

# **Reconstructing Ethnic Identities: *The Philippine Constabulary in the Cordillera Frontiers***

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Tinalakay sa papel na ito ang Konstabularyo ng Pilipinas bilang isang institusyon--ang pilosopiya nito, mga patakaran at gawain sa pagitan ng mga pangkat etniko ng Kordilyera noong unang dekada ng pamamalakad ng mga Amerikano. Sa pag-aaral ng Konstabularyo ng Pilipinas bilang isang institusyon, layon ng may akda na maipakita ang imahe ng mga lumikha nito at ang mga kondisyon na naging dahilan ng pagkakatatag nito. Tatalakayin sa mga susunod na pahina ang mga pag-aaklas na isinagawa sa Cordillera sa pamamagitan ng pag-aaral ng institusyon ng Konstabularyo. Makabuluhan ang pamamaraan na ito sapagkat nasasalamon sa kasaysayan nito sa Kordilyera ang naging tugon ng mananakop sa pagsusupil sa pag-aaklas ng mga katutubo na nagbigay daan rin sa mataagumpay na pagbago ng mga imperyalistang Amerikano sa lipunan at katarigian ng mga katutubo.

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## INTRODUCTION

Institutions are societal abstractions that evolve or are created to meet human needs. Institutions are concerned with qualitative changes with the purpose of gaining support for goals, overcoming resistance, exchanging resources, structuring the environment (both natural and social), and transforming patterns of behavior - the norms and values of people.<sup>1</sup>

This paper is on the Philippine Constabulary as an institution- its philosophy, its operations and activities among the ethnic groups of the Cordillera during the first decade of American rule. In studying the Philippine Constabulary as an institution, this paper reflects on the image of the creators of the institution, the conditions that demanded its creation. If the institution was indeed created to meet societal needs, the questions worth addressing are: what needs and whose needs?

In the Cordillera, the history of the Philippine Constabulary is synonymous to the history of Cordillera militancy and the consequent suppression and eventual pacification of the region. The constabulary provided a shot of colonial anesthetics to Igorot resistance resulting in successful social engineering and reconstructing of ethnic identities. This study, therefore, provides a different approach to the study of Cordillera resistance through the study of an institution - the Philippine Constabulary. The institutional history serves as an eyepiece for studying the intricate web of American-Igorot relations during the first decades of American colonialism.

## AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN THE CORDILLERA FRONTIERS

When the Philippine Constabulary was organized among the non-Christian tribes in the Cordillera, the American officials' views regarding the people were no different from their fellow colonizers. The use of the word *frontiers* to refer to the Cordillera summarizes the psychology of the American empire in relation to the unpacified margins.<sup>2</sup> The indigenous peoples of the Cordillera gave every American the impression of having to encounter a savage civilization like those of the American Indians in the frontiers of their homeland.

Robert G. Wood writing on the history of the Constabulary on the occasion of the institution's 30th anniversary expressed:

The non-Christian tribes of the Philippines are unadulterated wild warrior tribes, and their thirst for the blood of a native Christian or for that of their tribal enemies is as keen as was the thirst for the blood of the pale-faced.<sup>3</sup>

This was then the expectation every American had regarding his encounter with the Igorots. In consonance with this perception, the *Manual for the Philippine Constabulary* categorically stated that the role of the Constabulary was to suppress tribal fights, headhunting and other war-like expeditions of native tribes. The *Manual* directed the American Constabulary officials to learn the dialects and the customs of the people, as well as gain the confidence of the chiefs of the various tribes. These efforts should pave the way to a higher degree of influence of the Constabulary in the settling of internal conflicts.

It is noteworthy that the Constabulary forbade its officers to accept presents from members of the tribe without the officers compensating these with gifts of equal value. There are many pieces of evidence proving the violation of this provision as the Americans who had lived in the frontiers were just too eager to pacify the natives as well as collect some artifacts about their new-found "specimens of savagery."

