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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 26-10-2010		2. REPORT TYPE Final		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Dewey At Manila Bay: Lessons in Operational Art and Operational Leadership from America's First Fleet Admiral				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Derek B. Granger, CDR, USN Paper Advisor (if Any): John Gordon, CDR, USN				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Dept Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
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15. SUBJECT TERMS Operational Art and Operational Leadership					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 27	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556

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**DEWEY AT MANILA BAY:
LESSONS IN OPERATIONAL ART AND OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP FROM
AMERICA'S FIRST FLEET ADMIRAL**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal view and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

27 October 2010

Abstract

The decisive U.S. Asiatic Squadron victory over the Spanish South Pacific Fleet at the Battle of Manila Bay in 1898 illustrates the brilliance of Admiral George Dewey as an operational leader and his keen sense of operational art. Due to the U.S. Navy's virtually unchallenged supremacy since the conclusion of World War II, students of naval history have few modern examples of the use of operational art in a maritime context. Admiral Dewey's exploits have largely been forgotten to time, even if the final results of the Battle of Manila Bay ring somewhat familiar: Dewey's Asiatic Squadron destroyed or captured the entire Spanish South Pacific Fleet in a mere seven hours without the loss of a single American life. What is not so well known is how Dewey's operational leadership and practice of operational art set the stage for this earth-changing and relatively "bloodless" victory. Dewey's detailed planning and preparation for a battle more than 7,000 miles away from his nearest base highlight the very nature of operational leadership and operational art. In overcoming considerable challenges associated with the operational factors of space, time and force, Dewey, in one decisive action, established the United States as a world power and ushered in what is widely considered the beginning of modern naval warfare. The importance of this watershed event warrants an investigation into Dewey's practice of operational art leading to the United States' rise to superpower status, and more importantly, its relevance to students of modern naval warfare.

Introduction

On the night of April 30th, 1898, the six-ship U.S. Asiatic Squadron, commanded by Commodore George Dewey, steamed into Manila Bay in the Spanish Philippines to battle with the Spanish South Pacific Squadron. In less than seven hours, Dewey had sunk or captured the entire Spanish fleet and silenced Manila's shore batteries, all without the loss of a single American life while suffering just eight wounded.¹ Dewey's success in a distant bay most Americans could not have pointed to on a map transformed the United States into a colonial power, causing Europe to take pause². An editorial in a German newspaper observed that Dewey's victory marked "a new epoch in history, not only for the United States but likewise for Europe."³

In light of the Earth-shaping consequences of Manila Bay, it is somewhat surprising that Dewey's exploits receive so little attention from students of naval history. Perhaps the 112 years that have passed since Dewey's victory, combined with incredible technological advances in naval warfare that have witnessed the rise of satellite surveillance and cruise missiles, have led historians to conclude that Dewey's accomplishments, though impressive for their day, are irrelevant to students of modern operational art. If that is the case, why should Naval War College students pay attention to the accomplishments of Napoleon Bonaparte, Ferdinand Foch, or Raymond Spruance? Are their achievements little more than historical curiosities in an age of globalism, stealth technology, and smart weapons?

¹ David Traxel, *1898: The Birth of the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), 137.

² Craig L. Symonds, *Decision At Sea: Five Naval Battles That Shaped American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 143.

³ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 192.

The basic tenets of operational leadership and operational art are timeless. Therefore, if the practice of operational art by Napoleon, Foch and Spruance is worthy of study by today's students of warfare, so too must be Dewey's. This paper argues that Dewey's operational leadership and practice of operational art are relevant to 21st century students of the operational level of war. In doing so, it details how America's first Fleet Admiral effectively won the Battle of Manila Bay before the first round was fired by carefully incorporating into his campaign planning the operational functions of intelligence, command and control, logistics and protection to mitigate deficiencies in the operational factors of time, space, and force.

Counter-arguments

Like most of his contemporaries (and many naval leaders who followed him over the next half-century), Dewey subscribed to Mahanian theory of engaging and decisively defeating the enemy fleet. Even though Dewey's victory at Manila is arguably the essence of Mahanian warfare, history has largely discredited Mahan's theories on naval warfare and as such, have rendered Dewey irrelevant as he relates to modern naval warfare.

