Diplomat in Khaki
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Diplomat in Khaki: Major General Frank Ross McCoy and American Foreign Policy, 1898 -1949.

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From Havana, Wood's entourage returned directly to Washington. McCoy's patron, while winning nationwide acclaim (in the eyes of some, notoriety) for his Cuban exploits, had also secured his integration into the regular army as a brigadier general. Finding a new assignment suited to the abilities and ambitions of such a controversial soldier presented the War Department and Wood's friend, President Theodore Roosevelt, with no small difficulties. McCoy, now a first lieutenant, and Scott, reduced to his prewar rank of captain, established an office for Wood at 1812 H Street, N.W. “Good Old Scott,” as he was known throughout the officer corps, was a durable and steady if unimaginative West Pointer, class of 1876. He was stocky, tending even to stout; wire-rimmed spectacles gave him a bookish appearance that was offset by a long, ragged mustache that recalled his apprenticeship in the cavalry. During his years in the West, Scott won recognition as a master of Indian lore and sign language. In the new American empire, however, such expertise counted for naught. So, despite being senior to Wood in years of service, Scott accepted recurring employment as one of Wood’s key subordinates. Standing in Wood's shadow never troubled the modest Scott; indeed, he prospered there and revived his career, his subsequent advancement to high rank surprising and delighting his many affectionate admirers. Despite the gap between them in seniority, McCoy and Scott became fast friends, joined by a mutual admiration for their general.

Having set up Wood’s office, McCoy and Scott helped the former military governor assemble his final report while addressing what his official stationery termed “Business Pertaining to the Late Military Government of Cuba.” Wood’s desultory stay in this official limbo soon received welcome interruption in the form of an invitation to attend the Imperial German Army’s autumn maneuvers. The general accepted with alacrity and set out for Europe, with McCoy assigned
to follow in the capacity of aide-de-camp. “Good Old Scott” stayed behind to tie up the loose ends. In mid-August, McCoy sailed from New York aboard the S.S. Potsdam. His voyage was uneventful but pleasant, due largely to the presence on board of Prof. Albert Bushnell Hart, the noted historian and, in McCoy’s view, “the all around man of the ship, . . . starter of games, getter up of concerts, and the talker until further orders.” Although the official purpose for McCoy’s junket was to observe the German maneuvers, both the young lieutenant and his chief intended to exploit to the utmost a ready-made opportunity to see the rest of Europe. As soon as he arrived in Rotterdam, McCoy “started off at a rapid gait to do the old countries.” After touring Holland, he joined General and Mrs. Wood in Paris, at which time the pace immediately quickened to a “fast gallop.” Although it was still before daybreak when McCoy reached his hotel in the French capital, he wrote, “before I was out of the tub the Chief was in my room and we started off,” visiting the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, the Louvre, and Les Invalides in rapid succession. Wood “sees the sights as he works and plays,” observed McCoy, “on the run.”

As McCoy reported to his mother, both he and Wood realized keenly their ignorance of the fine arts. The spare moments provided by their undemanding three-month itinerary consequently found the two Americans—“determined to absorb all we could in a short time”—tramping through museums and undertaking pilgrimages to European cultural shrines. In addition to Paris and Berlin, their stops included Switzerland, the chief cities of Italy, Monte Carlo, southern France, and Great Britain. Reflecting on the effusive account of his travels that he was sending back to Lewistown, McCoy wondered if some might suspect that he and Wood had engaged in “little of the real soldier business” since leaving the United States. Should that be his family’s view, he told his mother, “you are right.”

The visit to England, at least, was not entirely without serious purpose. There Wood hoped to assess a British army recently blooded by its experience against the Boers. Because Wood’s own accomplishments in Cuba attracted the admiration of the British establishment, the Americans received a cordial welcome. When they arrived in London, a “pile” of invitations awaited. Besides the obligatory call on the American ambassador and a visit to the British training base at Aldershot, Wood and McCoy lunched with King Edward VII at Buckingham Palace and dined with Prime Minister Arthur Balfour; Lord Roberts, the army commander in chief; Lord Kitchener, the commander in chief for India; and General Sir John French.

Despite such flattering attention by English cousins, the centerpiece of the trip remained Germany itself. Arriving in Berlin in early September, the Americans were whisked off to Frankfurt in the private railway car of Prince Henry. The kaiser’s brother greeted each of them with a hearty hand-shake and a cigar and commented favorably—and accurately, thought McCoy—“about the great all around resemblance” between the kaiser and the American president. In
Frankfurt, Wood and McCoy attended a review of the Guards Corps and afterward were presented to Wilhelm II and his empress. Riding up to the imperial party in his turn, McCoy “got a handful of a Marshal’s baton and the family clasp” from the kaiser, accompanied by a rapid-fire series of questions: “What branch of service do you belong to? Have you been serving in the West? How did you like Cuba?” Other encounters with the imperial family followed their return to Berlin: a “very jolly informal” dinner given by the kaiser exclusively for the American and British observers and a more elaborate affair the following evening for all foreign officers attending the maneuvers. Wood’s impressionable young aide found the surroundings, the company, and the conversation dazzling.

With the social amenities out of the way, the real business of the maneuvers began. Throughout the exercise, the Americans accompanied the kaiser and his party as they followed the clash of the Red and Blue forces. For McCoy, Wilhelm himself was part of the show:

He looked his part . . ., uniformed as a red Hussar and mounted upon a splendid white Arab. There he stood upon a little knoll just as Napoleon used to stand, with his brilliant staff, the heralds and the imperial standard: like a picture of 1806. And we in our plain khaki had a little smile to ourselves as we looked at the Emperor, his officers and army, in one way at least as far behind the times as the picture he made.

Nonetheless, he warned, “you make a bad mistake if you judge the Kaiser and his army by this picture.” The precision-drilled German war machine was a formidable sight and made a deep impression. Wood’s experience here, McCoy believed, provided the inspiration for the general’s preparedness campaign preceding American entry into World War I.