With all these guidelines, how did the American Constabulary Official react and behave during his residence in the Cordillera frontiers. Was he assimilated or did he instead work towards the assimilation of the people in to the colonial mainstream? Peter W. Stanley in an article reflected:

To administer an empire, one needed a colonial service, people willing to make a career of the colony...What motivated Americans to travel to the other side of the earth and devote their lives to work in a foreign culture?...What drew these people from the center to the periphery? To answer such questions is to explore the psychology of empire.<sup>4</sup>

And so these questions are likewise asked of the Americans most of whom were assigned to top Constabulary posts. While

American teachers were sent to the area before pacification (or to pave the way to pacification). Other Americans who went to the Cordillera were actually Constabulary officials who were more often than not given the rank of Lieutenant Governor. As early as 1902, a Constabulary company was already organized in Bontoc, under Lieutenant Louis A. Powless and E.A. Eckman.<sup>5</sup>

A survey of the reports submitted by American officials in the Cordillera shows the multi-functions performed by the Constabulary officials. As district engineers, the governors assisted in trail as well as road building. They were also tasked to round up road tax labors which in some cases could not be done because the natives were "uncooperative"; natives were required to contribute labor valued at eighty centavos per day.<sup>6</sup> The Constabulary made sure that the natives paid their taxes dutifully.

Lastly, they also performed the so-called missionary duties that required explaining to the people the benefits of modern civilization - the advantages of education and the use of modern medicines and the practice of sanitation. In a 1909 report, Dean C. Worcester credited Lt. Governor Hale for being the first man to bring about the complete sanitation of Igorot towns.

They also introduced new crops such as coffee; they built agricultural experiment stations. This was partly to stir the subsistence economy of the region toward the drive for the production of cash crops.

Over and above all these was the Constabulary's task of suppressing inter-tribal conflicts and Igorot resistance to American colonization.

There seems to be a pattern that could be drawn from the experience of the governors - the creation of a patriarchal role and the image of demigods. Lewis Gleeck in *Americans on the Philippine Frontiers* recounts that on one occasion, Governor Walter Hale summoned an Ilocano and asked: "You are from the lowlands, aren't you? Who is god down there?" The Ilocano replied: "Apo Dios." Hale asserted: "Up here, I am god. You obey me."

Apparently, there were other reasons that brought the American lieutenant governor to the Cordillera, and made him love his post - the lure of the gold mines.

Walter Franklin Hale of Nebraska, who was appointed Lt. Governor of Amburayan in 1903 was already in the Cordillera as early as 1900. He first proceeded to La Trinidad in search of the rumored gold deposits, the big strike of which was then in Suyoc, Mancayan. He eventually married a native by the name of "Ensino" from Gon bong, Ampusungan.<sup>7</sup>

Hale was later appointed to a post in Kalinga. Hale who was also known as Sapao broke American rules by engaging in private business in Kalinga. For this and other reasons, he was ordered out by the American government. He challenged: "Come and get me." He eventually had a nervous breakdown.

Brigadier General Charles E. Nathorst who was appointed chief of the Philippine Constabulary was engaged in gold-mining in Suyoc, Lepanto and Bontoc from 1900 to 1901. On November 16, 1901, he entered the Constabulary and was first appointed Second Class Inspector.

While the American government continued to justify the *raison d'être* of the Constabulary - that is to become an instrument through stabilization - who can say what factors made the Cordillera attractive to the American. Encounter with what was considered exotic may just be one reason, but Igorot gold proved to be a stronger reason.

#### **THE IGOROT WARRIOR AS CONSTABLE**

It is important to note that prior to the creation of the Constabulary units in the Cordillera, many ethnolinguistic groups had a warrior tradition. It is therefore, not surprising for many natives to have developed the enthusiasm in being part of another military tradition. The creation of the Philippine Constabulary in the Cordillera which entailed enlisting natives as members of the police force was an act of institutionalizing a warrior society but this time integrated in the grand design of colonialism.

The characteristics of the Cordillera warrior society were then very much attuned to the immediate need of the time. It was not surprising then for the Americans to have easily diverted the skills of the Igorot warrior to the latter's own pacification and eventual submission to colonial anesthetics.

Dean C. Worcester remarked: "Whatever practicable, it is highly desirable to police the wild man's country with wild men, and this has proved far easier than anticipated." In employing this tactic, the Americans were actually applying the principle of *divide et impera*. Taking advantage of interethnic animosities, the American usually conscripted a tribe for expeditions against an enemy group. This resulted in power alignments, several areas joined the Americans if only to retaliate against their enemies. Thus on several occasions Sabangan, Bontoc, Kiangan and Ifugao joined the American forces to suppress Hapao, Talubin, Nagacadan and Kababuyan.

