

# H-Net Reviews

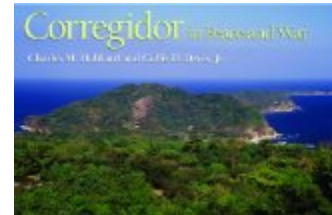
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Charles M. Hubbard, Collis H. Davis. *Corregidor in Peace and War*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. 216 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-1712-7.

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Commissioned by Dennis R. Hidalgo



## The Military History of the Island of Corregidor

This is the kind of book that you will find on coffee tables of people interested in history, and in the case of this book, military history. Its subject is the small but strategically located island Corregidor at the entrance of the Bay of Manila, that because of its position has had a turbulent history of military warfare. It contains beautiful, although not always relevant photos and maps that all testify to this history. The text is less important in these kinds of books, but in six concise chapters, the authors try to explain the military importance of the island. In a traditional historical fashion they tell the story of an island which, almost in spite of itself, became an epitome of the Philippines' modern military history.

In many ways, just as Philippine modern history itself, Corregidor was also part of U.S. military history. By the second half of the nineteenth century, many American weapons had found their way to the Philippines. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Philippines became the center of the U.S. military efforts. Admiral George Dewey led the American fleet into Manila Bay on May 1 of the same year and at the end of the year the Philippines passed into American hands. The Americans soon grasped the strategic value of the island and started to really fortify it. In 1902 the whole bay area was converted into the Manila Bay Defense Reservation and modern defensive positions were constructed on Corregidor. The island was literally transformed into a formidable fortress with heavy artillery of large caliber.

The irony was that most of the weaponry placed on

the island consisted of models that had been used or tested in World War I and which were more or less archaic at the moment they were installed. Battleships that were built after the war were far too powerful to be bothered by these weapons. In addition, the emergence of airplanes as an offensive weapon exposed the weakness of the military constructions. Already by 1922, when the construction of the fortress was more or less completed, the weapons and fortifications of Manila Bay were clearly obsolete. This combined with downsized budgets would prove disastrous in 1942 when Manila was attacked by Japanese forces.

Within a few hours of the air strike at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Japanese began to bomb the Philippines and destroyed most of the American planes in the country, eliminating in the process any chance of effective air resistance. This accentuated the vulnerable situation of Corregidor. In the last days of the month, the Japanese began systematically bombing the islands in Manila Bay and soon Japanese forces landed in Luzon. The American general Douglas MacArthur ordered a strategic withdrawal to the Bataan Peninsula in order to concentrate his forces and to defend the peninsula, supported by fortress Corregidor, in anticipation of reinforcements. However, this support did not come and the American and Philippine forces were quickly surrounded by Japanese troops. In spite of this situation and the dangerously overcrowded situation on the island Corregidor (where 15,000 people lived close together with a deficient fresh water supply) it defended itself until early

May when the Japanese landed on the island and established a beachhead. By then the military forces in Bataan had already surrendered and the situation on the island was hopeless. On May 6, Corregidor forces also surrendered to the Japanese. The Japanese forces would control the island until February 1945, when the last 35 of almost 6,000 Japanese soldiers and marines surrendered to the then superior American forces.

This is in a nutshell the story on Corregidor as told in this book. It touches on some debates among military historians but in general the authors are content

with simply telling the story of the military proceedings around the island. As such, it seems to be directed more toward a generally interested public, possibly even tourists visiting the island, than toward professional historians. It is also an eminently American book. The American perspective and the lives of American soldiers and generals are central, but the Filipino, let alone the Japanese, actors hardly come to life. As said at the start of this review, this is a well-designed coffee table book; for historians it can only be the start of further reading on the fascinating twentieth-century history of the Philippines.

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