

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Mission of Mercy

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Dear Peter,

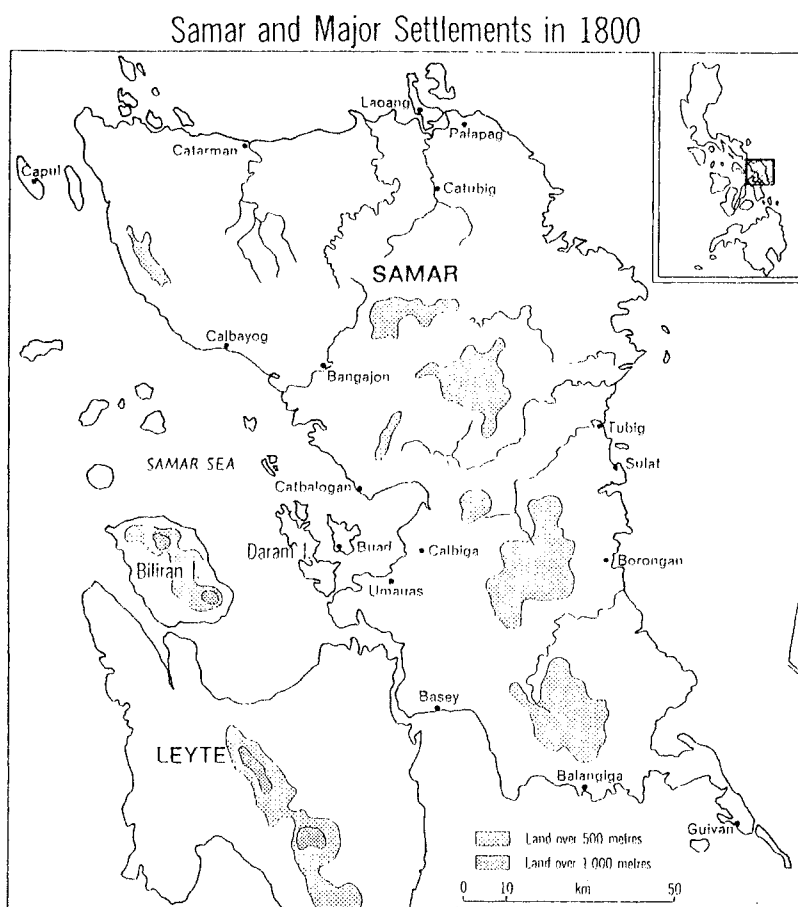
Two weeks ago, I took time off from my Tagalog classes to visit the U.S. Navy hospital ship, USNS Mercy, at her last port of call on the island of Samar. The Mercy was wrapping up a two-month humanitarian and goodwill mission to the Philippines and I thought it might be interesting to see the Mercy, especially during her stay in Samar.

The visit of a hospital ship is an aspect of U.S. security related assistance that is often overlooked in the counting of helicopters, armored cars, and other materiel. The people-to-people contact engendered by the Mercy may have a more enduring impact, either positive or negative, than last week's rush shipment of ten helicopters. The Mercy's mission was to provide health care and help increase public confidence in the Philippine government and its armed forces. Involving over 700 personnel and a cost of more than \$20 million, the Mercy's visit represents the largest single effort by the U.S. in this area.

Of the seven ports served by the Mercy, Calbayog City on the west coast of Samar was perhaps the toughest challenge for the Mercy and crew. Located midway down the Philippine archipelago, Samar is the third largest island, 156 miles long by 75 miles wide, yet has a population of only slightly over one million. It is one of the most impoverished regions, where the majority of the people never see a doctor and the communist-led insurgency is at its strongest with guerrillas relatively close in number to government troops.

Erik Guyot is an Institute Fellow studying the role of U.S. security assistance to the Philippines and Thailand.

The thrice weekly turboprop from Manila to Calbayog skimmed along the coastline of Samar, affording one a view of the narrow strip of flat land between the sea and the rugged hills that dominate most of the interior of the island. Lush green rice paddies cover the level ground while the adjacent coconut groves move part way up the hillsides. Gazing out at the jungled hills, I recalled reading about the frustrating forays of the American Marines who were dispatched to Samar in 1901 to avenge the massacre of a company of U.S. infantrymen by bolo-wielding Samareños. I little realized that while Calbayog was most hospitable towards the visiting Americans in 1987, one serviceman would be unfavorably compared with the Americans massacred over eighty years ago.