Furthermore, Dewey's action against the Spanish at Manila Bay was limited to the employment of but six ships of the line, hardly what would be considered the operational level of war using modern yardsticks. When compared to the forces commanded by Nimitz and Spruance at Midway, Dewey's is little more than a tactical force. As such, his accomplishments are worthy of study only inasmuch as they demonstrate his brilliant mastery of Mahanian tactics. Referring to the American victories at Manila Bay and Santiago, Cuba during the Spanish-American War, historian Ronald Andidora submits that the "small size of these engagement and the disproportionate material advantage enjoyed by the Americans in

each of them rendered their instructional value almost nil.”⁴

Preparations for War

At 0541 in the morning on May 1st, 1898, sixty-year-old Commodore George Dewey cemented his place in history books with his famous command to the Captain of his flagship, USS *OLYMPIA* (C-6): “You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.”⁵ Over the next seven hours, the American line of battle made five firing runs past the numerically superior Spanish squadron commanded by Rear Admiral Patricio Montojo, riding at anchor in Manila Bay beneath the cover of heavy Spanish shore-based batteries. Suffering 381 deaths and the destruction of most of his fleet, Montojo had little choice but to surrender to Dewey’s virtually undamaged force, handing America what amounted to total victory.⁶ While the events of May 1st, 1898 were unquestionably decisive, the American victory was for all practical purposes assured before Dewey and his squadron steamed into Manila Bay. Shortly after his victory, Dewey observed, “This battle was won in Hong Kong Harbor.”⁷

With the specter of war with Spain looming over alleged Spanish atrocities in Cuba, Commodore George Dewey crossed the Pacific Ocean to assume command of the Asiatic Squadron on January 3rd, 1898 in a ceremony onboard USS *OLYMPIA* at Nagasaki, Japan. While the six-ship squadron under Dewey’s command was small compared to the fleets later amassed during World War II, it was a sizeable and formidable naval force for the day,

⁴ Ronald Andidora, *Iron Admirals: Naval Leadership in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 9.

⁵ Laurin Hall Healy, Luis Kutner, *The Admiral* (Chicago: Ziff Davis Publishing Company, 1944), 181.

⁶ H.W. Wilson, *The Downfall of Spain: Naval History of the Spanish-American War* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, Ltd, 1900), 141.

⁷ John Barrett, “Admiral George Dewey,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Vol XCIX, June 1899 to November 1899 (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1899), 801.

especially for a United States Navy that was expanding following a considerable downsizing in the decades immediately following the American Civil War.⁸ After undertaking the required diplomatic proprieties with his Japanese hosts, he ordered his squadron on February 11th to make for Hong Kong, having received no direction from higher authority to do so but realizing that it offered the most advantageous position from which to mount an offensive against the Spanish fleet.⁹ Upon the squadron's arrival at Hong Kong on February 17th, he was greeted with news of the sinking of the USS *MAINE* only two days prior in Havana Harbor, nearly half-way around the world. In the relative safety of Hong Kong's neutral harbor, Dewey wasted no time in forging his plans for the pending war with a fading but still dangerous colonial powers.

First and foremost, Dewey was facing enormous logistical challenges associated with the operational factor of *space*. Plans for war with Spain, drafted in 1895 by officers at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, called for the U.S. Asiatic Squadron to seek out and destroy the Spanish Navy in the Spanish Philippines.¹⁰ Adopting these plans, Dewey realized his force would be operating more than 7,000 miles from his nearest base, requiring nearly two months to transport into theater coal, ammunition, and reserves. Furthermore, he realized that a formal declaration of war by the United States would render neutral ports, including Hong Kong and all ports in Japan, off limits in accordance with international law, further complicating logistical concerns by compressing the operational factor of *time*. Dewey had to take advantage of all preparations he could affect while in Hong Kong, a task

⁸ Lisle A. Rose, *Power at Sea: The Age of Navalism 1890-1918*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 16.

⁹ George Dewey, *Autobiography of George Dewey: Admiral of the Navy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 178.

¹⁰ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 160.

complicated by the fact that his every move was readily observable to the civilian ships and foreign warships plying the harbor.¹¹

Of equal concern to Dewey was that the Spanish Navy would be fighting in its own waters and within easy range of numerous heavily fortified Spanish bases. Shortly after his appointment to the Asiatic Squadron, Dewey became painfully aware of the inadequacy of U.S. intelligence on the region when his request for information about the Philippines was answered with a sorely outdated 1876 report from the Office of Naval Intelligence.¹² The Office of Naval Intelligence was certainly not alone in being unprepared for war in the Philippines. Prior to the sinking of the *Maine*, even President William McKinley confessed, “I could not have told where those darned islands were within 2,000 miles.”¹³

Dewey’s challenges in the operational factor of space were exacerbated by challenges in the factor of *force*. Many historians have argued that Dewey commanded a fleet that was, in nearly every aspect, vastly superior to Montojo’s. In his autobiography, Dewey acknowledges that he surmised a distinct advantage in armament over his Spanish adversaries, mounting 53 “large guns” (above four inches) to 31 by the Spanish.¹⁴ A critical deficiency faced by Dewey, however, was in the *quantity* of available vessels. Although Dewey’s force of six ships of the line was slightly less than Montojo’s seven, the Spanish had more than 25 small gun-boats that could mount a serious threat if brought to action. Furthermore, rumors circulated in Hong Kong regarding the impregnability of Spanish shore defenses at Manila, a formidable arsenal of

¹¹ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 163.

