

mended to those interested in the creation and formation of identity, whether ethnic, political, socio-cultural, or religious.

Ooi Keat Gin

*Academy of Brunei Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2471-0176>

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## *The US Volunteers in the Southern Philippines: Counterinsurgency, Pacification, and Collaboration, 1899–1901*

JOHN SCOTT REED

Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020.

John Scott Reed's 302-page book outlines the achievements of the United States Volunteers (USV) during the Philippine-American War of 1899–1902, America's most successful counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign waged outside the Western Hemisphere. The USVs, comprised of 25 volunteer

regiments, made a decisive contribution to the war. The USVs were recruited from 1899 to 1901 to replace the state militias who first fought in the conflict, and they served until they were relieved by a reconstituted regular army.

The book consists of a preface, an introduction, ten chapters, a conclusion, and three appendices. The book has 75 pages of references (with an average of 92 references per chapter), from page 203 to page 278; a 20 page bibliography, from page 279 to page 298; and a four page index, from page 299–302. Reed begins by describing how the opposition of Filipino nationalists to American annexation of the Philippines was an insurgency and the opposing US military effort was a counterinsurgency. The American counterinsurgency campaign was based on both attraction (through civic actions such as public health initiatives and education) and coercion (through tactical missions against guerrilla base camps and prosecutions of guerrillas under military law). Reed argues that between late 1899 and the spring of 1901, the USV practiced a regulated economy of violence targeting armed opponents and their clandestine elite supporters, while leaving non-resistant villagers unmolested. He asserts that the benign treatment of the general populace by USV troops was due to the standards of American military law, noting that while most USV soldiers were “ethnocentric white supremacists deeply dismissive of Filipino culture” (p. xii), these views were controlled by a military justice system that prevented individual beliefs from determining the collective conduct of the US pacification effort.

The USV regiments outnumbered regular Army regiments in 11 of the archipelago’s 18 military districts, particularly throughout the Visayas and northern Mindanao, which Reed refers to as the “southern Philippines.” The book examines USV combat and garrison life on Samar, Leyte, Panay, and Northern Mindanao. On each island, the USVs had five main tasks: securing population centers and transportation modes; purging guerrilla sympathizers from local governments; coercing members of the upper class to abandon the revolution; isolating armed guerrillas from food sources; and penetrating their sanctuaries and destroying their bases. These tasks were achieved without firepower and mobility advantages by using an optimal balance of violence and coercion while (by and large) respecting the human rights of Filipinos. (The infamous “water cure,” a form of torture used in interrogations, was only practiced on Panay by regular Army troops, not by the USVs.)

Chapter One first provides a strategic outline of the conflict from the 1896 revolution to the outbreak of hostilities between American and Filipino forces on February 4, 1899. The United States aimed to defeat the insurgency quickly at the lowest possible level of violence. The campaign therefore used both attractive and coercive tactics, providing civic actions and destroying insurgents. Coercive actions provided security for the attractive services, which over time diminished the need for coercive pacification. Reed notes that the American emphasis on separating the insurgents from the population foreshadowed counterinsurgency theory and practice developed during the 1960s, such as that of David Galula.

After reviewing the formation of the USVs, Chapter Two discusses the importance of the unit of the company in the US pacification effort. With so many small units scattered across the archipelago (69,161 officers and troops across 502 posts), COIN success hinged largely on the skill and judgment of junior officers, captains, and lieutenants, who were acting almost autonomously. Lacking overwhelming firepower, company officers concentrated on acquiring intelligence, patrolling, and ensuring troop discipline. Most company-grade officers previously held commissions as state volunteers, and many had learned sufficient Spanish to communicate in the Philippines while serving in the American Southwest and Cuba. “The USVs,” wrote Reed, “arrived in the islands well trained, well officered, and ready for service in difficult pacification districts” (p. 37).

Chapter Three explores the values that motivated the USV troops, which centered on the ideal of an aggressive but self-controlled masculinity in service to civilization’s expansion. The synthesis of an idealized masculinity allied with a near universal belief in American exceptionalism constituted the USV’s moral terrain.

Chapter Four follows the progress of operations on each island, focusing on the strategy of population control, which prioritized denying the insurgents money, food, recruits, and intelligence, rather than killing them. The Americans also concentrated on persuading elites that collaboration with them entailed fewer risks than continued support for the insurgents.

Chapter Five traces the development of counterinsurgency tactics. Offensive operations centered on “hikes,” or long-range patrols. These missions barred insurgents from urban areas, seized their food supplies, and gradually destroyed their bases, thus wearing them down. Intelligence was gathered from documents captured on hikes and, particularly on Panay, information was passed to troops in the field through telegraph lines. Although the USV troops were trained for conventional warfare, these tactics allowed them to further innovate for rapid long-range movements in the absence of firepower-based solutions.