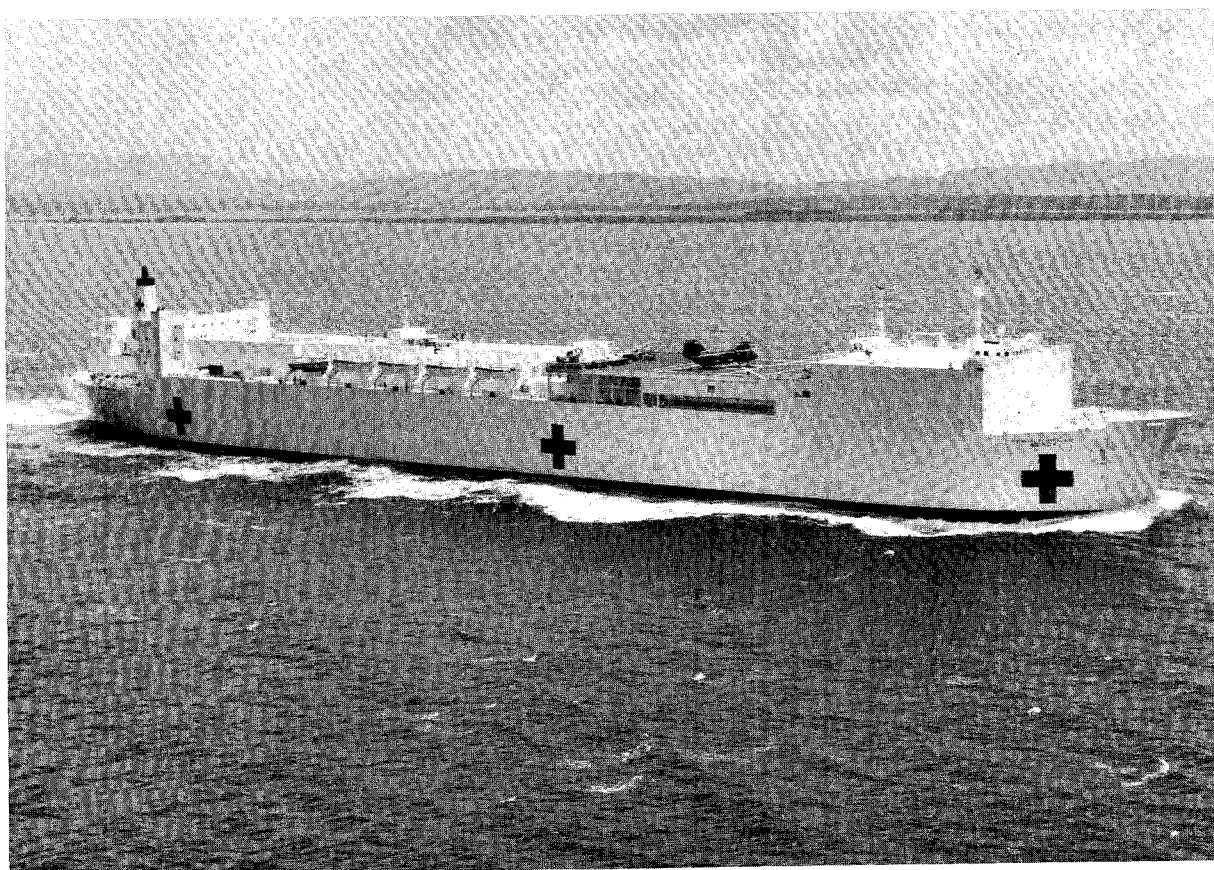
From Philippine Social History (Manila: 1982) p. 224.2

I. The USNS Mercy

The first sign one sees of Calbayog City, population 110,000 and Samar's largest city, is not the small gray cluster of buildings nor the modest airport, but a huge sparkling-white oil tanker anchored outside the harbor. The USNS Mercy, 894 feet long, is the largest medical trauma facility in the U.S., either on land or sea. Among navy ships she belongs to the

third largest class, exceeded only by aircraft and helicopter carriers. The Mercy's master, Captain Richard Hosey, described the ship as "a bow and stern wrapped around a hospital." According to him, her facilities are more sophisticated than those found in military hospitals on the West Coast. Converted from an oil tanker at a cost of about \$250 million, the Mercy is built to handle the results of a major war with 12 operating rooms, 1,000 beds, a 'helo' deck that can handle the military's largest helicopter, and distillation plants that can produce 300,000 gallons of fresh water a day.

This was the Mercy's maiden voyage and shakedown cruise to check out all the systems and repair minor cracks. The Mercy's services were offered to President Corazon Aquino when she visited Washington D.C. last fall and are not formally part of the annual U.S. military aid package. After visiting the Philippines, the Mercy steamed to the South Pacific and will return to her homeport, Oakland, California, in July.