¹² George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 175.

¹³ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 184.

¹⁴ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 203.

more than 225 guns, many of heavy caliber.¹⁵ In all, prospects for victory looked grim for Dewey's Asiatic Squadron, with the exclusive Hong Kong Club offering heavy betting odds against the Americans.¹⁶ Only days before formal war was declared, officers from the British Royal Navy entertained their American guests with a sort of farewell party. When it concluded, a British officer commented, "What a very fine set of fellows. But unhappily, we shall never see them again."¹⁷

Dewey's Growth into an Operational Leader

The manner in which Dewey proceeded in preparing for battle despite facing poor odds of success and considerable challenges attests to his qualities and effectiveness as an operational leader. According to U.S. Naval War College Professor Milan Vego, "The principal requirements for a successful operational leader are high intellect, strong personality, courage, boldness, and will to act, combined with extensive professional knowledge and experience."¹⁸ While all of these traits, as well as others, applied in various degrees to Dewey, boldness and experience are of particular importance as these were the primary influences on Dewey's planning and execution at Manila Bay.

By the time he was appointed Commodore of the Asiatic Squadron, Dewey was already renowned for his boldness. When his appointment to the prestigious position resulted in outspoken opponents who favored other officers, Assistant Navy Secretary Theodore Roosevelt was undeterred. Addressing a delegation of California Congressman, Roosevelt announced,

¹⁵ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 168.

¹⁶ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 192.

¹⁷ Healy and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 166.

¹⁸ Milan Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2007), X-13.

“Gentlemen, I can’t agree with you. We have looked up his record. We have looked him straight in the eyes. He is a fighter. We’ll not change now.”¹⁹

In Dewey’s case, boldness was born from experience. Within three years of his graduation from the United States Naval Academy in 1858, Dewey was assigned to the side-wheel steam frigate USS *MISSISSIPPI*. When the American Civil War broke out, *MISSISSIPPI* was assigned to the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, commanded by David Glasgow Farragut. Dewey’s first engagement occurred during Farragut’s attack on New Orleans, just one of several successful and high-profile endeavors that distinguished Farragut as an extremely aggressive and bold commander. While not assigned to Farragut’s flagship, USS *HARTFORD*, Dewey nevertheless was able to closely observe Farragut’s leadership style and quickly became a Farragut “disciple.” One of Farragut’s tactics, employed to considerable effectiveness at New Orleans, was to transit past heavily-fortified shore positions at night. This experience would prove pivotal to Dewey at Manila Bay.

Following the capture of New Orleans, Dewey learned from Farragut a lasting lesson on initiative. After weeks of trying, a Confederate gunboat slipped passed the Union blockade, prompting Farragut to assemble every one of his Commanding Officers onboard *HARTFORD*. As *MISSISSIPPI*’s Executive Officer, Dewey was allowed to attend. After all officers were seated, Farragut demanded an explanation for how the gunboat snuck by. A junior officer from another ship, who had been standing watch as Officer of the Deck the night the incident occurred, spoke out, admitting “I could have rammed her, sir, only I was awaiting orders.” Farragut, visibly disgusted, replied quietly, “Young man, you had the opportunity to make a great name for yourself in your profession, but you missed it. I doubt that you will get

¹⁹ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 140.

another.”²⁰ Dewey would not miss his opportunity when the time came.

Finally, some two years after his success at New Orleans, Farragut led a similarly bold attack on Mobile, Alabama. As Farragut’s ships proceeded up the channel between Forts Gaines and Morgan, USS *TECUMSEH* hit a mine (referred to during that period as a “torpedo”) and sank almost immediately. Behind *TECUMSEH*, USS *BROOKLYN* stopped in the channel and backed her engines, prompting Farragut to yell down from his position in the rigging of *HARTFORD*, “What’s the trouble?” When the reply from *BROOKLYN* came back, “Torpedoes!”, Farragut abruptly and famously issued what would become his signature command: “Damned the torpedoes! Go ahead!”²¹ Although Dewey was not present at the Battle of Mobile Bay, there is no doubt he was deeply impressed by reports of Farragut’s boldness of action in the face of the enemy.