The climax of the maneuvers came on the final day: an exhilarating cavalry charge, 10,000 strong, led by the kaiser himself into the flank of the retreating Blue forces. For McCoy, it was the greatest spectacle of all. He and Wood found themselves wedged between regiments of Black Hussars on one side and Grand Cuirassiers on the other and swept along by yelling, charging cavalry all around. It was a wild, bracing moment: “For four or five miles it was a mad charge over . . . plowed fields into a thick turnip patch, over a ditch and up and over and down a railroad embankment, through an orchard.” Whether either American recognized the charge for the anachronism that it was, McCoy did not record.

On November 1, McCoy and Wood departed for home. McCoy’s first transatlantic visit and his introduction to many of Europe’s leading political and military figures provided yet another episode in the continuing education that he was receiving at Wood’s side. The German maneuvers offered the military equivalent of finishing school combined with a grand tour. Little further was needed to cement his position within the American military elite. And what little remained was soon accomplished.
Back in Washington, while Wood awaited a decision on his next assignment, McCoy was detailed as military aide to President Roosevelt, thereby entering the "charmed circle of his friends and playmates." McCoy's White House duties were not taxing. He reported to Roosevelt's office at 9:00 each morning to await the chief executive and, upon his arrival, reviewed with Roosevelt the day's schedule. McCoy also screened the enormous influx of books received at the White House, selecting those of likely interest to the president. McCoy's most important function lay in contributing to Roosevelt's regimen of strenuous exercise. He served as one of the president's riding companions and refereed his notorious fencing matches with Wood (substituting as a combatant when Wood was unavailable). As McCoy wearily remarked, whenever the Rough Rider tired of flailing about with wooden broadswords, "it was jiu jitsu and boxing." Assignment to the White House even in a minor capacity opened the doors of Washington's hostesses for an eligible, well-mannered bachelor. "I'm getting the dining out habit bad," he complained halfheartedly to his mother. "Every night last week there were doings." Thanks to his closeness to both Roosevelt and Wood, McCoy gained the acquaintance of cabinet members and congressmen, forging relationships that would someday pay dividends.

While McCoy was enjoying Washington social life, negotiations for Wood's assignment were finally concluded. Roosevelt and Wood agreed that the latter would become the senior American military official in the Far East, assuming command of the Philippine Division in Manila. But because the current occupant of that position, Maj. Gen. James F. Wade, was not scheduled to rotate for several months, Wood accepted an interim assignment as commander of the Department of Mindanao and governor of the newly created Moro Province. Inevitably, Wood asked McCoy to join him as his personal aide. As always, the younger officer found the prospect of a new assignment exciting: "Los Moros are worth handling," he told his mother with misplaced confidence.

To study the handiwork of the world's other imperial powers and perhaps also to compare it to his own efforts as a colonial administrator, Wood decided to tour the principal European possessions in Asia on his way to the Philippines. McCoy's first journey to Asia thus began in Boston on March 28, 1903, when he joined Wood and Scott on board the S.S. Commonwealth bound for Gibraltar. The Americans's route took them across southern Europe, from Vienna to Constantinople on the Orient Express, and by sea again through the Suez to the Far East. Something akin to missionary fervor impelled the voyagers toward the challenges awaiting them at their new station. Wood and Scott left their families behind to follow later, so the three officers travelled unencumbered by women or children. One senses that they preferred it that way: Nothing distracted them from preparing for the job to come. During the journey, the comradeship that Cuba inspired assumed quasi-monastic overtones. The long voyage served as a rite of preparation that sharpened their shared sense of
McCoy as aide to President Theodore Roosevelt. McCoy’s admiration for Roosevelt was second only to his devotion to Leonard Wood. (Courtesy U.S. Army Military History Institute)
purpose. The weeks spent at sea and inspecting European possessions completed the conversion of Wood, Scott, and McCoy into single-minded zealots intolerant of opposition to purposes that were in their eyes unimpeachably worthy. They sailed to the Philippines determined to play a role in a historic undertaking—converting the islands into prosperous bastions of order and Western civilization. Whatever the defects of their vision, never had more genuinely idealistic American soldiers ever set sail for distant shores.

The trip itself reinforced McCoy’s confidence in the superiority of Western values and convinced him further of the need for colonial rule of backward peoples. Societies lacking the enlightened guidance of the West elicited McCoy’s wholehearted contempt. Constantinople was “the filthiest, most evil-smelling city since Santiago.” It had been “500 years since the Turks burst into this beautiful city, burning, destroying, and killing everything that was good, and it looks as though they’ve been camping out on the ruins ever since.” For American khaki imperialists the compulsion to clean up such untidiness was great indeed. “I believe in the crusades,” McCoy wrote, “and feel like joining one myself against the Turk and his dogs.”

From Turkey, Wood’s party proceeded to Egypt. From this point onward, wrote McCoy, “everything has taken new interest; and much . . . may be of use to us in time and occupations to come.” As Wood and McCoy took turns reading a biography of General Charles “Chinese” Gordon, their steamer made its way from Egypt to Aden and on to “the writhing mass of Bombay.” An extended stay in India provided “a liberal education of the work among two hundred million people.” McCoy quickly adopted the prevailing attitudes of the raj. “This punka business is rather worrying at first,” he confessed. But with “natives” competing for the privilege of pulling his punka rope to stir up a bit of breeze at a wage of 6 cents per day, he concluded that it must be considered good pay for light work. And, having experienced the “keenest enjoyment of a cold bath poured over you by a naked Hindu,” McCoy decided that “it’s necessary and I find I’m getting hardened already.”

