

# The Manila Incident: The German-American Conflict of 1898 in the Philippines

**Moises Levi ORLINO**

University of the Philippines, Diliman

msorlino1@up.edu.ph

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1542-7608>

*“I shall stop each vessel whatever may be her colors! And if she does not stop, I shall fire at her! And that means war, do you know, Sir? And I tell you, if Germany wants war, all right we are ready!”*

Rear-Admiral Dewey, 1898

## ABSTRACT

With the declaration of the Spanish-American War in 1898 caused by the sinking of the American battleship, USS Maine, the American Navy, led by the Commodore George Dewey, quickly found themselves in the Philippine Islands as part of the mission to neutralize the Spanish navy in Asia. In the Manila Bay, early in May, the German ships led by Vice Admiral Otto von Diederichs gradually entered the Manila waters as neutral ships. Their concentrations and movements were questioned. From May to July 1898, in the Philippine theater of the Spanish-American War, an incident between a belligerent nation, the United States, and a neutral nation occurred. This incident has been known to be the Manila Incident of 1898, where hostilities such as firing shots by American ships against the German ships happened. On these notes, this paper will focus on the said event from the declaration of war by the Spaniards in late April, up to August 1898 with the withdrawal of a majority of the German ships. Likewise, this paper will give a historical narrative of the event and will attempt to give reasons for the presence of the German Navy on the Islands. The researcher will also discuss how the conflict between Dewey and Diederichs started, and how it almost started another war. Lastly, the contribution of the press will also be discussed.

**Keywords:** *The Spanish-American War. Manila Incident. Philippine Military History.*

## Introduction

**B**efore the end of the nineteenth century, war had been raging on the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. The United States of America was at war with a weakened Spanish Empire. The latter, being only a remnant of its glorious past, and the sun for them was about to set. Whereas the former, exhilarated by their jingoism and manifest destiny, was just about to make a name in the international world. The Spanish-American War of 1898 started with the Cuban revolt of February 1895, which the Americans supported and sensationalized with its yellow journalism, mostly led by William Randolph Hearst and James Pulitzer who wrote stories of Spanish atrocities against its colony. By the next year of the same month, the *USS Maine*, an American battleship, exploded and sank, killing 266 American crew at Havana Harbor. On April 21, the US demanded that Spain withdraw from its colony or face sanctions. As a result of the threat, diplomatic ties between the two countries were severed after two days. On the next day, Spain declared war against the US; the latter followed the next day.

At the beginning of the war, the Americans captured two Spanish steamers *Buonaventura* and *Pedro*, and blocked all Cuban ports. It was Admiral William Sampson who led the Cuban theater. On April 27, Commodore George Dewey received an order from President McKinley to bring and sail the American Asiatic Squadron to the Philippines, a Spanish colony in Asia. On the first day of May, Dewey sighted the remaining Spanish ships in Manila, all under the command of Rear-Admiral Patricio Montojo of Spain and the Battle of Manila Bay would commence. There were two results of this battle: the victory of Dewey, and the uncertain fate of Manila. The world's attention was now fixated on the United States. Will US President William McKinley leave the Spanish colony, or occupy it as their new territory, similar to what they did in Hawaii the same year?

These were the immediate happenings and questions of the dry season of 1898 while everyone knows that the Americans won the war before the year had ended and concluded with Spain relinquishing all rights to all her colonies, both in the Indies and the Pacific as stated in the Treaty of Paris. But, before the signing of the treaty, an incident between the Americans and the Germans, the latter being a neutral party of the war, ensued.

This incident, known as the Manila Incident, will be the primary coverage of the paper. This incident was part of the Spanish-American War, but in the Philippine Theater, it was a naval misunderstanding that ended up as a diplomatic blunder for the Germans. During these years, Germany has been

busy expanding its sphere of influence by gaining new parts of the world, mostly Africa and some parts of China, even stretching as far as the Pacific Islands. The two imperialists would meet up in Manila from May until August of 1898 causing public unrest and suspicion against the Germans that was fueled by journalists in the US, Manila, Hong Kong, and neighboring countries.

The objective of this paper is to first give a historical narrative of the Manila Incident, showing both the American and German perspectives of the conflict. The researcher will also attempt to discuss the role of the press during the incident. Ultimately, the scope of this study will include events from May of 1898, until August of the same year. However, to give a wider view and context to the said event, there will also be a brief discussion of the Spanish-American War, especially the Philippine Theater. Moreover, this paper will attempt to provide a cursory account of German history during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to supplement the overall narrative.

The paper consists of three major parts. First, will be the discussion of the American movement since the declaration of the war, the Battle of Manila Bay, its aftermath, and its blockade policy of Dewey. In the second part, will be a discussion of the German movement, particularly its policy of expansion, which was very explicit in the late nineteenth century. Included in this section is the purpose of the German ships in Manila, and their movements in the Archipelago. To end the discussion, an examination of the issues that arose between the two states, such as the misunderstanding on the blockade, the issue of some German ships, and the media who most benefited from the incident.