Chapter Six analyzes USV combat losses. Being assigned to the archipelago’s most dangerous districts, USV troops suffered higher casualties than regular Army forces. Roughly six percent of the USV force was lost through combat, misadventure, and disease. Chapter Seven segues to an extensive discussion of medicine at the turn of the twentieth century, appraising how the Army protected soldier health. Although disease killed more soldiers than combat in the Philippine-American War, the Army was successful in institutionalizing preventative health measures. To Reed, “this may have been the *single most critical factor* in the tactical success of the USV force during its second campaign season of 1900–1901” (p. 129).

Chapter Eight examines the logistical support given to USV troops, which comprised the bare minimum necessary to keep them in the field. The austerity of their garrisons minimized cultural disruption in adjacent communities, thus supporting the pacification campaign (because poorly behaved COIN soldiers drive the population into the insurgency). This light cultural footprint could

have been negated had the behavior of USV troops not been controlled by their officers. Such internal discipline is the subject of Chapter Nine. Based on archival research, Reed demonstrates that the USVs incurred fewer disciplinary proceedings than either the state militias that preceded them or the regular Army soldiers that followed them. The USV troops were better disciplined because they were better trained, had better officers, and were deployed to places with less inducements to criminal behavior.

Chapter Ten examines to what extent USV officers were able to protect the rights of Filipino citizens under American military law. Citing authors such as Miller (1982) and Welch (1974), Reed discusses how much scholarship “portrays the pacification campaign as virtually genocidal in its effects on the Filipino people” (p. 182). To Reed, however, the crucial question is whether USV soldiers were “permitted, without punishment, to *collectively* violate the protections granted Filipino non-combatants” (p. 182). Reed concludes that USV troops were held to a higher standard of behavior than most recent historians of the conflict have understood. Troops committing criminal acts against Filipinos were systematically punished. To Reed, this was essential, because punishment of Americans who violated the laws of war reinforced the legitimacy of the occupation. An important component of how the USV troops behaved was their treatment of captured guerillas, who were either released or held as prisoners of war. This undermined the insurgency’s legitimacy and encouraged further surrenders, by contrasting the amiability and patience of the Americans with guerrilla reprisals. One of the conflict’s most notorious aspects was the use of the water cure to torture Filipinos into divulging information, particularly on Panay. However, none of the brutal interrogations documented during the US Senate hearings were committed by USV troops. During the COIN campaign, the appearance of justice was as important, if not more, than its reality. The behavior of USV troops and the willingness of USV officers to punish their men for abusing civilians was therefore critical to the archipelago’s pacification.

Reed concludes that the American counterinsurgency campaign succeeded because of a realistic pacification strategy implemented through sound operational decisions, discipline, tactical skills, and an improved Army medical system. Hikes by USV troops isolated insurgent leaders from elites, who were then recruited into a web of collaboration. American commanders understood that their primary objective was to control the population and deny resources to any insurgents remaining in the field.

The book deftly deals with several common themes in the COIN literature, such as the importance of junior officers and troop quality (see Thompson 1966; United States Army and Marine Corps 2007), intelligence (see Nagl 2005), and separating insurgents from the population (see Galula 1964; Kilcullen 2010). Yet, when discussing how the USV troops drew local elites into a web of collaboration, Reed fails to analyze how this perpetuated an oligarchy that continues to dominate Filipino society. While the United States provided social services for the population (what Reed calls attractive pacification), it did nothing to address Filipino society’s deep-seated

problems, such as landlessness. Indeed, as Linn (2000) notes, in ending resistance to their rule, the Americans sought pragmatic, sensible objectives, providing immediate benefits while leaving the archipelago's deep social problems unaddressed. Karnow also offers a strong critique, writing, "The Americans coddled the elite while disregarding the appalling plight of the peasants, thus perpetuating a feudal oligarchy that widened the gap between rich and poor" (1989, 198). This omission by Reed, may, however, be excused as his book's principal purpose is to discuss how the USV troops contributed to the Philippine-American War, not to analyze the role of American colonialism in Philippine history.

Overall, *The US Volunteers in the Southern Philippines* is well written, well researched, and provides an excellent discussion of the contribution of the USV troops to the Philippine-American War. It should be of interest not only to historians of that conflict, but also to those studying counterinsurgency warfare in general.

William N. Holden

*Department of Geography, University of Calgary*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3929-3704>

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