The USNS Mercy T-AH 19, courtesy of U.S. Navy

Captain Hosey was understandably proud of the Mercy's crew of about 400 sailors, 300 U.S. medical personnel, and 55 Filipino medical personnel. In a joint effort, they treated over 60,000 patients at seven ports. During their stay in

Calbayog, the staff chalked up the most impressive statistics of the entire mission with over 10,000 patients treated; 155 operations, including those for cataracts and cleft lips; and over 2,000 dental cases. Capt. Hosey believed that such people-to-people contact is more effective than simply sending war materiel. "In each port we reached 8 to 10,000 people," he said. "That is 60,000 people who are grateful and appreciative." In contrast, "there is no reaction if we tell them that we gave the government of the Philippines another plane or tank."

As for what the Mercy's visit costs, so far, no one knows. "We don't have the foggiest," said Capt. Hosey. "We were told, 'Do what you have to do and when you get home in July we will figure it out.'" As a rough estimate, Capt. D. L. Sturtz, commanding officer of the hospital, put hospital costs, which do not include running the ship, at \$18 to \$20 million.

As I followed the public affairs guide from one spacious ward to another, she told me that it took her about two weeks before she could find her way along the gently humming passages. In the pediatrics ward, about 30 children clustered around a T.V. or rested in bed. About half of the children were recovering from operations for cleft lips or palates. A few others were severely malnourished such as one infant with blackened skin and hair that easily came away from her scalp. One of the nurses, Lt. Kathy Pierce, described how the American staff first reacted to the malnutrition with an "oh my God pathology," but eventually got over it.

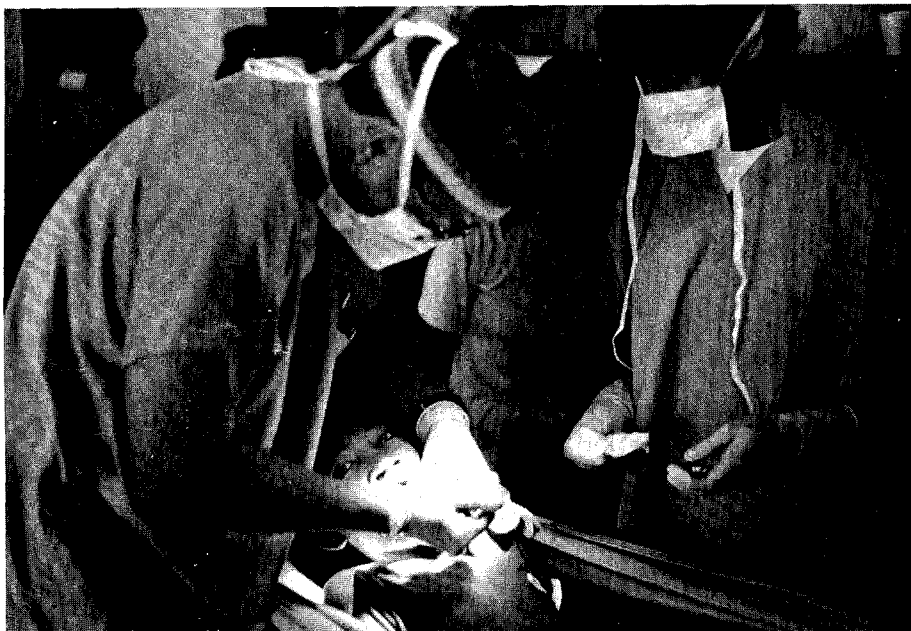
In addition to the business of surgery, there was an emphasis on cross-training and cooperation between Filipino and American medical staff. For example, one Philippine Army doctor had learned how to repair cleft lips and palates by performing some 20 to 30 operations, which was more than most American doctors would see in their entire career. In exchange, American doctors learned a lot from their Filipino counterparts about tropical diseases that they rarely encountered. Doctors in the Mercy's lab described as "amazing" the types of diseases they could study and document first hand.

II. Medcap

The real action, however, was not on the Mercy, but on shore. Every morning, crowds of over a thousand people crammed outside a central school building which housed the Medcap (Medical Civic Action Program) center. As early as 5 am, people patiently waited in the hot sun for the one in three chance of being treated by the "Americano doctors." All told, about 30,000 people overwhelmed the quiet city, some coming from as far as 100 miles away. It was the biggest event in the last decade, only President Aquino's visit had drawn comparable crowds, and then only for one day, not an entire week.

Inside the school compound were at least 20 different wards that quickly handled the vast majority of the simple cases that didn't require the Mercy's sophisticated facilities. With an endless line of people pressing at the entrance and doctors hurrying to process as many patients as possible, Medcap had the air of barely controlled chaos.