To help construct a historical narrative of the event and to examine it, six guide questions were put forward to discuss the topic more thoroughly. First and foremost, why were there German ships in Manila to begin with? Second, what were the reasons behind their presence in the colony? Third, how did the conflict between a belligerent country and a neutral nation start? Fourth, how did the nations involved act? Fifth, on the part of the press, how did they contribute to the incident? Lastly, an account branded the incident as a diplomatic blunder.<sup>1</sup> There will be an attempt by the researcher to explain why it was called a blunder, which eventually affected the German-American ties.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Clark, "Introduction," in *Germany, the Philippines, and the Spanish American War: Four Accounts by Officers of the Imperial German Navy*, ed. Karl-Heinz Wionzek, trans. Thomas Clark (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2012), xiii–xxv, xix.

## Gathering the Sources

For this study, the researcher was still able to gather viable and crucial primary sources. He owes most of the references to the book edited by Karl-Heinz Wionzek entitled *Germany, The Philippines, and the Spanish-American War: Four Accounts by Officers of the Imperial German Navy* (GPSAW), published by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines in 2012. Inside this book is a record of the then Vice Admiral Otto von Diederichs who commanded the whole Cruiser Squadron of the Far Eastern Station. This account by Diederichs was also a response to Admiral George Dewey's account of the incident. The next is an article entitled *The Activities of S.M.S. "Irene" in Philippine Waters, 1896-1899*, written by Captain-Lieutenant Friedrich Pohl, an officer of the *SMS Irene*. The next are two reports written by Gotlieb Becker, an officer of the *SMS Arcona*, and the account of Rear Admiral Max Pluddemann of the Imperial German Navy regarding the Spanish-American War.

The researcher also utilized the *Autobiography of George Dewey: Admiral of the Navy* published in 1913 to provide the American account and perspective of the incident. Lester Shippee also wrote an assessment of the incident in 1927 which the researcher used to further discuss what had happened in Berlin before the incident. Due to the lack of available copies, the opinions and statements by the press will all be based on the mentions by the researcher's sources. As a consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic, most libraries and archives were still closed or have yet to open to the public; hence, digital copies of primary sources accessible online were used. Because of this, the researcher was not able to consult Nathan Sargent's *Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign (1947)*, a rich source containing other documents.

## The Coming of the Americans

The Spanish-American War broke out in the dry season of 1898 caused first by the Cuban Revolt of 1895 and the sinking of the USS *Maine* in 1898. The Americans, in an uproar, immediately blamed the Spaniards for the sinking of the American battleship, a result of the sensationalized journalism of its time. The public commotion demanded justice for the 266 American crewmen who died. Moreover, because of their jingoistic attitudes as "protector of democracy," the US Government under McKinley was forced to send an ultimatum to the Spanish Government through Stewart Woodford, an American minister to Spain. The ultimatum was for Spain to evacuate Cuba. However, Spain responded by dismissing all Spanish-

American diplomatic ties. On April 24, the Spanish Empire under Alfonso XIII and Queen Regent Maria Christina declared war against the US. The next day, the latter also declared war.<sup>2</sup>

The war had two theaters: the Cuban theater in the Indies, and the Philippine theater in the Pacific. The US, even before declaring war, already captured the *Buonaventura* and *Pedro*, two Spanish steamships had anchored in Cuba. After that, Admiral Sampson declared a blockade on all ports of the colony. While on the other side, McKinley had quickly acted, when two days after the declaration, he ordered Commodore Dewey to bring the US Asiatic Squadron to the Spanish colony in Asia: Manila, and bring it to submission.<sup>3</sup> However, Dewey recalled that on the afternoon of April 25, he had received a cabled telegram by Secretary Long with the following statement: “War has commenced between the United States and Spain. *Proceed at once to the Philippine Islands.* Commence operations, particularly against the Spanish fleet. You must capture vessels or destroy. Use utmost endeavor.” (Italics of the researcher)<sup>4</sup> With Dewey, came the following ships to Manila: *USS Olympia*, an armored cruiser, the flagship; *USS Baltimore*, a steel cruiser; *USS Raleigh*, *USS Boston*, *USS Concord*, *USS Petrel*, and *USS McCulloch*; also, two transport ships.<sup>5</sup>