Being issued a rifle gave the Igorot pride; being a member of a warrior society, the new weapon symbolized a new social status. The Americans were able to read the Igorot mind. Wilcox noted that all over the islands especially among the non-Christian tribes, the people were keen about owning a firearm. Thus he observed: "The great ambition of the Ifugao is to be a policeman and so be authorized to carry a gun."<sup>9</sup> By 1903 the Philippine Constabulary had a large force to perform police duty.

In assessing the performance of the native constable, Dean C. Worcester found him "faithful, efficient, absolutely loyal and implicitly obedient."<sup>10</sup> He considered the Ifugao and the Bontok natural fighters, and thus made the best soldiers. (The Kalinga at this time were still up in arms against the Americans.

According to the Constabulary Officials, during operations the native constables could march for hours without rest. As may be expected they are hardy, strong, able-bodied and active. These physical attributes enhanced the performance of their police duty.

They were also observed to be excellent riflemen. This may be proved when ten Igorot riflemen were chosen to represent

the district during a shooting competition in Vigan. Instead of sending the best sharpshooters, ten of the available men in the Mayoyao station, were sent. Upon reaching the site of the competition, the lowlanders made fun of the Igorots who wore no trousers. Amazingly, all ten prizes were won by the Igorots except for the fact that an Ilocano tied for the tenth slot.<sup>11</sup>

During one of his visits, Wilcox described the effect of the native constable's membership to the constabulary:

There are five companies of constables in the Mountain Province, each serving in the part of the country from which recruited, and each retaining in its uniform the colors and such other native features as could be turned to account. Thus, the only "civilized" so to say, elements are the forage cap and khaki jacket worn directly over the skin; otherwise, the legs, feet and body are bare; the local g-string is worn...they are highlanders in every sense of word.<sup>12</sup>

Elarth assessed the contribution of the native constables - that is, with the partnership of the loyal and efficient native constables and the American officers, inter-tribal warfare was eliminated in one short decade;<sup>13</sup> the Igorots were pacified.

### **CORDILLERA CHALLENGES TO THE *WHITE APOS***

Undeniably the American colonizers were more successful in introducing qualitative changes to Cordillera society. Imperialist machinations through indigenous culture proved to be one of the most effective means in curbing Igorot resistance. The role of the Philippine Constabulary as an instrument of pacification cannot be undermined. The Americans who went to the frontiers worked under a well-coordinated framework of pacification.

But even with the Philippine constabulary, the American colonizers could not claim absolute pacification. The history of Cordillera resistance was sustained—armed challenges continued until 1913, and other forms of resistance evolved in the next years.

Contrary to impressions that the American period in the Cordillera was a period of acquiescence, the Igorots challenged the White Apos.

Until about 1913, one major challenge came in the form of armed attacks. These responses are contained in the memoirs of American administrators who visited the Cordillera, constabulary officers who supervised strategic points, and newspapers that reported the developments in the region.

For this paper, issues of the *Manila Times* were reviewed. There was incessant coverage of Igorot-Constabulary encounters, the first outbreak occurred in the Lepanto-Bontoc area in the spring of 1903. A Constabulary detachment was sent to the town of Barlig to arrest some "criminals"; the people decided to fight the force rather than surrender the so-called fugitives. Consequently, in May 1903, Senior Inspector Captain Nathorst organized a force which eventually suppressed tribal resistance. The event was described as follows:

The expedition was greeted by inhabitants arrayed with shield and spears and many with the familiar "headhunter's hatchet" and stated that they preferred to give up their lives before those of their townsmen.<sup>15</sup>

With the staunch native resistance, the Constabulary entered the town only after a rampage.

On February 27, 1905, the *Manila Times* reported that a band of 100 Igorots took the warpath again against the Constabulary force under the command of Lieutenant Case of Nueva Vizcaya. This occurred in the rancheria of Lagau in the district of Hapao. Four months later Igorots from the districts of Banaue and Quiangan joined forces with some Ilongotes of Bayombong in attacking a Constabulary detachment.