“At first sight everybody in India looks hopeless,” he observed. “Millions of heathen coolies squat . . . thick over the face of the earth . . . readier to rot than to keep clean, bound down by caste, and without a ray of hope from their religion.” Western rule and Western religion alone provided an optimistic note. “The only decent, clean people east of Suez are the native Christians and the British native soldiers. The British flag stands for a lot more than one knows,” he commented, “and where it waves is government, good government of a kind, but it only goes so far. The work of the missionary is the rest.” Despite such advances, India remained a daunting challenge. “It’s a question of centuries and the British know it, and are ready to wait,” McCoy believed. Although the Philippines were a small proposition in comparison, he worried lest Americans become impatient if their Pacific possession were not thoroughly Americanized overnight.
From India, Wood and his companions made their way to the Dutch East Indies. "This green isle," he reported from the residence of the Dutch governor general in Batavia, "seems bright and happy and wholesome." At first, the Americans were put off by the submissiveness of the locals. Observing the way that they "went down on their heels on our approach, squatted . . . in the most servile, sickening way . . . as the almighty white man went by," McCoy reported that "it made us 'sick at the stomach.'" He noted approvingly Wood's hope that the Filipinos "take to the woods occasionally and kill off a few of us, for their rights and manliness [rather] than squat and cringe." 

By the time his ten-day visit as a guest of the Dutch ended, however, McCoy's views had changed. He now rated the Dutch system of colonial government as a thoroughly good one, worthy of emulation. The power and energy of the Dutch permeated the entire society. "Their civil service," thought McCoy, "is such as we should build up for our colonies." An inspection of Dutch East Indian troops provided ideas that would come in handy in the Philippines. The key to Dutch success, McCoy believed, was their assumption that "the natives are the simplest of children" and the governor general their father and protector. Having accustomed himself to the servile, cringing behavior of the local people, McCoy concluded that Java was "the richest, greenest, and happiest country we've visited." From Java, Wood and his party proceeded to Singapore. There they dined with the exiled leader of the Philippine insurrection, Emilio Aguinaldo, to whom McCoy and Wood took quite a liking. "He is very much a man," observed McCoy. After Singapore, the three officers visited Hong Kong, stopped briefly at Saigon, and at last, at the end of July 1903, reached Manila.

Viewed from Washington, assuming responsibility for a mere portion of the Philippines after having reconstructed all of Cuba may have seemed a simple task. In many respects, however, Wood's dual responsibilities as military commander of the Department of Mindanao and first civil governor of the Moro Province proved more demanding than anticipated. By far the largest in the Philippines, the province encompassed not only Mindanao, itself larger than Ireland, but also the islands of Basilan and Palawan, and the Sulu Archipelago, a string of several hundred lesser islands. This vast territory consisted largely of rugged mountains and uncharted jungle, penetrated by a few roads and edged by a handful of ramshackle towns. Its habitants numbered about 400,000. Of the total, perhaps 40,000 were Christian Filipinos, 275,000 were Muslims (Moros), and the remainder other non-Christians, for the most part members of primitive hill tribes. The Moros were a fiercely independent people who for centuries frustrated Spanish efforts to establish more than nominal control over the southern Philippines. That independence may also explain the Moros' inability to achieve political unity among themselves. By the time that the United States supplanted Spain, Moro society had evolved into innumerable separate tribes,
each controlled by its own chief (variously called *datto, panglima,* or *hadji*) and each inflamed by a warrior tradition that required periodic warfare against believer and nonbeliever alike.\(^7\)

From 1899 to 1903, the American administration tolerated this Moro penchant for fighting, reflecting a policy that avoided any interference with Moro internal economy and political administration. The motive for this apparent disinterest was simple. During that period, American officials were preoccupied with suppressing rebellious Filipino nationalists opposed to American occupation of the islands. In comparison with the Philippine insurrection, the disposition of the Moros was a minor question that the United States could safely defer until able to give it full attention.\(^8\)

Despite the urgency of pacifying the northern islands, the United States took the precaution of establishing at least theoretical claim over Moroland. Toward that end, Brig. Gen. John C. Bates in 1899 initiated negotiations with the Sultan of Sulu, the Moros' powerless titular leader. The resulting Bates Agreement prescribed future relations between the United States and the Moro people. The sultan recognized American sovereignty in exchange for promises to protect the sultan's subjects, to pay him a personal annuity, and to respect his jurisdiction over criminal matters involving only Moros. The United States also pledged that Moro religious customs should be respected and implicitly recognized the Moro practice of slavery. As McCoy later conceded, the Bates Agreement "was in the nature of a *modus vivendi* until a better way of handling the Moro question could be worked out." To the sultan, however, American negotiators made no attempt to indicate its temporary nature.\(^9\)

From the outset, American officers in Mindanao disliked the Bates Agreement, complaining that it restricted their authority. By 1903, with the Philippine insurrection crushed, such complaints gave added weight to the assertion that the time had arrived to gain full control of the southern islands. On June 1, 1903, the Philippine Commission, the central American authority in the islands, acted on this conclusion by combining into one province all areas in which Moros predominated. The commission designated a governor as chief executive of the province and vested legislative authority in a provincial council composed of the governor and his five principal assistants—none of whom in practice would be Moros. In the words of the commission's senior member, William Howard Taft, this provincial government was granted "a very large measure of discretion in dealing with the Moros." The commission did insist that the provincial council preserve "the customs of the Moros, the authority of the dattos, and a system of justice in which Moros should take part." The commission also subdivided the province into five districts—Zamboanga, Lanao, Cotabato, Davao, and Jolo—each with its own administration subordinate to the provincial government. The creation of this elaborate machinery did not mean that the Philippine Commission viewed the Moro problem as susceptible to a strictly administrative solution. Noting that union of the civil and the military power seemed admirably adapted
to the Moro Province, the commission directed that there, as nowhere else in the Philippines, the civil governor and military commander were to be one and the same. Indeed, soldiers dominated the civil administration from the provincial to the district and municipal levels.20

On August 8, 1903, Theodore Roosevelt nominated his friend Leonard Wood for promotion to major general. Two days earlier, accompanied by McCoy and Scott (now a major), Wood had planted his headquarters at Mindanao’s southern tip in the provincial capital of Zamboanga. Driven as always by enormous stores of impatient energy, the new governor quickly immersed himself in his new realm, grasping at the essence of the situation he confronted and establishing his presence at its core. Within a week, he and McCoy were far from Zamboanga, trekking through the interior of the province accompanied by a battalion of infantry. Wood used the expedition to gauge conditions in the province and, through persuasion or intimidation, to elicit pledges of fealty from local chieftains. One of a series of operations mounted in succeeding months, it permitted Wood to refine his pacification strategy while allowing McCoy to develop his own perceptions of the Moro problem.