The American squadron arrived on the night of April 30, alerting the Spanish government in the Philippines, causing them to call all available Spanish ships for its defense. A list of the Spanish ships who were called are as follows: *Reina Christina*, steel cruiser and flagship; *Castilla*, *Don Juan de Austria*, *Don Antonio de Ulloa*, *Velasco*, *Isla de Cuba*, *Isla de Luzon*, *Isla de Mindanao*, *Elcano*, *General Lezo*, *Marques de Duero*, and *Argos*. Most of these ships were wood cruisers or small gunboats, and all were under the command of Spanish Rear Admiral Montojo.<sup>6</sup> It was the morning of May 1 when the first shot by the Americans was heard; and immediately, the cruisers *Maria Christina* and *Castilla* were burning, as the latter was made of wood as compared to the steel ships of the Americans. Montojo was transferred to the *Isla de Cuba* while the *Raleigh*, *Boston*, and *Petrel* were ordered to finish the destruction of all ships. The very same day, the Battle of Manila was finished. A stunning victory for Dewey who did not just eliminate the Spanish fleet, but also captured a Fort in Cavite. The battle reported a casualty of only

<sup>2</sup> Max Pluddemann, “The Spanish-American War,” in *Germany, the Philippines, and the Spanish American War: Four Accounts by Officers of the Imperial German Navy*, ed. Karl-Heinz Wionzek, trans. Thomas Clark (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2012), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Pluddemann, “The Spanish-American War,” 55.

<sup>4</sup> George Dewey, *Autobiography of George Dewey, Admiral of the Navy*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), 252.

<sup>5</sup> Pluddemann, “The Spanish-American War,” 58.

<sup>6</sup> Pluddemann, “The Spanish-American War,” 57.

eight wounded men on the American side and without any deaths. But, for the Spaniards, Montojo lost all ships, and 400 men.<sup>7</sup>

However, the day was not yet done for the Americans. Dewey immediately declared a blockade of Manila while also capturing a fort in Cavite. In principle, Dewey controlled the sea traffic of Manila, but reinforcement to take control of the coastline was needed as the Navy did not have the land troops to invade the land. For this very reason, additional four ships coming from Australia arrived in Manila and transported 5,000 men.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the blockade was only announced to the Governor-General of Manila through a letter.<sup>9</sup> This blockade by the Americans was one of the main causes of misunderstanding between the Americans and neutral parties such as the Germans, French, Austro-Hungarians, Japanese, and English as all were present in Manila Bay at the same time.

## The Coming of the Germans

### The German Empire and Expansionism

Before the researcher discusses the movement of the Imperial German Navy, it is important to give a brief background of Germany, specifically, its rapid growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and its diplomatic ties.

Germany was considered a late-comer imperialist that needed to first stabilize its region before the dream of colonizing any territory outside Europe. Therefore, in January 1871, a new German Empire was founded and Wilhelm I, King of Prussia was proclaimed the German Emperor, while Otto von Bismarck was made Chancellor and Prime Minister of Prussia.<sup>10</sup> The first step of Germany as an imperialist and colonizer happened in 1878 with its treaty of friendship with the chiefs of Jaluit Island, part of the Marshall Islands.<sup>11</sup> In 1885, the Berlin West Africa Conference decided that Africa should be partitioned among European powers. Here, Germany acquired

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<sup>7</sup> Pluddemann, "The Spanish-American War," 58.

<sup>8</sup> Pluddemann, "The Spanish-American War," 59.

<sup>9</sup> Otto von Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898: A Personal Remark on the Autobiography of George Dewey, Admiral of the Navy," in *Germany, the Philippines, and the Spanish American War: Four Accounts by Officers of the Imperial German Navy*, ed. Karl-Heinz Wionzek, trans. Thomas Clark (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2012), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Clark, "Chronology of Events," in *Germany, the Philippines, and the Spanish American War: Four Accounts by Officers of the Imperial German Navy*, ed. Karl-Heinz Wionzek, trans. Thomas Clark (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2012), 63.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, "Chronology of Events," 63.

what Clarke remarked as the "lion's share."<sup>12</sup> This is true as Germany acquired Southwest Africa or today's Namibia, Cameroon, and Togo; German East Africa or today's Tanzania, Rwanda Burundi.<sup>13</sup> Germany's expansionist foreign policy was now clear as day.

More acquisitions happened in the Pacific as the Germans claimed the Caroline Islands, (by raising a German flag on Yap Island). Reacting to this, the Spaniards protested and won the case against the Germans. However, it was considered a partial victory as the latter was given the right to trade. By the same year, Germany entered a treaty with Great Britain, ending with the Germans occupying the Marshall Islands. By the next year, Germany had expanded to the Solomon Islands. In 1887, Germany, for the first time, entered a conflict with the US about the possession of Samoa. This ended with a tripartite protectorate between the two and Great Britain. By 1896, Germany's expansionism reached China with its occupation of Tsingtao and gaining a 99-year lease from China.<sup>14</sup> Based on these accounts, it is crystal clear that Germany was quickly catching up with the other imperialist countries. The question is, which territory were they targeting next?

