

## **The 1902 Battle of Bayang from the American perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This article revisits the May 2, 1902 Battle of Bayang, a village in Lanao, the scene of the first deadly encounter between the United States Army and the Mëranaw Moros (Muslims of Mindanao). It probes into the events that led to this incident, depicting the retaliatory expedition led by Col. Frank Baldwin against the beleaguered Mëranaw warriors under the sultan of Bayang who bravely stood their ground amid a powerful occupying army. Despite the mediation effort of an influential imam, Sharif Afdal, the two parties engaged each other that saw the death of hundreds of Mëranaw compared to the few casualties on the American side. The war is an epitome of the brutal colonial program to crush all opposition along the way, using might with little diplomacy and lack of understanding of the local culture. The conquerors won the war but failed to stifle the resistance that persisted even after they left Mindanao. Lanao serves as a showcase of indigenous struggle against foreign domination, and the eventual state formation that made Moroland an unwilling part of it.

**Keywords:** Bayang Battle, Mëranaw resistance, Lake Lanao occupation, Fort Pandapatan

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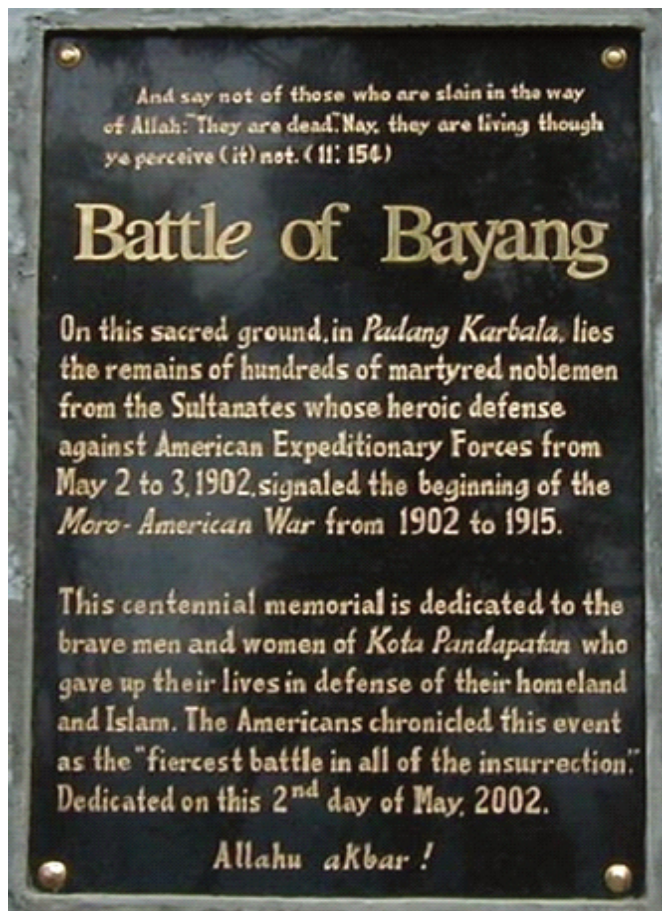


Figure 1 - The Battle of Bayang Marker. Photo by the author.

On May 2, 1902, Lanao became part of world history. The first and "fiercest battle" in Mindanao, Philippines (according to Dr. Mamitua Saber, Mëranaw sociologist), was fought in what is now the town of Bayang on the southeastern side of Lake Lanao.<sup>1</sup>

Today, that event is celebrated throughout Lanao. A marker has been cast and displayed conspicuously in the town of Bayang, Lanao del Sur to immortalize the Battle of Bayang (see Box 1). The battle signifies an event among the Mëranaw (also spelled variously as Maranao, Malanao or M'ranaw owing to its pronunciation), whose bravery in defense of their homeland

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<sup>1</sup> Revised version of an earlier paper presented to the Centennial Anniversary of the Battle of Bayang held under the auspices of the National Historical Institute, Mindanao State University Campus, Marawi City, May 1-2, 2002. The materials presented here were based almost solely on archival materials from the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. and University of Michigan Library while the author was on Post-Doctoral Fellowship at George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