McCoy, a captain as of August 16, held a low opinion of the Moro. Clothed in garish attire, sporting an arsenal of archaic weaponry, his visage stained with betel nut, the Moro seemed a queer figure, at once eccentric, childlike, and menacing. In McCoy’s eyes, the Moros’ cultural backwardness threatened to defeat altruistic American efforts to redeem them. Given “their befogged and superstitious [sic] brains,” the Moros refused even to avail themselves of the medical services offered by the American military. “You mention Cholera to them and they throw up their hands with a fatalistic gesture. ‘God has given and God has taken away.’” Moro polygamy and slavery, their incessant warfare, and a criminal justice system in which “the maximum punishment for murder is [a fine of] 105 dollars” fascinated and appalled McCoy. Describing Moro customs to an acquaintance in the War Department, he observed: “It is hard to realize that we are living in the same century with you law abiding American citizens.” And to a friend from Cuban days he wrote: “Over here we are living in the midst of feudalism and slavery, with pirates and bloody murder.” Altogether, it was an “opera bouffe performance.”21

In the early 1900s, the army’s long-standing role as a frontier constabulary loomed large in the memory of the officer corps. Not surprisingly, when officers in the Philippines attempted to relate the Moro to something more akin to their own experience, they described him as an oriental equivalent of the American Indian. Indeed, authorities in Washington viewed the Moro in much the same way. Secretary of War Elihu Root’s initial guidance concerning the Moro instructed the Philippine Commission to adopt the same course followed by Congress in dealing with “the tribes of our own North American Indians.” Soldiers serving in the Philippines found the analogy a persuasive one. Despite limited experience in the West, McCoy himself drew similar comparisons.
two months, he concluded that Americans could best pacify the Moros by adopting the methods used in taming the Indians. The military problem in the province, he wrote on September 25, "is not a hard one. The methods employed are very much the same as in handling the Indians of the Plains"; he added that the Moros were not nearly the fighting men of the Sioux and Cheyenne.  

Nearly a half-century after his introduction to the Philippines, McCoy recalled that it had been Rudyard Kipling "who opened up the whole Far East to the men of my time." The remark was a revealing one. A product of Western culture, McCoy thoroughly absorbed the prevailing fin de siècle assumptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. The racist preconceptions that informed the notion of the white man’s burden provided the foundation of American khaki imperialism whether in Cuba or the Far East. Given such ethnocentrism, the American army’s attitude toward subject peoples had two faces—one benign and one harsh. For Cuba, too exhausted by war to resist American occupation, military rule provided social uplift and efficient, well-ordered government. If the army’s manner in providing these benefits was patronizing, they were still tangible improvements of no little value. In contrast to the Cubans, the Moros in 1903 were unbroken, independent, and disinclined to accept American domination. It remained for them to expose the other face of American military imperialism. The military’s easy identification of Moros with Indians provided an early hint of what that face would reveal.

From the outset, Wood found the disorderly qualities of Moro tribal life and their pretensions to autonomy intolerable. In his eyes, order and acceptance of
American dominion were prerequisites to reorganizing Moro society along more efficient lines. Hence, his immediate goal upon assuming office was to overcome the Moros’ penchant for looting, piracy, slave raids, and internecine warfare while securing their unqualified recognition of American authority. In his first annual report to the Philippine Commission, Wood defined his mission as one of establishing “order out of the chaos existing among the savage peoples” and bringing the province’s “various and diverse elements . . . under a similar form of control.” McCoy agreed with Wood on the one language that would fix the Moros’ attention: force. McCoy noted that some observers of the Philippine experiment speculated that Americans would become “the most popular white men with Asiatics and may be able to convey to them ideas more acceptably than any other.” Personally, however, he believed that the United States would rule only by force. Given the preponderance of American military power, Wood’s clique assumed that pacification would be easily achieved. From the American point of view, Moro resistance would be irrational and foolhardy. Even before arriving in Zamboanga, Wood predicted to the president that “one clean-cut lesson will be quite sufficient for them.”

But, if the objective of Mindanao’s military commander was the straightforward one of imposing order, the aims of the governor of the Moro Province were more ambitious. Confronted with the Moros’ peculiarities, American military imperialists embraced what they saw as an obligation to eliminate the uncivilized and reprehensible aspects of Moro culture—the promised restraint of the Bates Agreement notwithstanding. The Moros, fulminated Wood, were religious and moral degenerates. Their laws were “utterly and absolutely undesirable from every standpoint of decency and good government.” Given that their native languages were “crude, devoid of literature, and limited in range,” Wood could find no object whatever in attempting to preserve them. The Moro practice of slavery attracted especially heated attention. Although engaged in imposing colonial bondage on a people who had long enjoyed de facto autonomy, American soldiers viewed involuntary servitude among the Moros as, in McCoy’s words, “beastly and repulsive beyond expression.” Predictably, such views led the military to expand its purpose from simple pacification to an experiment in social engineering aimed at elevating the Moro to American standards of behavior. Topping Wood’s agenda of essential social reforms was the abolition of slavery. American officers stationed in Mindanao prior to Wood’s arrival backed away from proposals to tamper with Moro slavery. Although they did not approve of the practice, these Americans considered noninterference with the institution of slavery to be the only way to prevent a religious war over the issue. Wood refused to accept such a “largely passive” approach that resulted in “little influence [being] exercised upon the vicious practices of the Moros.” He was determined to confront the problem directly. Thus, on September 24, 1903, Wood engineered approval by his legislative council of a measure abolishing slavery. McCoy heartily approved. “The only reason I can give for our Generals permitting
slavery so long,” he wrote shortly afterward, “is that they didn’t . . . see the Moros enough to understand the conditions. . . . It has taken the General just two months to feel sure of the right thing to do, and to do it with life.” The likelihood of Moro opposition to the law left McCoy unfazed. “It may cause fighting,” he observed, “but better fight hard and often than permit it [slavery] longer.”

