not corroborate the number of Filipino troops, but describes their trenches "fairly swarmed with men".
- 22 This is corroborated by Faust's *Campaigning in the Philippines*, 144, as a Filipino attack from Malabon, setting fire to the city, particularly the districts of Sta. Cruz, Sta. Mesa, and Tondo.
- 23 Ibid., Funston, 214-217.
- 24 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 916.
- 25 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 908.
- 26 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 906.
- 27 Ibid., Markey, 174.
- 28 Ibid., Markey, 177-178.
- 29 Markey, 184.

30 Faust, 147.

31 Faust, 148-151.

32 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 934.

33 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 931.

34 *The Philippine American War 1899-1902* by Brian McAllister Linn, 92.

35 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 938.

36 There is a conflict in dates on the American advance; Funston and Faust cite it on this date; Blount states "Soon after March 25th"; Markey cites the 24th.

37 Ibid., Faust, 155.

38 Funston, 225-226; Faust's *Campaigning* corroborates Luna's leadership of the Filipino troops charged with the defense of Malolos.

39 Faust, 155.

40 Ibid., Faust, 156-157.

41 Funston, 228-229.

42 Ibid., Funston, 205.

43 Ibid., Otis' *Correspondence*, 944-945, 947, 949-950 reports received by Washington, March 26, 28-29, 1899; corroborated by Funston's *Memories*, 241-243, and Faust's *Campaigning*, 167, which included the town of Polo.

44 Ibid., Faust, 158-161.

45 Corroborated by Faust, 162.

46 Funston, 245-247, 249.

- 47 Corroborated by Funston, 251, “*ties had been removed from the bridge, making crossing it a very slow operation*”
- 48 Funston, 256-257, events corroborated by Faust, 162-163.
- 49 Ibid., Blount, 208-209.
- 50 Funston, 260, 262-263; corroborated by Faust, 164, “It soon became evident that Malolos was being evacuated by the enemy, or Aguinaldo was holding fire for strategic reasons. The first supposition turned out to be the true one.”
- 51 Faust, 169-170.
- 52 Ibid., Correspondence, 953.
- 53 Funston, 265.
- 54 Funston, 267-268.
- 55 Ibid., Correspondence, 962.
- 56 Ibid., Correspondence, 959, 962-963.
- 57 Corroborated by Faust, 175.
- 58 Ibid., Correspondence, 968-969.
- 59 Ibid., Correspondence, 971.
- 60 Ibid., Funston’s *Memories*, 268.
- 61 Faust, 177.
- 62 Faust, 181.
- 63 Ibid., Funston’s *Memories*, 271-273.
- 64 Ibid., Correspondence, 972-973.
- 65 Corroborated by Faust, 183, “stripped of ties and converted into a breastwork for resisting the American advance”. Furthermore, in Faust’s sub-chapter *Operations of Wheaton’s Brigade to Calumpit pp. 184-187*, he supports Funston’s account.

- 66 Ibid., Faust, 183, describing it as “one of the few instances in which [the Filipinos] used artillery.”
- 67 Ibid., Funston’s Memories, 276.
- 68 Ibid., Funston, 286-289.
- 69 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 982 (Col. Summers’ attack in Maasin); 984-985 (Sitrep dated May 8); 990 (Sitrep dated May 17, Lawton in Bulacan).
- 70 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 991 (San Isidro).
- 71 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 993-994.
- 72 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 999.
- 73 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 1006-1008, 1010.
- 74 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 1013.
- 75 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 1016.
- 76 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 1019.
- 77 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 1027.
- 78 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 1049-1050, 1053-55.
- 79 Ibid, 1059.
- 80 Ibid, 1076.
- 81 Ibid., *Correspondence*, 1082-1086.
- 82 Ibid, 1087-1091.
- 83 Exhibit 935, [P.I.R., 243.2] 734-735, *Philippine Insurrection Against the United States*, Vol. IV; corroborated by Blount’s *American Occupation of the Philippines*, 242, drawn from the *War Department Report, 1900*, vol. i., pt. 5, 59.
- 84 Ibid., Funston, 196.
- 85 Funston, 226.

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