This quote was also mentioned in the archives by General Adna R. Chaffee "as the hardest fought battle of the entire Philippine insurrection" (in Allen and Reidy, *The Battle of Bayan and Other Battles*, 1903). Allen and Reidy (1903) describe in detail what transpired in the 1902 Bayang battle.

and religion has been etched in history. Soon, a new era beckoned for Lanao and the rest of the Bangsamoro homeland.<sup>1</sup>

The battle chronicled interesting episodes. Though expected, it could have been prevented if the parties to the conflict communicated in the same wavelength. In Sulu and Cotabato, a repeat of the Lanao experience would come later. The clash between the Moro warriors and the US military followed the same pattern: Moro resistance against foreign invasion.

### **What led to its occurrence?**

It all began when the administration of the Philippine Islands changed hands. As a colony of Spain, the Islands fell on the lap of the United States by virtue of the 1898 Treaty of Paris, owing to the brief US-Spanish war precipitated by the Cuban affair. But the colonial transfer included Mindanao and Sulu, a region which Spain did not possess or conquer. Its indigenous inhabitants could not understand why.

As the United States occupied the Philippine Islands, it also inherited the 334-year conflict with the "Moros" (then a derogatory term for the Muslims in the Philippines). Learning from its experience in winning the western frontier from the American Indians, the United States began to explore Mindanao and Sulu after concluding a "treaty" in 1899 signed by US General John C. Bates and Sulu Sultan Jamalul Kiram II (Tan, 1994). The Americans presumed that the Sulu Sultan had dominion over all Moros, which was not the case. The Bates Agreement, as this contract is also called, gave authority to the Sultan to continue administering local affairs and was paid a sum of money in exchange for his cooperation with the US command. A year later, American troops surveyed the rest of Mindanao Island and established sovereignty of the United States over the inhabitants, who had always remained free from foreign dominion.

Though well intentioned and honest, the United States introduced -- as it did for the rest of the new colony-- a new political arrangement, a "government of law" centered on a "civilized" way of life inspired by President William McKinley's pronouncements (Davis, 1902). Unfortunately, this change meant that "no sultan or king over all Moros of any region or over other datos" be recognized except as "headmen in the several bands, and those who can earn wages in the performance of public service be paid as such..." (Davis, 1902, p. 516). The new law invited trouble with the natives. Furthermore, General Brigadier George W. Davis, US Commander of the 7th Brigade, suggested three courses of action for the areas inhabited by the Moros:

- That the Bates Agreement be abrogated and set aside.
- That the government over the Moros be military (emphasis added), and that all violators of the law which amount to capital offenses, also slave catching, be tried, and punished by the courts that may be established by the supreme government.
- That trade in domestic products in the Moro country, carried on by Moros with any part of the Philippines under American flag, be free, unlimited, and non dutiable,

<sup>1</sup>Mëranaw is the accepted orthography by the Commission on the Filipino Language (*Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino*). Bangsamoro or Moro are synonymous terms, both referring to the Muslim people of the southern Philippines. However, the former is more popular in current usage. It lends to the newly formed self-government in Mindanao known as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (BARRM).

and that export taxes on Moro products shall not be imposed, this immunity from taxation to continue for ten years.

Such would also hold for the Lanao district which the US forces intended to occupy. Six months before the siege of Bayang, General George W. Davis (in Annual Reports, 1902:516) had recommended the following:

- Reopening of the wagon road from Iligan to the lake, to be guarded by a battalion of troops.
- Launching of light-draft gunboats on the lake, like the three which are now sunk in the lake.
- Installation of electric motors driven by turbines with the abundant waterpower of the Agus River.
- Utilization of this power to operate a trolley railroad on the wagon-road.
- Positioning of a regiment of troops around the lake region.
- Extension of the road around the lake, to and across the divide to Paran-Paran (Parang-Parang), which would be the base ultimately and a commercial port for all southern Mindanao, the road to be extended to Cotabato, where it would tap the trade of the Rio Grande Valley.