The abolition of slavery was only a first step. Wood’s scheme for uplifting the Moros required the complete abandonment of the approach signified by the Bates Agreement. To gain the authority that he sought, Wood intended to abrogate the agreement. The first major military action of his tenure provided the needed pretext to do so. On November 6, Scott, by now district governor of Jolo, notified Wood that a local chief, Panglima Hassan, was causing mischief near the town of Jolo, most boldly by sniping at American survey teams working in the field. To McCoy, accompanying Wood on an arduous expedition around Lake Lanao in the interior of Mindanao, the tenor of Scott’s report suggested a conspiracy to take Jolo by treachery. To Wood, in all probability, the opportunity to teach that one clean-cut lesson appeared to be at hand.

Acting with deliberation, Wood abandoned his trek around Lake Lanao. After assembling several infantry battalions augmented by artillery and cavalry, he landed on Jolo on November 12. According to Scott, Hassan had no intention of running away, so the American forces might have waited a week to attack him. But Wood was eager to press the action and immediately began sweeping the area suspected of harboring Hassan. According to McCoy’s account, this resulted in sharp fighting that netted 100 Moro dead within two days. The Americans easily destroyed Hassan’s _cotta_ (fortress), but the Moro chief himself eluded capture. On November 14, having convinced Wood temporarily to suspend operations, Scott personally tracked down Hassan in the jungle and persuaded him to surrender. “It seemed that the bloody war was finished by the colonel’s fine bit of work,” wrote McCoy. Later that day, however, Scott carelessly permitted his prisoner to escape, sustaining gunshot wounds to both hands in the process. “The General marched right back” continued McCoy, “captured the cotta where the Colonel had been shot, and swept the big swamp of refuge clean.”

The infantry swept over every part of it and in two days’ fighting killed about 300 Moros without the loss of a man. Then Mr. Andung’s turn came [another _datto_] and his cotta was taken by a pretty bit of work, with the loss of one man killed and three wounded. _The lesson will do for all time._ In the next few days the troops marched over various parts of the Island and found the most friendly and subdued lot of people on record.

Wood estimated total Moro casualties at 1,000 to 1,200 killed in less than two weeks. Having thus “pacified” Jolo with dispatch, he returned to Zamboanga and immediately drafted his plea for abrogating the Bates Agreement. The Moros
failed to keep their half of the bargain, Wood told Taft, citing as proof the recent fighting on Jolo. What began, he wrote, as an armed plot to massacre the garrison and inhabitants of Jolo culminated with an “attack on November 12 of between 2,000 and 3,000 armed Moros upon United States troops.” Wood’s description of what he called “these acts of treachery and rebellion” was luridly inaccurate. Yet the events on Jolo provided the necessary touch of plausibility to Wood’s claim that “serious disorder often amounting to anarchy” would exist so long as the Bates Agreement remained in effect. On March 21, 1904, Wood received his wish. By direction of the president, the United States unilaterally revoked the treaty. 30

Disavowal of the Bates Agreement, reminiscent of the cavalier American attitude regarding Indian treaties throughout the previous century, symbolized the shift in U.S. policy from accommodation to forcible reconstruction of Moro society. Wood moved quickly to implement this change in policy, so much so that the abrogation of the agreement in March merely indorsed a process that was by then well under way. In addition to outlawing slavery, the legislative council scrapped the Moro legal system in favor of one that conformed to American standards. It severely restricted the use of alcohol and levied a tax—called the cedula—of one peso on every adult male in the province. It created a school system in which English was the primary language and for which it published English-language textbooks. The council also launched a program of public works and sought to co-opt selected local leaders by appointing them as “headmen” to serve as the governor’s deputies in each tribal ward. All of this the legislative council accomplished while the Bates Agreement remained nominally in effect. 31

McCoy served on the council from late 1904 through early 1906, first as acting secretary and later as provincial engineer. In the latter capacity, he supervised the province’s extensive public works program, with projects ranging from building bridges and roads to constructing schools, government buildings, and harbor facilities. Assessing the council from his perspective, he told his mother that its members operated in perfect harmony. He claimed that “never yet has there been a measure but what went through unanimously.” Such unanimity reflected a harmony stemming from Wood’s domination of the council and his ability to secure approval of whatever measures he put before it. Both the provincial secretary and the engineer were always army officers, chosen like McCoy for their loyalty to Wood. If ever the council deadlocked on a motion, Wood’s vote counted twice. The result guaranteed a majority for Wood at all times, making opposition by the council’s three civilians quixotic at best. In practice, moreover, Wood seems to have encountered little difficulty in persuading the council’s civilian representatives to defer to his views—the superintend­ent of education, Najeeb M. Saleeby, being an occasional exception. 32

Nor was there doubt in Wood’s mind as to the ultimate aim of these reforms. His objectives were precisely those that the Philippine Commission had earlier enjoined him to avoid. As the prohibition of slavery showed, Wood intended to
recast the Moros’s culture into a version compatible with Western standards. McCoy called it “educating them away from . . . customs of which the American mind disapproved.” To accomplish this goal, Wood sought to undercut the position of the *dattō*, whose authority made him the linchpin of the old tribal system. This objective found expression in Wood’s plan to convert the Moros into a nation of yeoman farmers integrated into a cash-crop economy. “Our policy,” wrote Wood in January 1904, “is to develop individualism among the people and . . . [to] teach them to stand upon their own feet independent of petty chieftains.” Toward that end, Wood intended to distribute to the head of each Moro household 40 acres of land for cultivation. To provide the Moros with models for emulation and to stimulate their ambition for better surroundings, the American governor also hoped to recruit “desirable immigrants” from Europe or the United States.