### Early German-Philippine Interaction

By the time the Philippine Revolution of 1896 reached Europe, Germany, concerned over her nationals in the colony, sent two ships to evacuate Germans and other European nationals who were all dependent on them. On November 25, 1896, the *SMS Arcona*, a cruiser, reached Manila and immediately alerted the German Consul. Gotlieb Becker, Commandant of the ship, reported that a French cruiser was also present, as well as an English and Spanish gunboat. In the consul's list of German nationals, there were about 77 men, 10 women, and 11 children that boarded the ship for security.<sup>15</sup>

By next month, a second German ship will be anchored in Manila. *SMS Irene* arrived in Manila on Christmas Day because Rear-Admiral Tirpitz wanted to evaluate the crisis in the colony with his own eyes. It also has the

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<sup>12</sup> Clark, "Introduction," xv.

<sup>13</sup> "Facing the Past to Liberate the Future: Colonial Africa in the German Mind," last modified in 2005, [https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge\\_detail/facing-the-past-to-liberate-the-future-colonial-africa-in-the-german-mind/#:~:text=Germany%20then%20acquired%20German%20South](https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/facing-the-past-to-liberate-the-future-colonial-africa-in-the-german-mind/#:~:text=Germany%20then%20acquired%20German%20South).

<sup>14</sup> Clark, "Chronology," 63-65.

<sup>15</sup> Gottlieb Becker, "From the Reports by S.M. Ships: Two Reports by Commander Becker, Commandant of S.M. Cruiser 'Arcona' to the Head of the Cruiser Division [Rear-Admiral Tirpitz] on the Situation in Manila," in *Germany, the Philippines, and the Spanish American War: Four Accounts by Officers of the Imperial German Navy*, ed. Karl-Heinz Wionzek, trans. Thomas Clark (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2012), 47-53.

same mission as the *Arcona*: to give security to European nationals in case of danger brought by the Filipino revolutionaries. These Germans also observed the execution of Jose Rizal on December 30 because they were expecting a massive uprising during that day, but to their fortune, Pohl described the day as "quiet." *Irene* left the harbor by January 3, 1897.<sup>16</sup>

### The German Arrival

The *Irene* returned to the tropical colony, but this time with a more serious business. She received an order to return to Manila and on May 6, 1898, coming from Nagasaki, she entered Manila Bay unaware of the blockade declared by Dewey. As a protocol, the German consul boarded the ship and met the captain of *Irene*, Captain Ernst Obenheimer, both unaware of the blockade due to the lack of communication between American and German officials. This led to the first German ship not reporting to Dewey.<sup>17</sup> A conflict that would arise from this unawareness will be discussed later.

Three days later, *Cormoran* came in the dark early morning. The coming of this second German ship created issues that will be discussed as well later. According to Dewey, a small boat was supposed to board her, so that the Americans can identify the vessel, making sure that the ship was not a Spanish reinforcement. Dewey reiterated that all these processes were part of the laws of the blockade. But *Cormoran* was not deterred, so the Americans were forced to fire a shot to the surprise of the captain.<sup>18</sup> More German ships came in the coming days.

The presence of two German cruisers makes one ask, why are they in Manila, a current battle zone. Diederichs provided an answer to this question. On June 3, he received a telegraph coming from the mainland that the Emperor, Wilhelm II ordered him to proceed to Manila. But his flagship, *SMS Kaiser* was in repairs at Nagasaki and accompanying the *SMS Prinzess Wilhelm*. So Diederichs ordered the *SMS Kaiserin Augusta* to sail from China to Manila, with him onboard.<sup>19</sup> He also ordered that the *Kaiser* and *Kaiserin Augusta* should proceed to Manila after their repairs, and another ship was also bound for Manila: *SMS Darmstadt*, a transport ship bringing and relieving soldiers. With the order from the emperor, all these ships were

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<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Pohl, "The Activities of S.M.S. 'Irene' in The Philippine Waters, 1896-1899," in *Germany, the Philippines, and the Spanish American War: Four Accounts by Officers of the Imperial German Navy*, ed. Karl-Heinz Wionzek, trans. Thomas Clark (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2012), 39-40.

<sup>17</sup> Pohl, "The Activities of the S.M.S. 'Irene' in The Philippine Waters, 1896-1899," 40.

<sup>18</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 254-256.