On orders of General Davis, Lt. William D. Forsyth led some cavalry troops in March 1902 to open a trail from Parang-Parang (Cotabato) to the Lake region. They were instructed to use considerable care when entering areas inhabited by "non-Christian tribes," to treat the Moros kindly, not to molest peaceful inhabitants, and not to interfere with their religious practices or in the observance of their tribal customs (General Davis's Order, 1902).

While doing so, Forsyth and his men were attacked by the Mëranaw. One US soldier was killed and 18 of the horses were lost as they retreated to Buldon. In that fight the Mëranaw suffered more casualties: five of their men died. These natives were all identified to be followers of the Sultan of Bayang.

The battle in Bayang became imminent.

Meanwhile, several events were brewing in the vicinity. In late March 1902, two US soldiers were hacked to death by hostile Moros. Internal feuding among Moros and slavery remained unabated in nearby areas, where US troops were camped. Months earlier, Bayang people reportedly stole four US government-owned cows in Malabang and "had a great feast eating them" (Hagedorn to Adjutant General, August 1, 1901, Box 317, Pershing Papers). All these angered the Americans, who believed that the Moro depredations might provoke a war against Bayang. Military authorities, however, were aware that the "(US) president is anxious that no expedition be made against Moros until all efforts by negotiation have been exhausted" (General Davis's Orders, 1902).

On April 13, 1902, General Adna R. Chaffee wrote the Moros and concerned datus - Sultan Pandapatan of Bayang, Datu Adta of Paigoay, and Datu Amai Tampugao of Tuburan - asking them to deliver the "assassins" and "make restitution of the government property which has been stolen by their followers." General Chaffee also issued a stern warning:

“...that if within two weeks the murderers and the horse thieves were not given up the aggressors would have to suffer the consequences” (Davis, 1902, pp. 484-485).



Figure 2 - Trail to Malabang from Parang-Parang (This photo and succeeding ones were mostly from the Military Reports cited here, sourced from the US Library of Congress)

Prior to this, the General had sent Sharif Mohammed Afdal, an Afghan imam from Rio Grande (Dulawan, Cotabato) on a “peace mission” to Bayang.<sup>1</sup> He was to persuade them to yield to the demands of US authorities. He was to explain to them how pleasantly the Maguindanao of the Pulangui valley got along with the soldiers, that the Americans had always been just towards the Moros, but required them to be good on their part. Below is part of General Chaffee’s instruction:

“About the end of March (1902), the Sherif Mohammed Afdal, an Afghan and Mohammedan priest, residing with Dato Ali in the Rio de Grande Valley (to whose daughter the sheriff is married, and who had, during Spanish times, lived in the lake country, was induced to go on a mission of peace to visit the lake, and the necessity for the Moros to comply with the demand to deliver up the murderers and the captured horses. It was hoped that the influence of this prominent priest would suffice to turn them from their defiant attitude.” (Davis, 1902, p. 484.)

The datos, however, were “insolent and stated that they would not give up their men and if we came there they would fight us.” For one, the sultan of Bayang wrote to Chaffee that he recognized nobody but the Sultan of Turkey: “The word of the Colonel (Frank Baldwin) is not the law of the sultan of Bayang; if the Colonel is a person under the Sultan of Stamboul

<sup>1</sup> From information gathered from the archives and descendants, Sharif Mohammed Afdal was a Muslim missionary from Afghanistan who had lived with the Maguindanao Moros since Spanish time. He won wide acceptance among them, marrying six local women who bore him many children some of whom became officials in Cotabato and Lanao as governor, town mayor, and constabulary officer. He had also brokered peacetalks between the Spanish and Moro rulers, including Dato Ali in 1905 during the US military operations against him. The sharif’s tomb is found in Dulawan (now Datu Piang town), and has hundreds of descendants some of whom follow the Christian religion. The Afdal clan is said to number about 700 today. From virtual conversations and with permission from Faith Afdal and Allan Afdal Nawal, granddaughter and grandson, respectively, of the Sharif (October 8-9, 2020).

(Istanbul), he will not change the laws or types [sic] of one another” (Chaffee to Corbin, 1902).

