

*San Francisco Examiner*  
June 25, 1899

***Our Task in the Pacific***

***Some Plain Words About the Philippine War.***

Even to the least penetrating discernment the appalling magnitude of the task that we have undertaken in the western Pacific is beginning to unveil itself. Not only have we made no substantial progress in the conquest of the islands, but our troops are virtually, and may soon be actually, shut up in Manila—it would be hardly correct to say besieged, for that word covers many operations which can hardly be undertaken by our warlike but unmilitary enemies. Without heavy artillery, or the skill to use it if they had it, Aguinaldo's forces cannot take Manila, but they can prevent, and are now successfully preventing, our conquest of even the single island of Luzon; on none of the other islands have we ventured to undertake more than to gain a foothold in a single sea coast town. And in addition to the price paid to Spain for a nominal title to what she could not hand over, the conquest of the territory covered by our soldiers' feet has cost us already a sum estimated at more than a hundred million dollars. Even if the work were now complete, instead of barely and disastrously begun, it would take the trade that "follows the flag" a long time to recoup us for the outlay. (As incidental expenses mention may be made of seven hundred men dead and five thousand disabled by wounds and disease, most of whom will draw pensions.) Clearly, something is the matter with Expansion that does not expand. What?

We may be assisted to an answer by a review of the genesis and development of the national conception of the work to be done. The development is far from complete, but it has made progress. When Dewey's fine easy victory over the floating tubs of Montojo brought the existence of the Philippine islands back to the memory of Americans who had been more than ten years out of school it was thought by ninety-nine in a hundred of us that five thousand soldiers would be ample provision for the capture of Manila and occupation of the archipelago. Somebody of exceptional sagacity advised the administration to be on the safe side by sending more than twice that number, which was done with a light heart. Somewhat later, in the light of experience, the commanding general asked for thirty thousand. Then so competent a soldier as General Lawton averred the need of one hundred thousand, and now an officer of General Otis' staff, just returned to San Francisco, intimates his belief that one hundred and fifty thousand may be required. Even General Otis has now asked for fifteen thousand more than his former estimate, and the administration is believed to be so nearly roused from its dream as to be fiddling with the proposal to enlist some part of the thirty-five thousand volunteers authorized by Congress. Evidently the main reason of our failure to subjugate even the island of Luzon is that Aguinaldo will not let us. To win his assent we shall have to present stronger reasons than a raw civilian army of twenty-three thousand men, one-fourth of whom are in hospital. In command of them we should have, not a favorite of Secretary Alger, but an educated soldier, trained at the best military school in the world, that at West Point. If that famous school is not maintained for

the purpose of securing to the country the advantages of a military education in commanding, as well as in subordinate, officers it is hardly worth maintaining. By its maintenance, these advantages are conceded; by what right, then, are we denied them precisely where their need is greatest, their lack most perilous? It may be that long experience in arms is a better equipment than a technical military education in youth; indubitably it is better; but if the latter counts for anything whatever the President is faithless to duty in depriving us of whatever it counts for. We have plenty of generals who have both the technical education and the long experience. Apparently, the President and the Secretary of War are determined that they shall not be put in high command in the field.

As General Otis has never had an adequate force, his incapacity is not to be inferred from his failure to accomplish the work expected of him; but it is justify inferable from his failure to discern the magnitude of the task. He should have asked for one hundred thousand men long ago. Doubtless the newspapers would have affirmed his insanity, as they did that of General Sherman when in the early days of our civil war he foresaw that the South could not be overrun in three months by seventy-five thousand volunteers who could neither stand without support nor walk without falling over their own feet. But this administration has shown that it can ignore popular clamor. Unfortunately the clamor which it has chosen to ignore was that of right and reason.

The American people have been four hundred years in subduing the Indians at their doors. There were never a million Indians to subdue, and the work is not complete. The Philippines are six thousand miles away, with a population estimated at eight millions. That the inhabitants are a warlike race we have sufficiently proved, and that they are protected by a climate deadly to persons of our race we are on the point of proving. It is extremely improbable that this generation or the next will see the end of the war, but with an army of fifty thousand or one hundred thousand men we may hope to occupy and hold all the most important places, develop a considerable trade, set up a colonial government that will command respect if respectably administered and limit the activities of dissent to a guerrilla warfare in the interiors. If more than this can be accomplished, well and good; but neither this nor that can be done by talking.

This country has yet something to learn, namely, that "colonial expansion" means military strength. It means, not only a powerful navy, as already we dimly understand, but a powerful standing army as well. For preservation of order and putting down of inevitable rebellions in our distant and tropical possessions we cannot rely upon the inefficient volunteer of whom it requires two years to make a soldier, and who, anyhow, is not always going to present himself for inglorious service in pestilent swamps and jungles under a grilling sun. We are sure to have a good deal of that, not only in the Pacific, but in the Caribbean, for Cuba has yet to be subdued to our sweet will, which is to keep her for our honesty. It is for the people of this country to choose whether they will renounce their faith in Expansion—if they really hold it—or that distrust of the military arm which undoubtedly they do hold. I do not myself share the distrust, having never known, and not expecting ever to know, an instance of the Army doing more than its lawful duty, or doing that in an unlawful way. However that may be—whether a large standing army is a blessing or an evil—there is nothing for the Greater American to do but accept it as the fundamental fact upon which to rear the superstructure of his fascinating political creed.

As to the Philippines, then, we are committed to the policy of subjugation; there is no turning back. Retention is another and a still debatable thing. It seems to me that the best we can do with those Unhappy Isles is exchange them for Great Britain's possessions in the West Indies.

If that Power can be persuaded to take them by title, instead of by delivery, as we took them from Spain, so much the better. If not, or if we mean to keep them, the way is plain: we must get them. For that we must have a great many soldiers who are not officers and at least one less officer who is not a soldier.