Still on the same year, Major Crawford of the fourth Constabulary district made efforts to hold tribal conferences to settle tribal conflicts. A *Manila Times* issue describes how they were attacked during their visit to Mandacayan, considered the forbidden city:

The guides had led the detachment entirely around the Mandacayan outfit, which was lying in wait lined up on both sides of the river trail armed with rocks, spears and weapons for a good day's killing. The detachment entered the town which has been



practically deserted, but was subject during the night to a shower of rocks from the mountain sides.<sup>15</sup>

Major Crawford along with Captain Knauber met a similar fate in 1906 this time among the Apayao. In 1907, Lt. Gallman was attacked by an Igorot band led by Lingay, one of the toughest native leaders.

These direct confrontations were contained with the launching of expeditions by the Philippine Constabulary. In 1904 alone, the Fourth district of the Constabulary launched 462 expeditions, killed 17 outlaws and captured more than 1,000 ammunitions.<sup>17</sup>

William Dossier who came to the Philippines in 1908, and was later assigned to Mayoyao, recalled having been welcomed "by numerous shots into the station from the surrounding hills." Dean C. Worcester himself was sent a message expressing the Igorots' dislike for white men encroaching into their territory and meddling in internal affairs.<sup>18</sup>

Another Constabulary officer by the name of Captain James Rhea attempted to enter an Isneg village with the purpose of acquainting the natives of the new American laws. In a shower of spears, 30 of Rhea's men were killed, 6 others were killed while negotiating the unfamiliar rough terrain.<sup>19</sup>

Resistance to American rule came in other forms. Millenarianism in the Lepanto area with the founding of the Sapilada in 1901, and the Manolay Cult in Kabugawan, Apayao (1937-1939) signaled some crises in Cordillera ethnicity as a result of an alienating social order.

To evade integration particularly submission to the policy of taxation, population movement was rampant particularly in the more remote areas. These groups were eventually called *natalao* (constantly migrating) by census enumerators.<sup>20</sup>

The Igorots likewise opposed infrastructure projects as road networks; these activities ignited hostilities against the Americans. The Igorots knew the adverse effects of these improvements particularly in the erosion of indigenous culture.

They also believed that these roads would facilitate the entry of the White Apostles. But some had to kowtow for some reasons as Rev. Robert White wrote in 1914:

The people of Mainit, Bontoc did not want any road in their midst because it would mean that the strangers would come to bathe in their hot waters (springs) which was excellent for all manners of sickness. But the government had ordered them to build it and they had done so...because the constabulary soldiers would come and shoot them or burn their houses if they defied the government.

It was then a common occurrence for infrastructure projects to be met with spears and shields.

The Igorots were just not too willing to abandon their system of religious beliefs in favor of Christianity. An anecdote shows this resistance:

Then, too, they tell us that we have sinned against God. What sin have we committed against him?...The holy pictures that you give us show that they who killed God's son were bearded men. You yourself have a beard. Therefore, those slayers of God's son were not our ancestors. Therefore, we Igorots have not sinned against God.<sup>21</sup>

The Igorots reacted negatively to the establishment of schools in the region. It was expressed that education uprooted the young from home and their culture. When the first group of students from the boarding schools returned, the elders noticed that the students began objecting to the traditional life and refused to work in the fields. Yet there were no jobs for them with the skills they learned. The problem was how to match their education to the sophisticated environment.

In closing, the record of the American colonizer and its institution, Philippine Constabulary among the so-called wild tribes of the Cordillera, had the late William Henry Scott give the following warning: "We are seeing quite the glowing view of the American occupation of the Philippines, while suffering almost total amnesia of what the actual details added up to."<sup>22</sup>

Despite the Philippine Constabulary as an instrument of pacification Igorot resistance persisted as a historical theme.

On January 1, 1926, the PC District of Northern Luzon was reorganized with its headquarters at San Fernando, La Union. The Mountain Province remained under the said district. On December 1, 1927, Pangasinan and Nueva Ecija which were formerly under the Northern Luzon district were transferred to the Southern Luzon District. March 25, 1929 with the Bontoc as site of the headquarters. By this time the Northern Luzon District had 16 stations, 6 substations and a ratio of 1 soldier for every 1,620 inhabitants.<sup>23</sup> As to whether the transfer of the headquarters had any relation to heightened Igorot militancy is not known. By this time other forms of protests surfaced. The Igorots began articulating their land rights reflected in their efforts to defend their mines. One such evidence is a letter signed by 600 natives of Bontoc. The letter complained of the colonial government's utter disregard for the environmental degradation resulting from mining operations.