The talk of Medcap were the dentists and their race to break their previous record of over 500 patients treated in one day. At one end of the school compound 14 Filipino and American dentists worked furiously to do just that by seeing 644 patients and extracting 1690 teeth. "We figure that the thing we can provide the most of to the most people is [tooth] extractions," said Navy Commander Earl Eschete as he removed sweat-filled rubber gloves. Taking a break from seeing a patient every five minutes, Eschete explained the dilemma for American dentists between their traditional reluctance to pull front teeth because of cosmetic reasons, and the Filipinos' desire to have all bad teeth removed. "We've pulled a lot of front teeth and it's hard for us to pull front teeth...but they are comfortable with it so we should be too." He added that, "we can't do fillings because its thirty years too late."



Dental clinic at Medcap

Eschete and others emphasized that they weren't out to pull a record number of teeth since on days when they had seen far fewer patients they had pulled almost as many teeth. At the dental screening area, patients indicated which teeth they wanted removed and were rechecked by a Filipino dentist. Philippine Army 1st Lt. Jerry Mateo, who was screening patients, said he'd "never worked this hard," by seeing 74 patients in one day in addition to his shift at the screening area. By working with American dentists, he said he had learned valuable

techniques which he would apply in other civic action programs.

Another busy ward was pediatrics, where doctors perched on child-sized chairs treated up to 300 children each day. Many of the children were not seriously ill, several doctors told me. The parents just wanted reassurance that a cold or a fever would soon go away. Of those that were sick, the most common diseases were those easily preventable: diarrhea, worms, skin infections, and tuberculosis. "One child had an infected leg because his parents didn't have enough money for soap," said Philippine Army Doctor Grace Victoria. She then pointed to three-year-old Rodrigo Santiago who, suffering from measles and dysentery, lay listless with an intravenous tube dropping precious fluid into his body. His father, a fisherman, brought him to Medcap after an American serviceman passed by their house and noticed him. He had been unable to digest food for a week. But, according to Dr. Victoria, he would be fine if rehydration could be continued at the city hospital after the Mercy left.



The Pediatrics Ward at Medcap

Many patients also stopped by the immunization center where they received inoculations against diphtheria, tetanus, measles, and polio. Although this was the least glamorous part of Medcap, doctors said the vaccinations here probably made the most significant contribution to long-term health. As their last stop, all patients threaded their way to the dispensary, some to have a prescription filled, others just to receive a toothbrush and toothpaste. Each day, well over 2,000 prescriptions were filled for about \$27,000 worth of medicines. In addition, Operation Handclasp dispensed thousands

of packets of shampoo, more than fifty cases of Peptol Bismol, and some two tons of rice packed in little five-pound bags.

In assessing the Mercy's contribution to public health in Samar, American doctors expressed a mixture of satisfaction with the large number of people they served, and at the same time, frustration that many waiting outside could not be treated in six short days. Said Navy Commander Dr. Joel Labow, a pediatrician, "All of us have had the experience of having to look somebody between the eyes and say, 'Sorry, we're full.'"

Many doctors would have preferred to stay longer in fewer ports, but realized that their work entailed trade-offs between extensive health care in a few areas and reaching the broadest range of Filipinos possible. "Part of this mission is humanitarian and part is statesmanship to strengthen the ties [between Filipinos and Americans]," one doctor stated. "From a medical perspective it would be better to stay in one place longer."

From the perspective of a pediatrician, Dr. Labow offered this caveat: "There is the drama of restoring sight and fixing a bunch of cleft lips. But the major impact on health is not surgery but having a basic water supply. If we dug a well it would do a lot more than all the worm medicine [distributed]." The Mercy has done "a lot of good," he concluded, "but it's only part. The other part is long-term commitment."

III. Elusive "hearts and minds"

While one could literally count heads and quantify the medical successes of the Mercy's mission, the goodwill aspect was a more intangible and elusive goal. In a brief visit to Calbayog, Maj. Gen. Charles Teeter, head of the U.S. Military Advisory Group in the Philippines, described this goal: "The Mercy is here on a humanitarian mission to tell the story that the Armed Forces of the Philippines are contributing to the welfare of the people." He emphasized that the joint Philippine and U.S. effort had "reached over 60,000 people. I don't know of any other effort comparable in scope or duration."

Another objective of the Mercy's visit was to foster greater cooperation between the Philippine military and the local government. In congressional testimony, Pentagon officials have repeatedly stressed that the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) need coordinated action with the local government in order to deal with the insurgency.

The communist New People's Army (NPA) is probably strongest on Samar. Recently, AFP Vice Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Salvador Mison, put the ratio between the AFP and the NPA at 0.7 to

1 for Eastern Samar and 1.6 to 1 for Western Samar (where Calbayog is located). All such figures should be viewed with some skepticism, and these do not include the smaller province of Northern Samar. Yet, coming from a former commander for Region 8, which includes Samar, they do give an indication of the balance of forces. While the NPA control large areas near Calbayog, the city itself is relatively peaceful.