<sup>19</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 1.



coming for Manila. Diederichs, in his practicality, made Manila a transition place where German ships carried out their relief activities on one another. Thus, the reason why the German cruisers were concentrated in Manila. Diederichs also blamed the lack of good telegraphic and postal communication with all the German ships. But Diederichs had a more explicit and direct reason regarding his presence: he was "under the impression that [his] presence at Manila had only been required because of a *cry for aid* from the Germans in Manila."<sup>20</sup> It seemed like Diederichs had the same reason as the Germans two years ago. Dewey cried out why the Germans would send its best warships to Manila for "one German commercial house".<sup>21</sup> But Dewey was wrong. There was not just one business under the protection of Germany but also those European commercial houses by European nationals who did not have a consulate in Manila. Diederichs corrected Dewey and listed eleven businesses that were under the protection of Germany.<sup>22</sup>

In his words, "I had no political instructions...His Imperial Majesty the Kaiser had altogether rejected any idea of the establishment of a German Protectorate over the Philippines."<sup>23</sup> This implies that Diederichs, a career military man, had no political ambitions and followed the orders of his superiors rather than move on his own. But Shippee gave us a closer view of Berlin where most of the diplomacy happened. On May 11, the German Secretary of State of the Foreign Affairs, Bernhard Bulow received a cabled telegram from Prince Henry of Prussia who was at Hong Kong and commanding the German Asiatic Squadron, reporting that a German merchant who came from Manila reported to him that a *just* rebellion was happening in the islands, and that "the natives would gladly place themselves under the protection of a European power, especially Germany"<sup>24</sup> When Bulow had reported the following to the Kaiser, he suggested "to send Admiral von Diederichs to Manila, and report the situation, *so that the government might be able to determine what to do* before the insurgents get the upper hand" (Italics of the researcher).<sup>25</sup> The Kaiser was also wary of the situation and balance of power with the outcome of Manila. For him, he would only concede and let go of the Philippines if they were given equal compensation. Thus, Diederichs was ordered to proceed with all the ships at his command to Manila.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 2.

<sup>21</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 257.

<sup>22</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 5.

<sup>24</sup> Lester Burrell Shippee, "Germany and the Spanish-American War," *The American Historical Review* 30, no. 4 (1925): 754. doi:[10.2307/1835668](https://doi.org/10.2307/1835668).

<sup>25</sup> Shippee, "Germany," 765.

<sup>26</sup> Shippee, "Germany" 765-766.

One thing is true about this, the Filipinos admired Germany because Jose Rizal spoke highly of the Germans while he was there, and the Germans seem sympathetic to their cause.<sup>27</sup> Thus, revolutionaries suggesting that the whole country should be under Germany were not baseless at all. In fact, on January 29, 1897, a Filipino petition was written by the government-in-exile in Hong Kong, addressed to the Kaiser, it was sent through the German Consulate. The petition asked for help, in any form.<sup>28</sup> When this was reported to him, Kaiser Wilhelm II made this statement: "The wish to come under German sovereignty is common... *I am determined to buy the Philippines at the first opportunity or take them away from the Spanish* when their 'liquidation' comes." (Italics of the researcher)<sup>29</sup> But immediate action to this was impractical for the Germans, as its European neighbors might come into an alliance against them. Thus, only in 1898, they were given a chance to come to the Philippines.

It is now clear that Germany had three reasons for coming: two explicit and one hidden. On the one hand, the explicit excuses were being an aid to the German nationals and all European nationals and relieving and supplying all German ships all at the same time. Taking the opportunity that they are all at the same place and at the same time. The hidden one on the other hand, was making sure they are in the Philippines if opportunity revealed itself to them, and immediate action from the Germans would be needed, thus, the concentration of the Imperial German Navy.

The German ships continued to anchor in Manila. By June 6, the transport ship *Darmstadt* arrived, bringing with her, 1,400 fresh soldiers from the mainland. This made Dewey very anxious as it equaled the American Forces in Manila.<sup>30</sup> On the day of the declaration of Philippine Independence by General Emilio Aguinaldo, Diederichs arrived onboard the *Kaiserin Augusta*, and was still unaware of any American blockade as he explained "[there were] no sign of any blockade; the entrance...was not guarded by any ships."<sup>31</sup> On June 18, *Kaiser* Diederichs' flagship arrived. This will be

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<sup>27</sup> Augusto de Viana, "The Development of the Philippine Foreign Service during the Revolutionary Period and the Filipino- American War (1896-1906): A Story of Struggle from the Formation of Diplomatic Contacts to the Philippine Republic," *The Antoninus Journal: A Multidisciplinary Journal of the UST Graduate School* 2 (2015): 22.

<sup>28</sup> Doroteo Cortez, Jose Basa, and A.G. Medina, *The Petition by Friends of Rizal to German Emperor William II*, ed. Karl-Heinz Wionzek (Hong Kong, 1897), 1-7.

<sup>29</sup> Volker Schult, "The Philippines and the Kaiser's 'World Politics,'" *University of San Carlos Publications* 33, no. 1 (2005): 2, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 256-257.

<sup>31</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 2.

followed by the *Prinzess Wilhelm* two days later.<sup>32</sup> At the end of June 1898, there was one battleship, one heavy cruiser, two light cruisers, one cruiser, and transport, all German.