Wood offered further encouragement to his would-be yeomen by guaranteeing a market for their produce. He created government-supervised commodity exchanges, first in Zamboanga and then elsewhere in the province. McCoy viewed the exchanges as “a great thing.” He termed them “the best sort of charity, and really the only kind needed in the Philippines, . . . teaching [the Moros] to help themselves.” More than mere social uplift was involved, however. Wood believed that these exchanges would “exert a far-reaching influence in building up trade relations with the Moros and other non-Christian peoples.” Or, as Scott commented succinctly, the exchange was “a great educator.” By forging ties of self-interest between the Moros and the market economy, loyalty to the larger socioeconomic system would eclipse traditional tribal bonds.

The immediate effect of these attempts to alter their way of life was to stiffen Moro resistance. The Moros would not obligingly abide by the prohibitions against slavery and polygamy; they would refuse to pay taxes, however trivial; and, above all, the *dattōs* would not relinquish their privileged position. Thus, the policies of Wood the reform governor added immeasurably to the difficulties of Wood the military commander in maintaining order and respect for American authority. One historian explains this seeming contradiction by suggesting that the tenacity of Moro opposition surprised the Americans who did not “fully grasp . . . that virtually no aspect of Moro culture was unrelated to Islam (or the Moro concept of it).” In other words, the Americans failed to see that their civilizing reforms threatened deeply held beliefs that would permit no compromise.

The evidence nevertheless suggests just the opposite: Americans understood quite well the connection between their reforms, Moro beliefs, and the ensuing violence. The Moros, wrote McCoy in November 1903, believed that the aim of American policy was to Christianize them, “hence most of the trouble.” Scott, too, recognized the religious context in which the Moros viewed such requirements as the *cedula*, recalling that “the attempt to collect the tax was regarded by the Moros as an attack upon Islam.” Even those who overlooked the religious
connotations of Moro resistance conceded its deep-seated character. Wood himself implicitly acknowledged as much. The Moros, hitherto entirely free from restraint, objected to paying the cedula, he said, because they saw it as a token of submission to the government—as indeed it was. And Capt. Daniel B. Devore, district governor of Lanao, sensibly observed that the difficulty lay in convincing the Moros “that a government which taxes them without their having a voice in the matter of taxation nor use of the funds is really the best sort of government for them.”

Wood’s superiors on the Philippine Commission also understood that the reforms threatened the Moro way of life. As Luke E. Wright, Taft’s successor as governor general, reported in 1904:

The new order of things [created by Wood] was distasteful [to the Moros] in every respect. . . . They resented any interference with their customs or habits of life . . . as an unwarranted and offensive intrusion. . . . The promulgation of the law against slavery and the protection of escaped slaves from recapture were regarded by their chiefs and headmen as an unwarranted invasion of their vested rights and was deeply resented. 36

Rather than failing to appreciate the depth of Moro opposition, the Americans were determined to follow through on their civilizing mission despite that opposition and—as events would show—no matter how great the cost.

As Moro resistance to Wood’s policies stiffened, hostilities escalated into a full-fledged guerrilla war, though one largely shielded from public view. American soldiers clashed with Moro fighters over one hundred times during the thirty-two months that Wood served as governor. Like other conflicts rooted in assumptions of the enemy’s inherent inferiority, this one grew uglier the longer it endured. American tactics emphasized the use of large, deliberate sweeps designed to flush the Moros out of their jungle hiding places. The Americans succeeded in fixing their opponents, usually within the cotta of some rebellious datto, and punished the enemy with artillery fire before beginning a final assault. Given the superiority of American firepower, the outcome of such encounters was seldom in doubt. 37

McCoy frequently accompanied these expeditions, operating with the advance guard in his capacity as intelligence officer of the Department of Mindanao. Describing one such operation into the Taraca Valley near Lake Lanao in April 1904, he explained to his family that “the General’s idea was not to slaughter a lot of people, but to thoroughly demoralize the chiefs, and to show them that we could go any place . . . without the slightest hesitation.” Wood demanded that each datto in the area permit troops to search his cotta for weapons. Should a datto refuse, Wood shelled his fortress, an effective tactic, said McCoy, because “the Moro cannot stand artillery fire.” Afterwards, the cotta of the offending chief was put to the torch. Resistance was apparently common; on this operation alone, Wood’s troops destroyed over one hundred Moro strongholds. 38
Typically, the Americans sustained only light casualties. In the Taraca Valley, for example, only two were killed and eight wounded. Moro casualties are more difficult to calculate. Although McCoy never included specific figures in his letters home, the number of Moros killed was undoubtedly great, as a letter in May 1905 suggests. Wood cornered a chief named Peruka Utic and demanded his surrender. When the Moro leader replied from his cotta that he would surrender to “no dog of an infidel,” Wood battered the fortress for an hour and then assaulted with the Twenty-second Infantry. The American battalion, reported McCoy, “finished the business killing Utic and his whole outfit like mad dogs.”

The Moros’s persistent refusal to submit even when faced with overwhelming odds exasperated the Americans. “It’s harder to keep the people alive than to kill them,” McCoy complained at one point. And on the Taraca Valley expedition, Wood observed, “It seems a pity that these people insist upon hostilities which can only result in their destruction.” Yet, however stubbornly the Moros might resist, Wood had no intention of relenting. A few days later, he wrote:

The people of this valley have been so hostile and intractable for generations that I have decided to go thoroughly over the whole valley, destroying all warlike supplies, and dispersing and destroying every hostile force, and also to destroy every cota [sic] where there is the slightest resistance. While these measures may appear harsh it is the kindest thing to do.

In short, Wood offered the Moros the alternatives of submission or extermination, a policy that bore fruit most notoriously in the so-called battle of Bud Dajo in March 1906. Although well known, it bears recounting as the best-documented illustration of the consequences of Wood’s policies.