*Figure 3 – Datu Piang (left) and Sharif Mohammed Afdal (right). Photo was lifted from the Facebook of Faith Afdal, granddaughter. (Also found in <https://maguindanaopride.wordpress.com/tag/datu-piang/>)*

Sharif Afdal served as spiritual and political adviser of Datu Piang, the most powerful ruler in Cotabato during the time of the US occupation of Mindanao. The sharif was said to have married a daughter of Datu Ali, a Maguindanao leader.

Sharif Afdal reported at Malabang, returning from his visit to Bayang and neighboring villages. “He reported his failure to influence the Moros to abstain from resistance. Their attitude was generally hostile, and many with whom he came in contact regarded him as an enemy who sought to aid the Americans in overthrowing the Moros,



The two-week deadline came close. Wasting no time, the military high command authorized Colonel Frank D. Baldwin to mobilize three battalions, including his 27th Infantry Battalion, consisting of 1,800 men in a possible punitive expedition to Bayang. Troops of US soldiers namely, Battalion 17th Infantry under Major Lea Febiger, Battalion 10th Infantry under Major R. Hoyt, and Troop A, 15th Cavalry under W. Forsyth, were stationed at Malabang, ready to come to Baldwin's succor upon notice (Baldwin, in Davis, 1902, p. 570).

Col. Baldwin was no neophyte in this war game. A veteran Indian fighter, he had engaged the ferocious Sioux Indians and Nez Percé of Oregon. He served with distinction in the Great Sioux War of 1876-77 and in the capture of Chief Joseph, acclaimed leader of the Nez Percé Indians in 1877 (Wooster, 1994, p38). John J. Pershing described him as a "fine soldier with large experience in handling Indians, but was disposed to use force instead of diplomacy" (see John J. Pershing's Unpublished Memoirs, Box 374, Pershing Papers). Then a captain, Pershing, would soon succeed Baldwin as commander of the US forces in Lanao based in Camp Vicars (Malabang).

Fast forward. Pershing would be remembered for his tour of duty in Lanao. After the infamous Battle of Bayang, he conducted various expeditions around Lake Lanao to pacify the Mëranaw datos, many of whom became friends (*amigos*) though others remained as foes. Like Baldwin, he himself had vast experience in subduing the Native American Indians (Sioux, Apache, etc.) back home. Pershing was later promoted to General and was appointed as the third and last Governor of the Moro Province (1909-1913).



Figure 4 - The 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Marching Toward Bayang, May 1902

Then, as negotiations with Bayang went on, Col. Baldwin and seven companies of his 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry aided by the 25<sup>th</sup> Battery Field Artillery with four mountain guns, 225 dismounted cavalry and medical corps started preparing for war. He moved his troops from Malabang toward Bayang. On the way, he met some opposition from the *cotta* or *kota* (fortification)<sup>1</sup> of Pualas and engaged the Moro warriors who had stood their ground against the advancing enemies. It was easy for Baldwin to deal with them. His battalion was equipped with artillery battery that pounded away at sniper fire and destroyed the Moro stronghold, leaving many casualties among them the Sultan of Pualas (Baldwin, 1902, p. 570).

On May 1, 1902, an ultimatum was sent to the Bayang datus to give up the murderers until 12:00 noon, or else "the consequences would be bad for them." The Bayang warriors -- joined by their allies from nearby Binidayan, with some delegation of fighters from Pualas, Bacolod, Butig, Paigoay, Maciu and Dirimuyud -- had fortified themselves in what was known as the *Cotta* (fortification) of Pandapatan, or Padang Karbala to the Mēranaws.<sup>2</sup> Baldwin describes it as a "thoroughly equipped fortification... where American losses were far greater than those of an ordinary battle" (Allen & Reidy, 1903, p. 17).

Fort Pandapatan, named after the sultan,<sup>3</sup> was reputed to be one of the strongest *cottas* in the Lake region, being over 100 years old and constructed atop a hill overlooking an approaching enemy. It had several deep ditches around it for entrapment, causing death or

<sup>1</sup> *Cotta* or its English equivalent is used here throughout instead of *kota/kuta* to sync spelling with the literature. Some details are provided in Magdalena (1994).