But this was not to be misrepresented as German aggression as other neutral ships were also starting to arrive and anchor by each day. British ship *Linnet* arrived on May 2; British *Immortalite* on May 7. For the French, *Briueux* arrived on May 5. For the Japanese, it was *Itsukushima* who represented them on May 10.<sup>33</sup> Additional ships for these countries arrived in the latter days of June. British Gunboat *Rattler* and *Bonaventure* on June 22; a cruiser *Iphigenia*, gunboat *Plover* on the 25th. The same day, the French Battleship *Bayard* of French Rear-Admiral de la Bedoliere anchored in Manila. For the Japanese, the cruiser *Akitsushima* arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and the cruiser *Matsushima* was traveling to Manila.<sup>34</sup> It seemed like a naval battle may occur any minute among these major powers. Fortunately, this was far from happening.

Meanwhile, the Germans were not idle in Manila Bay. When *Darmstadt* arrived on June 6, she went to Mariveles until June 9 then sailed to Tsingtao, her destination. She returned to Manila on June 26 until 30. Contrary to Dewey's belief of the *Darmstadt* in the Bay for four weeks.<sup>35</sup> But on Diederichs' log, she was only in Manila for eight days.<sup>36</sup> Diederichs concluded that Dewey must have seen only its first arrival and later again on its return, but not in between. Making him think it was there for a month. The *Irene* was also busy while she was in Manila. On May 9, Captain Obenheimer of *Irene*, and Captain Brussatis of *Cormoran* visited Dewey in his occupied Fort in Cavite and requested to visit the battlefield with the Americans. Dewey granted this request. On May 11, with Dewey's promotion to Rear Admiral, the Germans participated in saluting Dewey. On June 6, with the arrival of *Darmstadt*, the crew of *Irene* and *Cormoran* were all relieved and replaced with a new set of crew members. After that, *Irene* was ordered to find two German businessmen who traveled within the Philippines. They were sent to Dagupan, but in their return, they brought back an injured senior Spanish officer, a clergyman, women, and children, but with no accounts of the Germans.

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<sup>32</sup> Clarke, "Chronology of Events," 66-67.

<sup>33</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 254.

<sup>34</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 18.

<sup>35</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 256-257.

<sup>36</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 8-9.

## The Conflict

Now, with American and German ships together in one place, the conflict arose early. The blockade was one of the reasons for the conflict. According to the accounts of Dewey, they declared a blockade on May 1, isolating Manila and suspending all its trade until August 13.<sup>37</sup> But this was not announced to all parties. Dewey only assumed that the Germans knew of the blockade.<sup>38</sup> For this reason, when *Irene* entered Manila, it was totally unaware of the blockade, as there were no signs of such, did not stop. Considered only a first strike, Dewey tolerated the act and deemed it an oversight. But when the *Cormoran* entered Manila on a dark morning, a steamboat ordered by Dewey was sent to board her to identify the vessel as the Americans were making sure that all Spanish ships would be captured. This was all part of the law of blockade. But the *Cormoran* ignored the boat, forcing Dewey to order the *Raleigh* to fire at her. The *Cormoran* was forced to stop and be boarded by the Americans who explained about the blockade and the current circumstances.<sup>39</sup>

For the Germans, however, Diederichs blamed the lack of communication between the two countries. It was true that the blockade was declared on May 1, and the Governor-General of Manila was made aware through a letter. But there were no communications made to other consulates. As Diederichs put it, "No communication was made to me or the German consul, directly or indirectly, of any declaration of blockade or the opening of the blockade, from the American side."<sup>40</sup> This is true because only by May 10 was the blockade communicated to the German consul, and only at the request of the Governor-General.<sup>41</sup>

Tensions further rose when Diederichs himself had arrived and was visited by Dewey, as common naval etiquette. A conversation between the two men was recorded. When Dewey asked about the *Darmstadt* being idle for six days, not moving anybody, Diederichs replied in this manner: "*I am here by the order of the Kaiser, sir.*"<sup>42</sup> Dewey misinterpreted it as German annoyance and threat. In the defense of Diederichs, he denied it and called it "falsely misinterpreted"<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 237.

<sup>38</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 254.

<sup>39</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 255-256.

<sup>40</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 4.

<sup>41</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898."

<sup>42</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 257.

<sup>43</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 5.

When *Irene* landed on the Bay of Mariveles because Manila Bay was very unsafe without the guidance of a pilot. Pohl, Captain-Lieutenant of the ship described the *Boston* and *Concord* as lying cleared for action. Only in the arrival of the German consul was *Irene* made aware of a blockade of Manila; thus *Irene* did refrain from asking Dewey for permission.<sup>44</sup>

On the issue of the *Cormoran*, and the law of blockade that allowed boarding and identifying the ship, Diederichs defended his position by reasoning that they were not made aware of the blockade because there was not any sign of one. Moreover, it was contrary to the custom to fire a gun at a ship at once.<sup>45</sup> But, firing a shot across a ship's bow was the standard practice in giving warning shots during blockades.