Although the Mercy sailed into a calm harbor, she did not sail into a tranquil political scene. In the restrained competition between city hall and the local army commander, the Mercy appeared to play three roles. First, as a somewhat neutral entity, she served as a mediator, bringing the two sides together in limited cooperation. Second, the Mercy was a powerful symbol that either side could invoke to wring concessions from the other. And third, the Mercy, and especially the medical supplies left behind, were a limited good over which both sides competed. To try and convey how the arrival of a hospital ship interacted with the web of local politics requires some detail.

Dur the Marcos era, Calbayog was run by Jose Roño, formerly mayor and later Deputy Prime Minister. Despite Roño's position as the third-ranking member of the Marcos government, residents claim he turned his back on his hometown and did little to bring in government projects. There is almost no industry in Calbayog and numerous local waterfalls remain untapped. Historically, Calbayog has been a regional center for coconut production. Coconut is still king, covering four times the acreage of the next largest crops, rice and abaca (hemp). [1]

After coming to power, the Aquino government replaced the mayor loyal to Roño with Godofreda Dean, a woman pediatrician who had twice led unsuccessful campaigns on the opposition ticket. Mayor Dean is not a traditional politician versed in the art of making deals and populist rhetoric. A single and retiring person, she described herself as "married to my medical profession." She first gained prominence when she began offering free medical services. Yet, Roño's machine is still strong. The mayor spoke of Roño loyalists in city hall and he handily won a seat in the May congressional elections partly through vote buying and by putting up a dummy opponent to split the pro-Aquino vote.

Mayor Dean said that despite improvements in relations with the military since 1986, suspicions remained. "Before, we were scared of the military [because] they were just spoiled during Marcos's time." Shortly before the Mercy's visit, there was something of a confrontation between the mayor and the local Army commander. Lt. Col. Romulo Gorospe, head of the 52nd Infantry Battalion, wanted to conduct a large-scale house to house search for possible subversives in Calbayog. In other cities, similar searches without a warrant have attracted some criticism from human rights lawyers. The mayor refused permission unless Col. Gorospe agreed to put his request in writing and send a copy to the President's office. The colonel backed

down.

According to Col. Andres Batan, who heads military-civilian relations for Region 8, the Mercy has improved relations by bringing U.S. and Philippine military personnel together with city officials in this joint effort. I was seated between him and Mayor Dean when he said that in the past the armed forces "couldn't get the cooperation of the local government." He then turned towards the mayor and in a half-chiding voice said, "But now, the local government is convinced we are here to help." He concluded that, "By giving service with the assistance of the U.S. government and the local government of Calbayog, we are winning the hearts and minds of our people."

Although Mayor Dean later said in private that the Mercy's visit had "helped improve relations" with the military, it was evident that it also brought out old tensions.

To prepare for the Mercy's visit, city hall had requisitioned scores of volunteers to help staff Medcap and provided food for the thousands of patients who came in from outlying areas. The mayor asked the Army to shoulder part of the cost, since according to her they had the bulk of the responsibility for the visit. But when the mayor called on the military to contribute, they refused until she showed the letter to her from the U.S. Embassy describing the joint civilian and military nature of the visit. Then, said Dean, "they woke up and shelled out" 20,000 pesos (\$1,000).

But for most people who were neither harried government officials nor patients anxiously waiting in line, the Mercy's visit was like a week long barrio fiesta. The arrival of 700 Americans meant a boom in the local economy. The two hotels in town were booked full (I managed to get one of the last rooms), the discos and beer halls were jammed, and pedicab rides shot up from 50 centavos (2½¢) to ten pesos (50¢).

The ship in particular seemed to hold a strange fascination for many people. By day a sparkling white palace and by night a twinkling string of lights, the Mercy symbolized everything that was modern and wonderful about America. Almost everyone I met, from the owner of my hotel (he was Roño's dummy opponent), to a high school principal, assumed that I could get them one of the rare visitor's passes for the ship. Only fifty people a day, other than patients, were permitted on board for a tour. Oscar Suarez was one of the lucky ones. He travelled from Legazpi city, 160 kilometers to the north, "just to see the ship." With no apparent connections, he somehow managed to get on after waiting for seven days.

Many who had official connections were not so fortunate. In some cases, lack of a visit was interpreted as an American offense against Philippine national pride. For example, after

the ship had left, I was speaking with Col. Gorospe, when he suddenly claimed that local doctors had not been allowed to visit the Mercy. What had really happened was that due to a scheduling mix-up local doctors had been unable to visit the Mercy. After the Mercy had left, the mayor had issued an apology over the radio regarding this and other matters, which of course, Col. Gorospe heard and interpreted as an intentional affront.