<sup>2</sup> Padang, also Perang (or P'rang), means war in the local language. Karbala is an ancient city in Iraq which the Mēranaws used in reference to the Bayang Battle, akin to the 680 AD battle between the Shi'ite Muslim army commanded by Husayn Ali (grandson of the Prophet Mohammed) and the advancing, more powerful forces of the Ummayyad Caliphate Yazid. These two warring factions represented the Shi'ite (Ali) and Sunni (Yazid) groups of Islam. Interestingly, Mēranaws identify with Ali but profess the Sunni type of Islam.

<sup>3</sup> There was no photograph or description available about Sultan Pandapatan from US records, except that he was brave whose leadership and gallantry in battle earned him admiration from American officials like Generals George Davis and Adna Chaffee. The sultan descendants today have become civil servants, officials in the Philippine government, and scholars.

delay of enemy attack. Those ditches were about 10 feet deep and 12 feet wide, with sharp bamboos driven in slanting direction; their tops were camouflaged by natural ground cover for the unsuspecting enemy. The interior of the fort was about 80 sq. feet, with various holes around the walls for serving the *lantacas* (brass cannons). The exterior side of the fort was completely hidden by "live bamboos so thick that a field mouse could hardly get through it." There was but one entrance to the fort, where the Bayang fighters had a swinging piece of artillery (*lantaca*) to fire upon those trying to enter (Chaffee to Corbin, 1902; Magdalena, 1994).

In defense of this cotta, about 600 able-bodied warriors, many of whom had earlier fought Spanish soldiers, took their stand. Of this number, 400 to 500 were warriors from Bayang and Binidayan (Davis, 1902, p. 489). Armed mostly with *krises* and *kampilans* (bladed weapons), some homemade rifles (*paliuntod*), Remingtons captured from the Spanish soldiers, and cannons (*lantacas*), they shouted as they waved red flags in defiance. Here they vowed to fight to the end (see Figures 5-6 showing a map of these two forts, and layout of Fort Pandapatan).

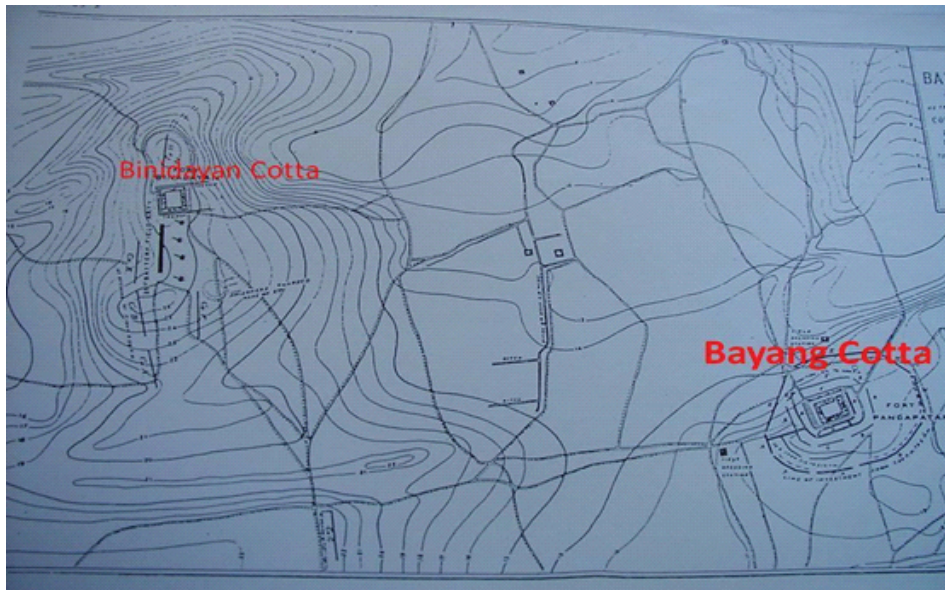


Figure 5 - Fort Pandapatan (Bayang Cotta) and Fort Binidayan

The countdown began. No word was heard from the Bayang *cotta*. In May 1, as Baldwin's troops inched closer to their target while awaiting orders from superior officers, they met resistance from another cotta, that of Binidayan (Baldwin 1902, p. 488). Encamped within striking distance, they were fired upon by the Mëranaw fighters. This prompted Baldwin to order the battery to hurl shots at the Binidayan *cotta*, killing many Moro warriors and eventually capturing the fort. Those who escaped proceeded to Bayang and joined forces with their comrades there.