Bud Dajo was an extinct volcanic crater on the island of Jolo, several miles from the district capital. With its conical shape, heavily overgrown slopes, and 2,100-foot summit, it was an ideal defensive position. In mid-1905, several hundred Moros congregated at the top of this previously uninhabited mountain, apparently intending to settle there permanently. Scott, the district governor, viewed this development uneasily but promised that, if the Moros behaved themselves and “did not set themselves up... as being in defiance of the American government, he would not attack them.” In essence, Scott would tolerate the Dajo settlement so long as the Moros did not force his hand.

Amicable relations prevailed until early in 1906 when Scott departed on home leave and Capt. James H. Reeves became acting district governor. American officials began to take a different view of the Moro presence on Dajo. Instances of violence, theft, and arson in the local area were blamed on the Dajo Moros. The Americans were soon attributing a broader significance to the encampment. On March 1, Reeves reported to Capt. George T. Langhorne, the provincial
secretary, that the Dajo Moros were boasting "that they have established ... an
impregnable position, and that they are in open defiance of the American
authority, and that we ... cannot force them off the hill and cannot make them
obey the laws." By claiming to be "patriots and semi-liberators of the Moro
people," he continued, "they had forfeited any right or claim that Colonel Scott
had promised them." Reeves saw only one solution: "This thing will continue ...
... until we finish the job and these people are whipped." Such a recommenda-
tion merely confirmed conclusions already reached by higher authorities. Three
weeks earlier, Langhorne told Wood that the Dajo Moros would probably have to
be exterminated. Wood agreed. Such a "ridiculous little affair" should be
brought to an end. He recommended that "a couple of columns should take the
place some night and clean it up." 42

Convinced that they had unearthed the embers of insurrection, the Americans
ruthlessly proceeded to snuff them out. Several battalions under the command of
Col. Joseph W. Duncan assembled at the base of Bud Dajo on March 5 and began
scaling its sides the next day. Wood at this time was nowhere near the battlefield.
Indeed, he was no longer governor of the province, having recently assumed his
long-delayed command of the Philippine Division. In the company of his
successor as provincial governor, Brig. Gen. Tasker H. Bliss, Wood intended to
monitor the action at Dajo by reports cabled to Zamboanga. But when the cable
failed, Wood and Bliss, accompanied by McCoy, sailed for Jolo. They arrived at
daybreak on March 7, "just in time," wrote McCoy, "to see through our glasses
the khaki dots swarming over a cotta silhouetted against the sky." At about this
time, Wood was stricken with one of the seizures that plagued him throughout the
last twenty years of his life. Despite McCoy’s efforts to hold him in the saddle, the
general collapsed to the ground. Wood quickly recovered but was obviously in no
condition to assume active command. He thus remained merely an observer
throughout the action. 43

Although the Americans secured a foothold on Dajo’s crest that day, much
fighting remained. "The whole rim of the crater was ... fortified with cottas and
trenches," wrote McCoy. Rather than engage in costly assaults against each
separate stronghold, the Americans laboriously dragged several light artillery
pieces up the side of the mountain to use in reducing the Moro fortifications, a
process that McCoy followed for the next twenty-four hours: "It was most
remarkable the fierce dying of the Moros. At every cotta efforts were made to get
them to surrender or to send out their women but for an answer a rush of
shrieking men and women would come cutting the air and dash amongst the
soldiers like mad dogs." The result was predictable: "The hostiles [were] wiped
out to a man," McCoy reported. "Only about twenty women and children were
saved." Approximately 600 Moros were slaughtered, including a sizable number
of women and children. American losses totaled 18 killed and 52 wounded. 44 A
brief outcry ensued in the United States when a low-ranking official in Manila
leaked reports of the battle to American newspapers. Press accounts stressed the
number of noncombatants killed on Bud Dajo, and congressmen—principally Democrats—hastened to demand an explanation.\footnote{For two and a half years, Wood’s excursions against the Moros had gone virtually unnoticed. Now, ironically, he was called to account for an operation in which he played only a peripheral role. Of necessity, he publicly assumed “entire responsibility for the action of the troops in every particular.” But, while admitting that “a considerable number of women and children were killed in the fight,” he strenuously denied that “any American soldier [had] wantonly killed” a noncombatant. The fault lay with the tactics used by the Moros: The women “were dressed and armed much like the men and charged with them.” As for the children, they were “used by the men as shields while charging troops.” In short, the Moros “apparently desired that none be saved.”\footnote{Writing privately to Roosevelt, Wood did not attempt to blame the Moros for their own massacre. He rejected the notion that the sex or comparative youth of those killed on Dajo mattered. “No part of such an aggregation can be given any protection or consideration from those who are ordered to destroy it. . . . Work of this kind,” he told the president, “has its disagreeable side, which is the unavoidable killing of women and children; but it must be done, and disagreeable...}}
as it is, there is no way of avoiding it.” Roosevelt, Taft, and the Republican party rallied to Wood’s defense. Within a month—amazingly, given the lingering presence of other similar atrocities—the issue was forgotten. Wood emerged with his career intact. It was, however, a sour note on which to end his stewardship and one that McCoy—ever the defender of Wood’s reputation—in later years was hard pressed to justify.

For McCoy, the high point of his first tour in the Philippines occurred several months prior to Bud Dajo. While Wood was in the United States on medical leave the previous autumn, McCoy conceived and commanded an operation that led to the elimination of the most elusive of all Moro leaders, Datto Ali, thereby emerging for the first time from his mentor’s shadow. Ali, a prominent chief who dominated the Cotabato Valley in the Lanao district, was the single most formidable opponent of the American presence in the Moro Province. A shrewd and ruthless fighter, he eluded the Americans longer than any other Moro leader. His talent for survival, however, served to so incite army officers that getting Ali became an obsession, a litmus test of Wood’s ability to deny any exception to his authority.

