40 Years Ago Today!

Dewey's Own Story of the Battle of Manila

By GEORGE DEWEY

As the gloom of the night gradually shut out the details of the coast (Filipino coast) the squadron (United States Asiatic squadron) steamed quietly on toward the entrance of Manila bay with all lights masked and the gun crews at the guns. By degrees the high land on either side loomed up out of the darkness, while the flagship (Olympia) headed for Boca Grande. A light shower passed over about 11 o'clock and heavy cumulous clouds, drifting across the sky from time to time, obscured the new moon. The landmarks and islands were, however, fairly visible, while compass bearing for regulating our course could readily be observed.

It was thirty-six years since, as executive officer of the Mississippi, I was first under fire in the passage of Forts Jackson and St. Philip, under Farragut, and thirty-five years since, as executive officer, I had lost my ship in the attempted passage of the batteries of Fort Hays. Then, as now, we were dependent upon the screen of darkness to get by successfully, but then I was a subordinate, and now the supreme responsibility was mine.

If the guns commanding the entrance (to Manila bay) were well served there was danger of damage to my squadron before it engaged the enemy's squadron. If the Spaniards had shown enterprise in the use of the materials which they possessed, then we might expect a heavy fire from the shore batteries. One who had military knowledge did not have to wait for the developments of the Russo-Japanese war to know how quickly modern guns of high velocity and low trajectory may be employed and how effective they may be when fired from a stationary position.

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