Then, at 1:30 in the afternoon of May 2, 1902 the big day came. Col. Baldwin flashed the green light to his infantry to begin shelling the position of the recalcitrant Bayang *cotta*. The US troops maintained a safe distance from the hills of Binidayan as they



bombarded Fort Pandapatan for an hour, and then showered it with rapid fire using their *krag* rifles. Completely surrounded by a superior force, the Bayang warriors could not imagine what hit them. They exchanged several shots with their *paliuntod* and *lantacas*, but hardly hit anyone at long range. They stopped to conserve precious bullets.

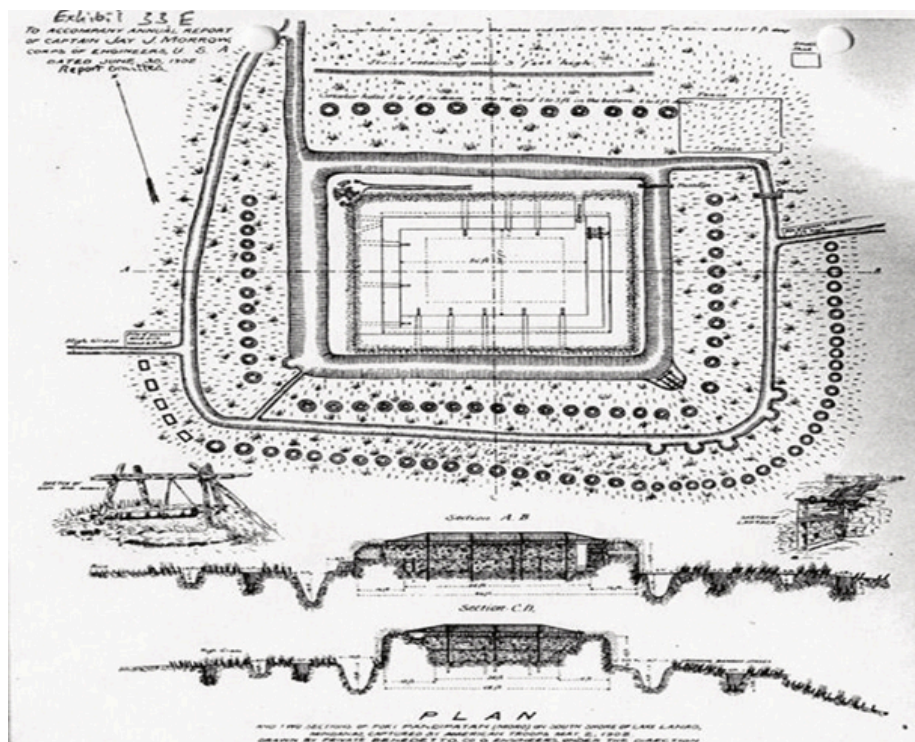


Figure 6 – Another view of Fort Pandapatan. From [https://web.archive.org/web/20140102194651/http://www.morolandhistory.com/08.PG-Battle%20of%20Bayan/battle\\_of\\_bayan\\_p2.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20140102194651/http://www.morolandhistory.com/08.PG-Battle%20of%20Bayan/battle_of_bayan_p2.htm)

Themselves trapped in their own *cotta*, they could do nothing about the incoming cannon balls, hitting their mark with devastating effects. The US mountain guns were moved at a closer range of 400 yards and repeated the massive bombing of the beleaguered *cotta*. The Moro warriors kept firing to hold at bay the advancing infantry equipped with modern rifles (*krag*s). As if the elements were conspiring, or mourning, heavy rain fell that day. With ammunition running at dangerously low levels, the US troops got ready with their fixed bayonets for a man-to-man combat. Baldwin ordered his men to retreat somewhat away from the fort before darkness came, giving the wounded an opportunity to be treated. During the night, the US forces planned to scale the *cotta* the following day to launch the final assault against their weakened foes. At daybreak, the badly hit Mëranaw warriors hoisted white flags of surrender.<sup>1</sup> The Bayang war was over.