In his autobiography, Dewey admits, “Farragut has always been my ideal of the naval officer: urbane, decisive, indomitable. Whenever I have been in a difficult situation, or in the midst of such confusion of details that the simple and right thing to do seemed hazy, I have often asked myself, „What would Farragut do?“ In the course of the preparations for Manila Bay I often asked myself this question.”²² Unsurprisingly, his response would turn out to be very Farragut-like.

Dewey’s Campaign Plan

Having distinguished himself as a bold leader during his Civil War service, Dewey would further distinguish himself as a well-prepared Commander during his command of the

²⁰ Healy and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 68.

²¹ S.S. Robison, *A History of Naval Tactics from 1530-1930: A History of Tactical Maxims* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1942), 651.

²² George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 50.

Asiatic Squadron. His preparations for war with Spain commenced even before he arrived in Nagasaki to take command of the Asiatic Squadron. Receiving notification of his pending appointment while serving as the President of the Board of Inspection and Survey in Washington, Dewey immediately and exhaustively studied charts on the Far East, placing particular emphasis on the Philippines.²³ Keenly attuned to the challenges of operational sustainment inherent with operating so far from his closest base, he undertook an investigation into the readiness of the ships assigned to his new squadron. His findings were disturbing: not one ship of the Asiatic squadron had a full peace time allowance for ammunition and powders, let alone a war time allowance.²⁴ Upon being informed by the Department of the Navy that merchant steamers would not transport ammunition due to safety concerns, Dewey coordinated through Roosevelt to have additional ammunition shipped via the USS *CONCORD*, outfitting at Mare Island for service with the Asiatic Squadron.²⁵ Demonstrating exceptional foresight and resourcefulness, he made a stop by Mare Island on his journey west, calling on the Commanding Officer of *CONCORD* to persuade him to light-load all supplies save his squadron's badly needed ammo, maximizing every inch of storage capacity.^{26 27} Additionally, Dewey recommended recharting *CONCORD*'s track across the Pacific to include a brief stop for coal in Hawaii, allowing *CONCORD* to make it to Japan where additional stores could be

²³ Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, 4.

²⁴ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 170.

²⁵ Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, 5.

²⁶ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 140.

²⁷ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 171.

easily procured.²⁸ Realizing that *CONCORD* was too small to carry more than half the required ammunition, Dewey arranged for the sloop-of-war USS *MOHICAN* to transport the balance. The speed in which these logistical arrangements were made was critical: *MOHICAN* arrived in Hong Kong only 48 hours before Dewey took his squadron to sea en route Manila Bay.²⁹

Dewey's other chief logistical concern while undertaking preparations at Hong Kong Harbor was coal. Dewey was well aware following news of USS *MAINE*'s sinking in Havana Harbor that war with Spain was imminent. Faced with the inevitable prospect of being directed to depart Hong Kong harbor by the British authorities and having no available American bases, Dewey undertook discreet negotiations to purchase merchant colliers to provide floating logistics support. Obtaining Navy Secretary Long's approval, Dewey purchased the British merchant ships *NANSHAN*, *McCULLOCH*, and *ZAFIRO*. Dewey, however, disobeyed Long's orders to arm these newly acquired auxiliaries, choosing rather ingeniously to register the ships as merchants registered and home ported in Guam, an exceedingly remote island in 1898 that Dewey regarded as an "almost mythical country."³⁰ ³¹ Additionally, he elected to hire and leave the British crews intact, augmenting them with a small contingent of U.S. Navy personnel. The sum of his efforts, combining operational logistics, operational deception, and operational protection, ensured these vital support vessels would not be ordered to leave the safety of Hong Kong harbor upon the official declaration of war, as well as their freedom to resupply in

²⁸ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 140.

²⁹ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 171.

³⁰ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 162.

³¹ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 191.

Japanese and Chinese ports.³²

Another critical consideration for Dewey was the operational movement of his forces. With fully half of his ships located a considerable distance from Hong Kong (USS *PETREL* was conducting Bering Sea fishery protection service³³), Dewey had to rapidly assemble all ships of his force for redistribution of ammunition, bunkering, tactical planning, dry docking for structural repairs, repainting of ships gray from peacetime white, and the countless other preparations required for a force sailing into battle. Effective use of transoceanic telegraph cables ensured the expeditious arrival of all his warships at Hong Kong, with USS *BALTIMORE* arriving from Honolulu on April 22nd, only two days before the governor of Hong Kong requested the withdrawal of all U.S. ships due to neutrality concerns.³⁴

Even as the ships of his force were being ordered to Hong Kong, Dewey embarked on an operational intelligence campaign to assist him in devising his plans for war. On April 23rd, Dewey sent a coded cablegram to O.F. Williams, the United States Consul at Manila, requesting information on Manila's defenses, the presence of mines, and Spanish fleet movements.³⁵ Despite very real threats to his safety from the Spanish government, Williams responded with information regarding the mounting of six new heavy guns at Corregidor, the laying of mines in Manila Bay, tidal currents, the disposition of Spanish surface forces, and Spanish efforts to fortify their land positions.³⁶ Furthermore, Williams relayed rumors from the

³² George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 192.