Tensions further grew when Diederichs officially visited the Governor-General in Manila. According to Dewey's recollection, no other naval officers visited the Governor-General other than the German. This created more suspicions toward the Germans.<sup>46</sup> But on the defensive again, Diederichs recalled that it was just neutral and fair for them to also visit the Spaniards, as they were a third party of the war. Diederichs called it "a breach of international etiquette" if he did not present himself to the Governor-General. Regarding other parties, the French Rear-Admiral Gigault de la Bedolliere also paid a visit to Manila, thus, debunking Dewey's account.<sup>47</sup>

More conflicts continued when Diederichs had landed on Mariveles and occupied a quarantine position. This angered Dewey as the Germans did not ask for any permission. Dewey was forced to board the *McCulloch* and steamed around the Germans in Mariveles without communicating with Diederichs.<sup>48</sup> In his defense, Diederichs ordered the *Cormoran* on June 18 to inspect the quarantine facility to relax and eat breakfast, as he made up his mind to take all chances of sleeping on land<sup>49</sup>

The climax of the conflict was reached when *Irene* had returned from the mission of finding the two Germans; the Americans had only been made aware on July 6 and immediately sent *Raleigh* and *Concord* to Subic to inquire about the order. Dewey argued that as the chief officer who oversaw the blockade, he had the right to communicate with all vessels entering the Manila port, which was under blockade. But Diederichs, according to Dewey,

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<sup>44</sup> Pohl, "The Activities of the S.M.S. 'Irene' in The Philippine Waters, 1896-1899," 40-41.

<sup>45</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 8.

<sup>46</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 262.

<sup>47</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 12-14.

<sup>48</sup> Dewey, "Autobiography of George Dewey," 263-264.

<sup>49</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 18-19.

kept on denying such rights to the Americans. Adding to this offense, when the *Cormoran* was sighted by the *McCulloch*, the Americans communicated in international signal “I wish to communicate” but the *Cormoran* again ignored the communication, forcing again the Americans to fire at her.<sup>50</sup> On July 8, Flag-Lieutenant Brumby filed two complaints about two German ships that violated the blockade. But Diederichs only called this a matter “of small importance.”<sup>51</sup> The Germans reiterated and filed their cases against the American ships that stopped the *Irene* on June 27 in an unprofessional manner.<sup>52</sup>

On July 10, to make clarity among the neutral party and the Americans, Diederichs sent Captain-Lieutenant Paul von Hintze, flag-lieutenant of the flagship *Kaiser* to carry out to Dewey the explanations of the offenses. Hintze explained the offenses involving *Irene* and the *Cormoran*. Dewey, in the recollection of Hintze, began to argue that under the laws of the blockade, he had every right to board any ships, be it men-of-war or merchant ships, so that the identity would be established. Then, in anger, Dewey spoke “*Why, I shall stop each vessel whatever may be her colors! And if she does not stop, I shall fire at her! And that means war, do you know, Sir? And I tell you, if Germany wants war, all right we are ready!*” (Italics of the researcher)<sup>53</sup>

The tension, suspicion, and unrest among the Americans were fueled more by the press which reported every movement of the Americans and Germans. The press published all possible stories that thrilled the public. In early May, the press started with its story of Prince Henry coming to Manila bringing with him seven ships, and the *Irene* and *Cormoran* were to sink all of Dewey’s ships. The press was sowing antipathy towards the Germans, and this was only the beginning. A Manila paper reported that a German officer made a speech that Germany will fight for Spain against the Americans, but there were no speeches.<sup>54</sup> When the *Cormoran* arrived at midnight, the headlines were “landings by night” or “attack on Cavite”. It was the English and American newspapers such as the New York Herald and China Mail who were spreading suspicion. In addition to this, a reporter aboard the *USS Olympia* made the reports that Dewey heard, and it made him more anxious and suspicious of the Germans.<sup>55</sup> On the day that Dewey uttered those words

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<sup>50</sup> Dewey, “Autobiography of George Dewey,” 265-267.

<sup>51</sup> Diederichs, “An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898,” 22.

<sup>52</sup> Pohl, “The Activities of the S.M.S. ‘Irene’ in The Philippine Waters, 1896-1899,” 35.

<sup>53</sup> Diederichs, “An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898,” 24.

<sup>54</sup> Diederichs, “An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898,” 11.