Prior to Wood’s arrival, the American authorities who avoided interfering with Moro customs found Ali generally agreeable. Yet, as early as December 1903, McCoy already identified the datto as chief among the opponents of the American antislavery law and predicted that “he’ll either be in prison or up in arms against us before a great while.” Wood sought assurances of Ali’s willingness to abide by the rules laid down by the new regime. When Ali refused even to talk, Wood expected to play out the usual sequence of events—an attack on his adversary’sotta, to be followed inevitably by submission on the part of any survivors. Ali, however, refused to play the role of compliant victim. In early March 1904, Wood assembled a multibattalion force to take Ali’s fortress at Saranaya. Showing unusual caution, Wood shelled theotta for a full twenty-four hours. When the infantry finally assaulted the ruins of the stronghold, they found only a single wounded Moro. The remainder, including Ali, escaped during the night. Gauging the enormousotta to be capable of sheltering 6,000 warriors, McCoy remarked that the evacuation “was the most astonishing piece of work for any but a civilized people.” Ali’s tactical skills earned grudging respect. The Moro chief, McCoy commented, was “a soldier and a gentleman. . . . I don’t blame him for fighting for his ‘ancient customs.’ ”

Two months later, Ali retaliated. In May, he ambushed an infantry company in the Rio Grande Valley and killed fifteen Americans without losing a man. Wood’s hastily mounted pursuit again came up empty-handed. As McCoy remarked after a futile two-months’ search—during which another American patrol was ambushed—Ali was “still chasing from one end of the valley to the other.” Although U.S. troops doggedly clung to his trail, “it’s just by accident when they encounter” him. Wood combined his pursuit of Ali with attempts to coax the
Moro leader into surrendering. Ali refused such ploys. As he replied to one proposal on July 14, 1904 (in a letter that McCoy translated): "Which is better for you, to kill me or not? . . . Until I die all the people will not submit to the government, because I will try to kill all the people who are friends of the Americans." Perhaps convinced by Ali’s threat, Wood the following day posted a reward of $500 for Ali’s capture, dead or alive.51

The new year brought no better luck. Ali, however, suspended his attacks on American troops and withdrew to the rugged Cotabato Valley. Yet, if the Moro chief no longer molested the Americans, his determination to remain free was undiminished. He no longer wished to fight, but neither did he intend to surrender—as fruitless negotiations by Saleeby and Halstead Dorey, McCoy’s classmate and another member of Wood’s circle, showed. Despite Ali’s inactivity, the Americans still viewed him as an irritating symbol of Moro resistance. Thus, Langhorne, as acting provincial governor in August 1905, commented, it was necessary "to get entirely rid of a disturbing element like Ali" to guarantee that he would not "be in a position to create further trouble in the future." Langhorne opposed any further bargaining with Ali, arguing that "every concession to an Asiatic . . . is a mistake."52

Shortly thereafter the prospects for getting Ali brightened when McCoy extracted a key piece of information from two of Ali’s rivals—Datto Piang and Entu Enok. Ali, they revealed, had abandoned his usual hiding place and was now camped along the Malala River near the Gulf of Davao. Brig. Gen. James A. Buchanan, commanding the Department of Mindanao in Wood’s absence, decided to mount yet another expedition against the Moro leader. Buchanan’s inclination was to do as Wood had done in the past: to march a large force up the Cotabato Valley, sealing off avenues of escape as it advanced. Yet such maneuvers repeatedly failed to surprise Ali because, as McCoy commented, "every movement of troops there was known by him almost at once." McCoy proposed instead to rely on a small body of troops that could move quickly and avoid notice while approaching Ali’s hide-out, not by the expected route up the valley but from the rear. On an expedition in late 1904, McCoy explored such an indirect approach into the area, and he believed that he could retrace his route. Impressed with McCoy’s alternative, Buchanan not only approved it but appointed the young captain to lead the operation.53

On October 16, at the head of a column of 100 American infantrymen, 140 Filipino bearers, and 10 scouts, McCoy went ashore at Digos on the Gulf of Davao. Knowing that success depended on catching Ali unawares, McCoy moved quickly into the interior, pushing his troops to the limit of their endurance. By October 20, the bearers, the scouts, and several Americans were exhausted. Refusing to ease up, McCoy left the lame behind to follow at leisure and with the remaining 77 infantrymen, “stripped of all impedimenta, excepting one day’s cooked rations,” pushed on. After marching for two more days and nights, the party reached Ali’s hide-out before dawn on October 22.54
McCoy divided his small force into three groups, deploying them around the clearing that contained Ali’s hut. As flanking elements skirted the edges of the clearing to prevent any escape, the center, led by Lt. Philip Remington, burst into the clearing to find Ali and two companions lounging in the doorway. Ali grabbed a rifle and opened fire, killing Pvt. Llewellyn W. Bobb. Remington returned fire and hit the Moro chief. A brief fire fight with other Moros still inside Ali’s quarters ensued. The outcome was never in doubt, and soon McCoy sounded a ceasefire. Ali, his son, and ten followers lay dead. Some fifty others, many of them women and children huddled inside the house, were captured. Of these, several had sustained wounds that the Americans treated. McCoy immediately dispatched “messengers to surrounding rancherias [settlements] that since Ali’s death the hostile operations in the Rio Grande Valley were over.”

From a tactical standpoint, McCoy’s operation succeeded brilliantly. Given the enormous—perhaps exaggerated—importance attributed to Ali’s elimination, McCoy reaped substantial accolades. Besides official commendations from Buchanan and Wood, there was a cherished letter from the White House that conveyed congratulations “not merely as President but as an old personal friend.” McCoy’s feat also won him a first heady taste of national publicity. According to an enthusiastic correspondent in Collier’s, Ali’s death marked “the last phase in that war of extermination which the American race has waged for nearly three centuries against, first the red and then the brown race.” With Bud Dajo still to come, such a prediction was obviously premature. Still, the momentary importance of McCoy’s accomplishment permitted him to stand alone for the first time. As such, this climactic event of his Philippine tour inaugurated a new phase in his career.