³³ Wilson, *Downfall of Spain*, 121.

³⁴ Wilson, *Downfall of Spain*, 122.

³⁵ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 180.

³⁶ Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, 14.

streets of Manila, including one detailing the organization of a coalition European naval force led by Germany being sent to defeat the Americans.³⁷ Dewey also used his own officers to gather intelligence, sending them ashore in Hong Kong disguised as tourists or businessmen, to obtain information from steamers arriving from the Philippines. Through this method, Dewey learned of the alleged Spanish policy requiring compulsory pilotage under guidance of Spanish pilots to navigate the treacherously mined Corregidor channel.³⁸ Having acquired knowledge of the currents and water depth in Subic Bay and Manila Bay, Dewey deduced that extensive mining of the channels into either port was problematic for the Spanish and that the countless reports of mines were nothing more than a ruse perpetuated by the Spanish government to deter an attack.³⁹ Through his deliberate analysis of the information gathered through this combination of highly resourceful yet amateur intelligence gathering methods, Dewey obtained a surprisingly accurate picture of what awaited him in Manila. In a cable to Secretary Long sent on March 31st, fully one month *before* the Battle of Manila Bay, Dewey outlined with remarkable precision the Spanish naval and land forces at Manila, concluding with confidence that he could take Manila in a single day.⁴⁰

Enabled by his productive intelligence campaign, Dewey now set out to finalize his battle plans. According to Joint Pub 3, preparing battle plans is one of several tasks encompassed by the command and control (C2) function, as are communicating the status of information, assessing the situation, and commanding subordinate forces. While Dewey

³⁷ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 187.

³⁸ Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, 15.

³⁹ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 157.

⁴⁰ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 157.

obtained a reputation for boldness during the Civil War, his planning was deliberate, thorough and cautious. Somewhat surprisingly, his planning process was very much a collaborative affair that drew extensively from the inputs of his subordinate commanders. “Day after day, he summoned his captains to discuss all the possibilities and eventualities of a conflict with the enemy. He gave them an opportunity to say when, where, and how the battle should be fought. From junior to senior he called upon them to express their opinions freely. If any man had a novel idea, it was given careful consideration.”⁴¹ In assessing Dewey’s command and control practices, an officer serving under Dewey in the Philippines observed Dewey “had the respect and confidence of every officer and man who served under him”, adding, “Prior to leaving Hong Kong, every contingency which might arise was considered and studied, and plans made to meet each one, so that when the time actually came to engage the enemy’s fleet, we had a prearranged plan which fitted the case perfectly.”⁴² Despite the absence of an official proclamation of war by the United States, the governor of Hong Kong sent word to Dewey on April 24th that British neutrality necessitated the departure of all U.S. ships within 24 hours. Dewey didn’t bother to wait for the full 24 hours to elapse for by that time, he had essentially completed combat preparations and the crafting of a bold plan that was executed to near-perfection less than a week later.

Having closely studied China, Dewey correctly surmised that so loosely an organized nation would be unable to enforce neutrality laws, prompting Dewey to steam his squadron from Hong Kong to Mirs Bay, an anchorage in Chinese territory 30 miles distant from Hong

⁴¹ Barrett, “Admiral George Dewey,” 801.

⁴² Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 171.

Kong.⁴³ There, he meticulously oversaw final preparations to include such details as jettisoning decorative woodwork on all of his ships to reduce the threat from splinters and the draping of chains over the side of the ships to provide some degree of armor.⁴⁴ Additionally, he relentlessly drilled his forces in critical skills like target practice and damage control, as well as in skills less likely to be needed like hand-to-hand combat. In the midst of all of the activity, a small tug entered Mirs Bay on the morning of April 27th to deliver an urgent cablegram from Secretary Long: “War has commenced between the United States and Spain. Proceed at once to Philippine Islands. Commence operations, particularly against the Spanish fleet. You must capture vessels or destroy. Use utmost endeavors.”⁴⁵ At once, Dewey summoned all commanding officers for a final meeting onboard *OLYMPIA* to discuss the latest intelligence on Manila and Subic Bays and promulgate his Commander’s guidance. Less than three hours after receiving Secretary Long’s cable, the American Asiatic Squadron steamed from Mirs Bay to seek out the Spanish fleet some 600 miles away. Dewey had little chance of achieving the element of surprise, however, as the Spanish Consul at Hong Kong informed Montojo by cable that “The enemy’s squadron sailed at 2 p.m. from the Bay of Mirs, and according to reliable accounts they sailed for Subic Bay to destroy our squadron and then will go to Manila.”⁴⁶ That is precisely what Dewey did, arriving first at Subic and dispatching two vessels to reconnoiter for the Spanish fleet before continuing on to Manila Bay, arriving in the early morning of May 1st, 1898.