<sup>55</sup> Diederichs, “An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898,” 12.

of threat, Captain Coghlan reported it to the press, the *Shanghai Daily Press*.<sup>56</sup> However, Dewey had neither right, nor power to make a threat or declare a war between two powerful nations. When the *Irene* was fired at by the *McCulloch*, the press interpreted it as a small American ship gaining victory over a large German ship. When *Irene* again was faced with two cruisers, the newspapers sensationalized it by making a headline that *Irene*, seeing the American ships, immediately cut their anchors for a quick escape.<sup>57</sup>

The conflict calmed down only when letters between the two naval chiefs had become more pleasant. Dewey was able to explain his side in his first letter dated July 11, a day after the outburst. Diederichs immediately responded the same day as accepting the explanation. Diederichs this time, finally ordered all his ships to establish identity under all circumstances. On the next day, Dewey again explained his right to Diederichs. In reply, Diederichs, still hard on the laws of the blockade that establishing identity can be done through outward appearance and the ship's neutrality, according to the flag.<sup>58</sup> Thus, as a rule between the two nations in the future, the government of Berlin and Washington agreed that before the arrival of ships before blockaded ports, identity must be first established.<sup>59</sup>

There are reasonable explanations as to the behavior of Dewey and the cause of the misunderstanding. As Diederichs pointed out, Dewey was consumed by public opinion, both putting a lot of pressure on his side and avoiding an unnecessary war. The press played with the idea of suspicious Germany causing mistrust among the public. Two, Dewey had a smaller force but with great missions. He was to be on alert when it comes to Spain; to keep the Filipino revolutionaries at bay, without progress. Then you have, in addition, a large German navy concentrated where his small forces were. All of these, according to Diederichs, made Dewey heavily anxious, and very emotional.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

With the armistice between the Spaniards and the Americans reached on August 12, 1898, hostilities ended. Two months ago, McKinley already decided not to give the Philippines back to Spain. The next day after the armistice, the Spaniards surrendered Manila to the Americans with a mock battle, ensuring that the Spaniards were honorably defeated by an equal, and

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<sup>56</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 25.

<sup>57</sup> Pohl, "The Activities of the S.M.S. 'Irene' in The Philippine Waters, 1896-1899," 45.

<sup>58</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 25-30.

<sup>59</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 32-33.

<sup>60</sup> Diederichs, "An Account of Events off Manila from May to August 1898," 33.

not by the revolutionaries. On August 21, Diederichs, along with all his forces moved to Batavia (Jakarta) aboard his flagship *Kaiser* but left the *Prinzess Wilhelm* in Manila. By November 6, *Irene* returned, so that she could relieve the *Prinzess Wilhelm* of duties. By December 10, the Treaty of Paris was signed which saw the withdrawal of the Spaniards from the Philippines and the Americans occupying it.

In conclusion, the presence and concentration of the Imperial German Navy in Manila can be listed down: one, with the order from the Kaiser, all ships of Diederichs would go to the Philippines as an aid to all the European nationals. Diederichs used this concentration of ships for this practicality and called every ship to Manila and did the resupply, changes of crews, changes of equipment, and maintenance. In short, Diederichs made Manila a temporary hub for the Germans. Lastly, with German expansionism going all around the globe, the *Kaiser* and other officials in Berlin wanted to observe if ever they could capture Manila for Germany. However, orders to do so were not given as the Americans decided to fully occupy it.

The conflict had three main causes: the issue of blockade which started all issues. The blockade the Dewey declared was not communicated to all proper delegates causing some people to be unaware of such declaration, thus, acting as if there was no blockade at all. This started when the Americans only communicated it with the Spaniards but not with other neutral consulates in Manila such as the German. Another, there was no clear understanding of what the laws of the blockade were, both Dewey and Diederichs pushed their interpretations, especially on the issue of identity as Dewey was so anxious with false flags. This misunderstanding led to almost hostile interactions such as the firing of guns and emotional outbursts. Lastly, the press feasted on the incident. The Anglo-American press made sure anti-German sentiments rose within the public, and pro-American actions were praised. For the Manila-Spanish press, they exaggerated the presence of the Germans as friends who will help them against the Spaniards. All led to German casualties when it came to their image. Suspicions were aroused to the point Dewey, heavily anxious, bursting out in anger.

For the Germans, this was a diplomatic blunder on their part as assessed by Clark. This was the beginning of the antipathy towards them in the US. German image was damaged both in the Philippines and abroad. When the outburst of Dewey was reported, the American ambassador to Germany, Andrew White communicated friendly feelings to the Deputy Undersecretary of State Baron Oswald von Richthofen to lessen the damage. However, this issue remained open for at least the next two decades as Clarke pointed out, the US used the Manila Incident to question the British-German



blockade of Venezuela in 1902.<sup>61</sup> Overall, this started the German antagonism in the US which will shape the opinion of the public during the Great War. But still, German expansionism was undeterred. On September 10, Germany and Spain entered an agreement regarding the sale of Kusaie, Ponape, and Yap in the Carolines. By the next year, Germany acquired the Caroline, Marian, and Pelew Islands from the Spaniards for 16.75 million Reichsmarks.<sup>62</sup> Proving that there was a chance of German occupation of the Philippine Islands in 1898.

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<sup>61</sup> Clark, "Introduction," xix-xxi.

<sup>62</sup> Clarke, "Chronology of Events" 67-68.

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