Of all the people I met, a few such as Norma Piscasio, a 45-year old grandmother who ran a roadside stall next to her husband's truck repair shop, retained their equanimity. "People are crazy about this ship," she said. "I'm curious, but not crazy."

As with any carnival, not everyone approved of the behavior of the celebrants. One priest I spoke with claimed that the older generation was not used to the American's behavior and complained of servicemen "openly cavorting with girls." Yet, many people seemed to expect that the American men would pack the few discos in town. What shocked some of the more traditional minded was the behavior of the American women. One evening, I was eating dinner with a post office employee who always worked quickly so that he could hurry home to his game of mahjong, when he blurted out: "And you know, the women sit by the side of the road and openly drink beer." It was a remark echoed by others.

To find out more about the local reaction to the Mercy, I also spoke with the ebullient and influential parish priest, Father Ponciano Figueroa. "The Mercy is a blessing. It's bringing people to church," he joked, referring to the crowds who showed up at the church waiting area in hopes of being treated. Fr. Figueroa told the new faces that "You are here because you want to be treated by the Americans. But you have to be cured spiritually too."

He commended the Mercy for serving people in need whether or not they were NPA supporters and claimed that if the Mercy visited every year it would "solve the insurgency problem." He based this on his belief that the poor Filipino could long suffer poverty and injustices, but let his child die and he would run amok or join the NPA. Other priests from outside the city were more circumspect, however, in viewing the Mercy as a panacea. One said that while it might "change a little" those who supported the guerrillas, it would not affect the ideologically committed.

In other ports the Mercy had been greeted by a sometimes hostile press. "We have been accused in every port of working with the CIA...and [directly] supporting the Philippine Army against the communists," said Capt. Hosey. Although his further

comment that he hadn't seen one favorable article in the local press overlooked many positive ones, he did have a point. In Davao City on Mindanao, for example, some local papers repeated the accusation of leftists that the Mercy was part of "low intensity conflict, a new approach used by the Americans to keep nationalism at bay among countries under their sway."

In an effort to find similar criticisms of the Mercy in Calbayog, I visited the local congressional candidate of the Partido ng Bayan, the legal left party formed by the former head of the NPA. I was disappointed. Attorney Artessio Apostol, a human rights lawyer and Samar's charter member of the Integrated National Bar, found it politically impossible to roundly criticize the visit of a hospital ship in a city with only 33 doctors. One moment, he claimed that the Mercy was part of a CIA program to gain public support for the U.S. military bases, the next, he called it "something wonderful" and hoped that it could extend its visit for two or three more days.

The day before the Mercy was scheduled to depart, a "despachada" or farewell party had been planned for the Mercy's crew. It would have been a fitting end for a successful medical and goodwill effort, but for a collision between the American adherence to proper procedures and local Philippine politics.

Late that afternoon, I was asking Mayor Dean about the history of Calbayog. We were in the middle of the high school's cavernous assembly hall, to one side were the local media, her aides, and a few Philippine military officers, while behind us at the far end of the room patients were being screened for the dental clinic. As she talked, every now and then she would write out a note granting special permission for a few people to immediately enter Medcap, thus bypassing the long lines. It was standard practice in all ports for local officials to grant such favors and it incensed the Americans monitoring the entry gate. Earlier, one of the servicemen had pointed to a group of patients who were wearing relatively good shoes instead of the usual rubber sandals and said, "It's frustrating. You try to help the poor and she lets in her voters." What particularly outraged the Americans was that because they so visibly controlled who entered, locals thought that they were the ones playing favorites.

The Mayor had just finished writing a note to let in a dozen soldiers when a low-ranking Navy officer stormed over and shouted at her to stop it. The mayor was totally taken aback and could only respond to his accusations in a weak voice. This went on for a few long moments as the officer pushed aside an aide who tried to intervene and continued to release a week of pent-up anger. Finally, he threw up his hands in disgust and left.

I apologized profusely to Mayor Dean for his outburst and explained that he had been out in the blistering sun since 6 am without a break. Showing little emotion, she said in a low voice, "It's a daily problem. We Filipinos resent it. We also have our pride." A Philippine Army major seated nearby simply shook his head in agreement saying, "If he does not understand, he does not understand." No other Americans were nearby. Earlier in the day, two city councilmen had been removed from Medcap in a case of mistaken identity.

The mayor was still upset when five minutes later Maj. Gen. Charles Teeter strode over and courteously greeted "Madame Mayor." But pleasantries from the trim, sharp-nosed general did little to assuage her anger.