⁴³ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 190.

⁴⁴ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 165.

⁴⁵ Sargent, *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign*, 22.

⁴⁶ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 175.

Consistent with Mahanian doctrine, Dewey would have identified the Spanish fleet as the enemy center of gravity. While he was confident that his squadron's morale, training readiness and advantage in projectile weight would give him a decided force advantage over the Spanish fleet, he had serious concerns regarding the heavy shore batteries overlooking the approaches to Manila Bay. Dewey observed in his autobiography, "If the guns commanding the entrance were well served, there was danger of damage to my squadron before it engaged the enemy's squadron."⁴⁷ Through his experience at the Board of Inspection and Survey and study of Mahanian doctrine, he was fully aware of the effectiveness of modern guns when fired from a stationary position and the legitimacy of Mahan's maxim that one shore-based gun was the equal of four guns of similar caliber afloat.⁴⁸ As such, his plan focused heavily on operational protection and passive defensive measures intended to neutralize this key Spanish critical strength. First off, Dewey decided to enter Manila Bay through Boca Grande, the wider of the two entrances into Manila Bay, to maximize the separation between his squadron and the Spanish shore batteries.⁴⁹ Second, Dewey planned to complicate the Spaniard's targeting from their shore batteries by transiting the approaches into Manila Bay at night with all navigation lights extinguished.⁵⁰ Despite Montojo's excellent intelligence on the movement of the American squadron and the advantageous position of his powerful shore batteries, the Spanish failed to engage the transiting U.S. ships until they were very nearly inside Manila Bay, even then only firing a couple of rounds with no effect. While the American's returned fire with a

⁴⁷ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 208.

⁴⁸ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 171.

⁴⁹ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 146.

⁵⁰ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 207.

few rounds of their own, Dewey had made it clear in his meetings with his Commanding Officers that the squadron would not stop to fight it out with the shore batteries but would remain focused on the objective: the Spanish fleet.⁵¹ Safely past the shore batteries and seeing no threat of the widely rumored Spanish mines, the American squadron had now only to wait for the sun to rise and seek out and destroy the Spanish fleet, a task which it carried out with very little difficulty and no loss of American life.

Dewey Ushers in American Imperialism

When the United States entered the Spanish American War, the strategic objective had been to liberate Cuba from alleged Spanish atrocities, not to gain colonial possessions. That objective decisively shifted three days after the defeat of the Spanish Pacific fleet when Dewey cabled to Secretary Long: “We control bay completely and can take city at any time, but have not sufficient men to hold.”⁵² While the prospect of seizing territory had not been seriously considered by the McKinley administration, Dewey’s cable prompted the mobilization of additional forces to do just that. Two significant challenges faced Dewey related to this effort. First, the Filipinos were mounting an insurgency against the Spanish forces occupying the countryside around Manila. Second, ships of the powerful German navy were conspicuously patrolling the waters adjacent to Manila Bay, threatening a move to claim the Philippines for their own.

Almost immediately following the Montojo’s defeat, Spanish General Don Basilio, realizing the hopelessness of his situation, had communicated through intermediaries his

⁵¹ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 146.

⁵² Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 195.

willingness to surrender his 31,000 ground forces to Dewey's squadron.⁵³ Dewey was unwilling to accept the offer, fearful that his lack of sufficient occupational forces would prompt looting and widespread Spanish bloodshed at the hands of the Filipino insurgents. Accordingly, he waited for American expeditionary troops under the command of Major General Wesley Merritt, USA, to arrive.

Even as Dewey was declining the offer of Spanish surrender, exiled Filipino leader Emilio Aguinaldo arrived in Manila Bay seeking to create a native, independent government under American advisors.⁵⁴ Realizing that the growing number of native insurgents could be of assistance in pushing the Spanish forces from their garrisons into the city of Manila, Dewey assisted Aguinaldo by allowing the insurgents use of captured Spanish guns and ammunition but was careful not to forge an official alliance that might imply official recognition of a Filipino state.⁵⁵ Unhindered by Dewey, the band of 1,000 Filipino insurgents successfully drove the nearly 13,000 Spaniards from their garrison on May 29th, forcing their withdrawal to Manila. Emboldened by his success, Aguinaldo now proclaimed establishment of the "First Republic of the Philippines" with himself as dictator. Despite his delicate and conditional support of Aguinaldo, Dewey faced a major problem: three separate authorities were now attempting to exercise rule over the Philippines.⁵⁶

When Merritt arrived with 8,500 troops in early August, Dewey continued his negotiations for a Spanish surrender with General Don Basilio's successor, General Firmin

⁵³ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 273.