On January 14, 1936 the Philippine Constabulary was merged with the Philippine Army as the latter's Constabulary Division. But it was re-established as the PC two years later. During the outbreak of World War II, the PC was disbanded and became part of the Army of the United States. It was reconstituted on July 20, 1945 as the Military Police Command of the Philippine Army.<sup>24</sup> With the continuing rationalization of giving the military institution a semblance of a civilian instrument for peace, the Philippine Constabulary is what you and I know as the Philippine National Police. To the Cordilleran peoples it is the institution that has suppressed the Igorots' rights to defend their claims of their lands as well as the very institution that fought the protesters of the Chico Dam project.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Milton J. Esman, "The Elements of Institution Building," in *Institution Building and Development*, Joseph W. Eaton, ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1972), pp. 21-23.
- <sup>2</sup> According to Harry Ritter, *The Dictionary of Concepts in History* (1986), frontier history as an area of study in the United States was first advanced in 1893 by Frederick Jackson Turner. It has since gained attention. Frontier as a concept does not only denote a geographic entity, i.e. that area serving as demarcation for a confrontation between civilization and savagery. Its definition is definitely ethnocentric.

- <sup>3</sup> *Khaki and Red* 10 (August 1931), p.42
- <sup>4</sup> Peter W. Stanley, ed. *Reappraising an Empire: New Perspectives on Philippine-American History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
- <sup>5</sup> John C. Early, "Memorandum on Mountain Province, 1930" (typewritten manuscript). The following were assigned to the post of lieutenant governor to various districts in Mountain Province: John C. Early (Amburayan), Norman G. Conner (Apayao), Elmer A. Eckman (Bontoc), J.H. Evans (Benguet), W.A. Miller (Lepanto), Walter F. Hale (Kalinga), Jeff D. Gallman (Ifugao), Charles E. Nathorst and William Dosser.
- <sup>6</sup> Early Memorandum, p.9.
- <sup>7</sup> Lawrence Wilson, "Sapa: Walter Franklin Hale, in Memoriam," in *University of Manila Journal of East Asiatic Studies* 2 (April 1956), p.4.
- <sup>8</sup> *Khaki and Red*, p. 56.
- <sup>9</sup> Willis Bliss Wilcox, *Through Luzon on Highways and Byways* (Philadelphia: Franklin Book Company, 1901), p.275.
- <sup>10</sup> Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines: Past and Present* (New York: MacMillan, 1914).
- <sup>11</sup> Samuel Kane *Life or Death in Luzon: Thirty Years with the Philippine Headhunters* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill company, 1933), p.240.
- <sup>12</sup> Wilcox, *Through Luzon*, p.97.
- <sup>13</sup> Harold Hanne Elarth, (ed.), *The Story of the Philippine Constabulary*, (California: Globe Printing Co., 1949) p.52.
- <sup>14</sup> White Apos was used by Frank Tenista to refer to the Americans in Ifugao. Apo is a native term used to address a respected elder. The use of white Apos denotes the machinations of imperialism through indigenous culture.
- <sup>15</sup> *Manila Times* (July 14, 1903).
- <sup>16</sup> *Manila Times* (August 8, 1905).
- <sup>17</sup> *Philippine Commission Reports*, 1904 (p.7)
- <sup>18</sup> Worcester, *The Philippines: Past and Present*, p.429.
- <sup>19</sup> Elarth, *The Constabulary Story*, p. 124.
- <sup>20</sup> Felix Keesing and Marie Keesing, *Taming the Philippine Headhunters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1934).
- <sup>21</sup> Roy Franklin Barton, *The Kalingas: Their Institutions and Custom Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p.116.

<sup>22</sup> William Henry Scott, "Star Spangled Curtain" in Angelo J. delos Reyes and Alorna M. delos Reyes, eds. *Igorot: A People Who Daily Touch the Earth and Sky* (Baguio City: Cordillera Schools Group, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Elarth, *The Philippine Constabulary Story*. p.13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*