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BATTLE OF MANILA BAY 20 YEARS AGO

Washington, May 1—(Special correspondence)—Twenty years ago today Admiral Dewey consummated the task assigned him by Theodore Roosevelt, "to seek the enemy fleet and destroy it." Before that historic event, all the world had been spelling the name of the principal port in the Philippines "Manila." As soon as official reports of the battle had been published, the world learned that it had been in error, and the people of this country took delight in declaring that "Dewey knocked 'L' out of Manila."

Many thought at the time, and perhaps still think that after Dewey had accomplished the task assigned, he should have sailed away, leaving the Philippines to their fate, and avoiding what later came to be known as "the white man's burden." But Dewey didn't. He wasn't the "sail away" kind. He stuck around that vicinity, and subsequent events have fully demonstrated his wisdom as a first class fighting man.

It will be remembered that soon after Dewey took possession of Manila Bay, a German fleet came quietly in—a fleet superior in strength to that which Dewey commanded. It was under the command of Admiral von Diederichs. Dewey made a courteous inquiry as to the reason why a fleet superior to his own had come upon the scene, and the German admiral replied that he was there "by order of the Kaiser." With continued courtesy, Dewey informed von Diederichs that if Germany was seeking war, she could have it.

In accordance with his rights under international law, and in order to protect the interests of the United States, Dewey established certain port regulations, particularly with a view to enforcing the blockade. He assigned each visiting ship to a particular anchorage. One of von Diederichs' subordinates was careless or innocent in observing the regulations and was notified by Dewey that he would fire upon the first vessel of whatever nationality that disobeyed the rules. He did, in fact, fire across the bow of a ship moving into forbidden waters. There was no further trouble and as soon as he could do so without seeming to have been driven out, von Oledrichs steamed away.

One of the historic incidents of that meeting between Dewey and von Diederichs was the action of Admiral Chichester of the British navy, who, when the Germans asked him what his attitude would be in case of hostilities, gave answer by placing his flagship between von Diederichs and the Olympia, Dewey's flagship. The Kaiser's representative appreciated the fact that to fire at the Stars and Stripes, across the Union Jack meant fight from both, and Germany was not ready then. "Der Tag" had not yet arrived.

In his report to the Navy Department concerning all that happened at Manila, Admiral Dewey related a boast made by a German captain, that twenty years from then Germany would begin a world war. It was in fact just 19 years less one month from the date of that prophecy that the United States entered the conflict thus foretold.

There has been an important disclosure since that time, in connection with the visit of the German fleet. It seems that Germany had long coveted the Philippines, and, when war broke out between Spain and the United States, closed a bargain for the purchase of the islands, having first convinced Spain that she would probably lose them anyway. Von Diederichs' mission was to take possession and assume the position of Governor-General. Having a superior naval force and armed with a paper title to the islands, the German admiral would very likely have secured possession of the whole Philippine archipelago if he had been dealing with a man of procrastination or pacifist inclinations. Dewey did no watchful waiting nor was he too proud to fight. He promptly sent an ultimatum, and as a consequence had no fighting to do. Von Diederichs knew his man.

At this distance of time and under present circumstances, we can more fully appreciate the value of Dewey's services in sticking to the Philippines after he had captured them, and standing by his rights in Manila Bay. Had the Philippines been a German possession from 1898 to 1914, Germany would have developed in that period a naval force sufficient to operate from Manila Bay as a rendezvous. The story of the present war, prolonged as it has been in the face of many advantages against Germany might have been ended in Germany's favor.



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