⁵⁴ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 222.

⁵⁵ George Dewey, *Autobiography*, 247.

⁵⁶ Symonds, *Decision at Sea*, 186.

Jaudenes, eventually obtaining an agreement from Jaudenes that he would surrender Spanish forces provided they met American resistance. As Dewey later recalled, Jaudenes’ “honor demanded that. So I had to fire, to kill a few people.”⁵⁷ The agreement thus made, Dewey and Merritt carried out what amounted to a staged joint attack from land and sea on August 10th, prompting a swift Spanish surrender. With the Spaniards out of the power struggle, the Americans would shift their focus to Aguinaldo and embark on a counter-insurgency campaign that would ultimately prove lengthy, costly and bloody. Recognizing that the challenges inherent in a counter-insurgency campaign required professional diplomacy as well as military might, Dewey wrote his friend, Senator Redfield Proctor of Vermont, “This appears to me an occasion for the triumph of statesmanship rather than of arms.”⁵⁸

To combat the threat of the Germans from clawing their way into the power vacuum, Dewey established a naval blockade of Manila Bay. Despite initially having far fewer ships than the Germans would ultimately operate in the region, the aggressiveness in which the Americans enforced the blockade prompted cooperation from most foreign naval vessels. Numerous situations developed that risked open conflict between American and German warships, but Dewey repeatedly distinguished himself as a highly effective diplomat that balanced firm resolve with delicacy, projecting strength without being heavy-handed.⁵⁹

If Dewey’s skillful diplomacy with the Japanese, Germans, Spaniards, British, and Filipinos is somewhat surprising in view of his reputation for boldness, so too was his perception of the importance of information operations during the age that gave rise to

⁵⁷ Traxel, *Birth of the American Century*, 224.

⁵⁸ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 239.

⁵⁹ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 209.

muckraking and yellow journalism. John Barrett, a newspaper correspondent who was embarked onboard *OLYMPIA* from May 1898 to March 1899, observed that Dewey was lenient in his press censorship, adding that nobody “could rival the Admiral in quick perception of what was permissible news and what was not, together with the rare faculty of showing the correspondent with unfailing urbanity why this or that sentence should be changed or omitted.”⁶⁰ An example of his keen awareness of the value of public perception occurred during preparations for the joint staged attack on Manila. After reviewing a proposed release that referred to the pending bombardment of the city, Dewey recommended instead the phrase “reduce the defenses of the city”. He explained, “It is necessary for us to remember that we are making history. If we left in words which implied no respect for noncombatants, women and children and property, we would be censured for it by the future historian.”⁶¹

Dewey’s Relevance in the 21st Century

The term “operational art”, described as the theory and practice of preparing for and conducting military operations on land, at sea and in the air, was first coined by the Russians in the 1920s, more than two decades *after* Dewey’s victory at Manila Bay.⁶² Despite this, there should be little argument that Dewey practiced operational art in the design of his campaign plan in the western Pacific, even if he would not have recognized the term. What makes Dewey’s success relevant today is not his textbook use of Mahanian tactics, but in his careful and deliberate crafting of a battle plan that mitigated sizeable deficiencies in the operational factors of space, force and time. Several recent conflicts have shown that Dewey’s approach

⁶⁰ Barrett, “Admiral George Dewey,” 806.

⁶¹ Healey and Kutner, *The Admiral*, 231.

⁶² Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, I-5.

would be appropriate more than 100 years later.

Take, for example, Dewey's resourcefulness in combating his logistical challenges and lack of cargo lift capacity. Faced with similar challenges while preparing for the Falklands War of 1982, the British did *exactly* as Dewey did, chartering merchant container ships, commercial tankers and civilian cruise liners to transport cargo, fuel and troops 8,000 miles from the United Kingdom to the Falklands theater.⁶³ Furthermore, the British decision to leave behind wheeled vehicles to maximize loading space for tracked vehicles echoes of Dewey's efforts to sacrifice less critical supplies for vital ammunition onboard *CONCORD*.⁶⁴

Vego contends, "Intelligence should provide the operational commander timely, accurate, and relevant information about the enemy forces" order of battle and capabilities, and the enemy's strengths and weaknesses."⁶⁵ Dewey's aggressive conduct of an intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) campaign despite having practically no professional intelligence resources paved the way for his success. Of particular importance was Dewey's careful consideration of the rumored threat of mines, ultimately leading to his dismissal of such reports. The failure to accurately ascertain enemy capabilities, despite vastly superior intelligence capabilities than Dewey enjoyed, has proven disastrous to many modern commanders during conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Israel. By dissecting the Spanish disinformation campaign and comprehensively war gaming every potential Spanish course of action, Dewey avoided falling into the trap of overestimating the strength of his enemy and postponing his attack, despite the prevailing international opinion that the Americans were

⁶³ Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflicts* (London: Brassey's, 1991), 257.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, 253.