That evening, the mayor's short thank you speech for the Mercy's crew pointedly mentioned the "confusions, frustrations, and tensions" during a "long and hectic week." For the next two days, all the mayor could talk about was the Navy officer. She added that he had also shouted at the mother superior who he mistakenly believed was trying to sneak in a patient. As a final salvo, she compared him to the "notorious" Capt. Connell, the American military commander who in 1901 allegedly led his men in molesting and raping Samar's women, and thus was rightfully massacred. This last epithet got my curiosity and I resolved that after the festivities I would find out more about Capt. Connell and the ruins of the nearby military camp named after him.

The farewell party included, along with the usual speeches, an assortment of three types of dances: native and Spanish era dances, maudlin ballroom music provided by the eight piece Philippine Army band, and various U.S. pop hits. First, was a performance of a traditional courting dance in which the two lines of dancers strutted like chickens, followed by the sinuous "Ali Bang Bang" or butterfly dance. Next, the Army band struck up a waltz as Brig. Gen. Bayani Fabric, Region 8 military commander, and his wife danced solo while the younger generation complained that the music was too slow. Finally, to the beat of Madonna and the Bee Gees, everyone poured out onto the dance floor which was subtly lit due to frequent power blackouts. During the farewell dinner, many of the American servicemen said that they preferred Calbayog, with its small town atmosphere, over the other ports, and they meant it.

After the Mercy departed, I stayed around for another two days, partly due to force of circumstance, the plane wouldn't come for another two days, and partly by choice. I wanted to find this mysterious Camp Connell and also see what were the later impressions of Calbayoguenos.

The morning after the Mercy left, I stopped by city hall to see the local historian, but he was out of town. The mayor,

however, had just come back from making a radio announcement about the Mercy. Philippine Army soldiers had been indiscriminately distributing a prescription anti-asthmatic left behind by the Mercy's crew. After halting the distribution, Mayor Dean went on the air to warn residents against taking the drug without a doctor's supervision. She also apologized to the citizens of Calbayog that the Americans had not been able to keep their word and treat a final group of 800 patients as promised. In addition, she also mentioned that the local doctors had been unable to visit the Mercy. It was not the ideal follow-up to a goodwill mission. I didn't ask the mayor directly, but it was clear that for the shouting incident her radio announcement would have been much shorter. (It should be noted that Mayor Dean is not the least anti-American. She worked in a hospital the U.S. for several years and hopes to return again for another visit.)

Later in the day, I paid a visit to Dr. J. R. Canto, director of the city hospital and its entire staff of 31. He summed up the overall effect of the Mercy on health situation thus: "What they did here we could not have done in a long time. It is something the whole region is thankful for." "But," he added, "you came like a whirlwind and you left behind people who we have to see."

Dr. Canto was most appreciative that the Mercy's crew had repaired equipment at the hospital, but was a bit rueful that none of his staff could visit the Mercy. More importantly, he was upset that the large quantity of medical supplies left behind by the Americans were given to the regional military command based in Tacloban, located in adjacent Leyte province, for what he saw as public relations purposes. Instead, he wanted the medicines donated to the Mayor's office (and subsequently the hospital) since it had been the "prime mover" in organizing and preparing for the visit. Whatever the merits of giving the supplies to the regional military headquarters, it appeared that just as the preparations for the Mercy's arrival had touched off a small dispute, her departure engendered a minor squabble over the spoils.

For my final stop that day, I visited Col. Gorospe at his headquarters on the north side of town near the airport. His area of responsibility includes more than 3,000 square kilometers surrounding Calbayog. His command, however, was not closely involved in the Mercy's visit, but instead provided security and some logistical support. The primary military elements involved he said were the civil relations staff from regional headquarters in Tacloban. I was in no position to judge whether Col. Gorospe's unit was capable of being more involved in the visit, but it seemed that since the battalion was based in Calbayog, they stood to improve their relations more than the distant and relatively unknown civil relations staff.

As our conversation progressed, I asked him about the NPA situation, a touchy subject. In the back of my mind I remembered Gen. Mison's statement that the AFP outnumbered the NPA in Western Samar by only one and a half times. Col. Gorospe's response to my question was that there were very few NPA in his area of responsibility and that he didn't have the exact figure. Moreover, the press accounts of large numbers of NPA referred to other areas, not his. I then asked him if he conducted night patrols, and if so, how often. He started and looked at me as if I were mad, and then after a long pause, said yes, of course his men conducted night patrols.