<sup>1</sup> A white flag was mistakenly assumed by the American soldiers as a sign of surrender. Oral sources, however, say this is not so. It is a sign of mourning among the Mëranaw .



Figure 7 – American soldiers preparing mountain guns for war against Moros (From: Library of Congress's Prints & Photograph Division)



Figure 8 - View of Fort Pandapatan (Bayang Cotta) showing damaged areas, with a US soldier and three Mëranaw guides/interpreters.

The Battle of Bayang was an uneven fight, the odds stacked against the Mëranaw warriors at a ratio of 6 to 10. The Moros suffered between 300 and 400 dead (according to estimates of those captured), compared to 10 US soldiers dead and 40 wounded. There were 83 Moro survivors, who were marched up to Binidayan. Since they were not well guarded, they dashed for freedom after subduing the sentinel on duty whereupon many were killed or wounded (Davis, 1902, p. 489; Baldwin, 1902, p. 571). Outnumbered and outgunned, the

"battle" would have easily been called a Moro massacre, or a "murderous retaliation," according to Jacob Schurman, president of Cornell University and first head of the Philippine Commission (Schurman, 1902: 1105).

Baldwin concludes his report as follows: "There were captured during this battle 17 lantacas, 3 iron cannon, 1 brass howitzer, and 43 rifles of different patterns, also several hundred weapons such as are used by these people" (Baldwin, 1902, p. 573).

A few days after the Bayang battle, several of the captured horses were returned by Datu Grande of Macadar, a Moro leader who would profess "loyal friendship" to the Americans.

Amid this notorious encounter, the US troops received profuse commendations from their superiors, and the US President himself. It earned for Col. Baldwin a meteoric promotion to Brigadier-General and a new assignment. To General Chaffee, the battle reaffirmed "respect for United States authority in the center of savagery" (*Outlook*, 1902.).

For his part, General George W. Davis commended the Bayang Moros:

At this moment of exaltation and triumph do not forget the vanquished foe, whose persistent gallantry commanded the admiration of all who saw the magnificent defense of their stronghold. A race of men who have been able to make a fight and convert this wilderness into a garden..." (Allen & Reidy, 1903, p. 45)

Later in 1902-03, Moro strongholds in Lanao – Butig, Bayabao, Calahui, Maciu, Taraca – repeated the pattern of deadly quarrels with the Americans under Captain Pershing. Moros from other parts of Mindanao and Sulu would also experience their own wars in subsequent years. The Battles of Bud Dajo (1906) and Bud Bagsak in Sulu (1913) waged by the Tausug, and the Seranaya expedition against Datu Ali of Maguindanao (1905) filled a vast space in Moro history. But we reserve those topics for longer discussions elsewhere.

These Moro wars gave justification for the US to establish a military government, known as Moro Province, in much of Mindanao and Sulu in 1904-1913 under three decorated Generals. John J. Pershing was one of them. However, parts of Mindanao (Misamis and Surigao) and the rest of the Philippine Islands were placed under a civilian government under the Philippine Commission.

In conclusion, the Battle of Bayang narrative cracked the invincibility of Mëranaw resistance, though the Mëranaw fighting spirit never wavered. It paved the way for more military expeditions in the ensuing years, under the command of Captain John J. Pershing. Such expeditions also broke the insularity of the Lake Lanao region which, for centuries, had remained relatively untouched by outsiders. Spanish attempts to subjugate it came close to putting an end to the Mëranaw resistance with the death of its hero, Amai Pakpak (Saber, 1980), but the Katipunan revolt in the north weakened the Spanish forces. The coming of the Americans in 1900 changed the entire configuration. The consequences would open Lanao and the entire Mindanao region to free trade and its absorption into the economic and political systems of an emerging Philippine state. The deadly encounter between the *kris* and the *krag* would come to an end.

Finally, the overriding significance of the Bayang battle is this: it symbolizes the triumph of globalism as well as the integration of the Bangsamoro homeland into the world system that has given life to modern states in Southeast Asia.

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