⁶⁵ Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, VIII-28.

doomed from the start. In essence, Dewey *knew his enemy* and knew *when* to press the issue to preclude the Spaniards from reinforcing or further constructing shore defenses.

In an August 13, 2010 New York Times article, journalist Thom Shanker observed, “Mastery of battlefield tactics and a knack for leadership are only prerequisites. Generals and other top officers are now expected to be city managers, cultural ambassadors, public relations whizzes and politicians as they deal with multiple missions and constituencies in the war zone, in allied capitals — and at home.”⁶⁶ Dewey, it appears, was ahead of his time. His astute media awareness, coupled with the delicacy in which he handled myriad political and cultural sensitivities, should serve as an example for modern day military leaders facing similar “wicked problems” that are growing increasingly complex in an age of globalism.

Perhaps most importantly, modern students should seriously question Andidora’s assertion that Dewey’s material advantages in age and capability of his ships somehow guaranteed his success at Manila Bay. History is rife with examples of superior forces falling to inferior ones. The American Revolutionary War, the Japanese invasion of Malaya in 1941, and the Japanese defeat at Midway in 1942 all concluded with “underdog” victories. Advantages in the operational factor of force have often been offset by hubris, with operational leaders relying on sheer numbers or technology rather than careful and deliberate planning to identify and exploit enemy critical weaknesses. Vego makes the point, “Experience shows that no new technologies, no matter how advanced, can replace operational art,” adding “the excessive focus on tactics of platforms and weapons/sensors reduces all fighting to simple targeting and shooting.”⁶⁷ Dewey’s application of operational art despite enjoying material

⁶⁶ Thom Shanker, “Win Wars? Today’s Generals Must Also Politick and do P.R.,” *New York Times*, 13 August 2010, <http://www.cnas.org/node/4859> (accessed 25 October 2010).

⁶⁷ Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare*, xvii.

advantages over his Spanish adversaries ensured his forces focused on the enemy center of gravity while mitigating his enemy's critical strengths.

Finally, Dewey's performance as an operational leader is worthy of careful consideration. *The Joint Operating Environment 2010* published by U.S. Joint Forces Command observes, "Those commanders who have listened and absorbed what their subordinates had to say were those who recognized what was actually happening in combat, because they had acculturated themselves to learning from the experiences of others."⁶⁸ Dewey's collaborative approach to planning for war, which drew heavily from the inputs of his subordinates, supports this observation. An MIT, Carnegie Mellon and Union College joint research effort yielded a 2010 report that concluded, among other things, "In groups where one person dominated, the group was less collectively intelligent than in groups where the conversational turns were more evenly distributed."⁶⁹ Arguably, Dewey's willingness to participate in, rather than dominate, planning efforts despite his positional authority and bold predisposition was the critical enabler to his success. With the adoption of the 2007 *Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* and its underlying emphasis on partnerships and shared responsibility, that quality is becoming increasingly important.

There can be no mistaking that experience matters in the development of our military leaders. Dewey's experience, particularly his participation in the American Civil War, provided him with real-world tactical expertise as well as a highly successful role model to

⁶⁸ *The Joint Operating Environment 2010*, http://www.jfcom.mil/newlink/storyarchive/2010/JOE_2010_o.pdf (accessed 25 October 2010), 72.

⁶⁹ "Collective Intelligence: Number of Women in Groups Linked to Effectiveness in Solving Difficult Problems." *Science Daily*, Sep 30, 2010, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/09/100930143339.htm> (accessed 25 October 2010).

emulate. The forging of similar leaders in today's Navy is problematic due to the dearth of naval conflicts since the conclusion of World War II. *The Joint Operating Environment 2010* heralds the importance of "providing the education so that future leaders can understand the political, strategic, historical, and cultural framework of a more complex world, as well as possess a thorough grounding in the nature of war, past, present, and future."⁷⁰ Accordingly, future leaders in the U.S. Navy must continue studying historical applications of operational art. In doing so, they would be wise not to overlook Dewey.

⁷⁰ *The Joint Operating Environment 2010*, http://www.jfcom.mil/newslink/storyarchive/2010/JOE_2010_o.pdf (accessed 25 October 2010), 70.

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