IV. Camp Connell

Throughout my stay in Calbayog, I wanted to dig a bit into its history. Since Calbayog had been spared the ravages of World War II, what seemed most salient was the story of Capt. Connell and the Balangiga massacre where he and most of his company were wiped out in 1901 by insurrectos fighting the American occupation. Although Balangiga is located on the southern tip of Samar, the nearby remains of a military camp named after Connell made it a part of the local consciousness.

The head of an ecclesiastical school suggested that on my last day in Calbayog I visit Mr. Antonio Savensio for the closest thing to a first hand account. Mr. Savensio, age 85, lived just to the south of Calbayog with his son-in-law who industriously fattened crabs to sell in Manila.

The story he related was told to him by his great-uncle, one of the participants. It was similar to that in scholarly texts save for the description of Connell as a cruel leader and the traces of local pride. The insurrectos snuck into the garrison at Balangiga by dressing up as women with bolos hidden beneath their skirts. Taking advantage of Capt. Connell's policy that prohibited his men from carrying arms in church, they surprised the Americans one Sunday morning, immediately killing more than half of the company. Of the 74 men in the company only 26 managed to escape. At the time, it was the largest single defeat for the U.S. Army in the period between Little Big Horn and World War I. It shook public confidence back in America that the pacification of Samar was going smoothly.

Following the Balangiga massacre, a battalion of Marines was dispatched from Manila to lead a punitive campaign. Their orders were to take no prisoners and kill all persons over ten years of age since they were "designated as being capable of carrying arms." [2] It was a brutal campaign in which the

Marine and Army units were frustrated by the elusive insurrectos for five long months. [3] And after first clamoring for vengeance, the American public was later shocked by reports of atrocities with Henry Cabot Lodge calling the American general directing the campaign "revolting." [4]

As for Capt. Connell, in reality he was not the thoroughly abusive leader as described in the local oral tradition. Although he conscripted the healthiest men in Balingiga to clean up the town, he also sought to punish his men for any abuses against the locals. A devout Catholic, he believed that the Samañeros did not need "bayonet rule" as did his superiors. This laxity was blamed for the massacre. But whether or not Connell was too soft or too harsh is somewhat irrelevant to the memory which continues. For those who remember the name, it symbolizes a bitter chapter in U.S.-Philippine relations.

After bidding Mr. Savensio and his prosperous son-in-law goodbye, I travelled back towards Calbayog, still in search of Camp Connell. I knew it was near the coast somewhere between the cemetery and a small stream. I spent what seemed an inordinate amount of time covering a small patch of ground and asking for directions in broken Tagalog. After all this, I had visions of the ruins of a grand structure: something along the lines of the old colonial forts at Malacca or Penang. Instead, I found the tiny remains of Camp Connell enclosed in a thorny grove not ten feet from the coastal highway. To call Camp Connell a disappointment would be an understatement. The thick walls crumbled away at chest height and enclosed an area not more than 15 by 20 feet. It was a fitting reminder of the temporal nature of human endeavor.



The remains of Camp Connell viewed from the Maharlika highway.

V. Postscript

On the flight back to Manila I thought about what the Mercy's visit had accomplished. Although it was easy to focus on the array of minor problems associated with the Mercy, I was reminded of the basic fact that American and Philippine military personnel had worked incredibly hard to bring medical treatment to over 60,000 people. This treatment ran the gamut from giving a balloon and cough syrup to a child to restoring sight to the blind. Most of those treated were from the poorer sectors of society and normally would not have been exposed to Americans. Each patient and their family would remember the service by the American doctors.

Whether this goodwill was transferred to the Philippine military and whether relations with the local government were significantly improved was another matter. Despite the joint U.S.-Philippine nature of the effort, the Mercy was perceived as an American show. In addition, the Philippine military personnel most visibly involved were not local personnel, but doctors from Manila and members of the civil relations staff from the regional headquarters. Finally, while the Mercy's visit fostered greater cooperation between the military and city hall, it also raised old tensions.

As Philippine and American medical personnel emphasized, lasting improvements in health and civil-military relations would require a sustained effort, not just a one week blitz. After the Mercy had left along with her sweating doctors and the crowds of hopeful patients had dissipated, Calbayog was perhaps best described by a local priest. In his words, Calbayog "returned to its normal lethargy."

Sincerely,



Erik Guyot

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3. Chaput, Donald, "The American Press and General Vicente Lukban, Hero of Samar" in Readings in Leyte-Samar History (Tacloban: 1979), p. 244.
4. Miller, Stuart Creighton, Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903 (New Haven: 1982), p. 236. For an animated critique of Miller's allegations of American atrocities see Brian Linn, "Stuart C. Miller and the American Soldier" in Pilipinas: A Journal of Philippine Studies no. 7 (Ann Arbor: 1986), pp. 45-73.