

Yanks Among the Pinoys

Preface: No narrative of the Philippines would be complete without considering the outsize influence of various Americans who left an indelible mark on the country before and after independence in 1946. (The Philippines celebrates June 12, 1898 as its Independence Day but that is another story.) Except for one or two, these men - there is only one woman - are unknown among contemporary Filipinos. I have skipped more well known Americans such as William Howard Taft , Douglas MacArthur or Dwight Eisenhower. They all had a sojourn in the Philippines.

I omitted the names of several American Army officers who refused to surrender to the Japanese after the fall of Bataan and Corregidor in April and May of 1942. These officers formed large Filipino guerrilla armies which tied up the occupying forces in knots. Among them were Donald Blackburn, Wendell Fertig and Russell Volckman. They have been given enough credit in books and even movies.

The motivations of these Americans to stay in the country are probably as diverse as their personalities. Only Fr. James Reuter probably had a clear vision on why he came in the first place. A priest belonging to the Society of Jesus, Fr. Reuter passed away before the end of 2012 at age 96. Of the people on this list, he is the most beloved by Filipinos. The others range from former soldiers to Jewish expatriates to counter insurgency experts and CIA operatives. Some were instrumental in starting businesses that were vital to the country. Quite a few married Filipinas. One was considered a rogue but contributed greatly to economic development. While one was assisting the government in stamping out the Communist insurgency, another one was actively aiding the insurgents.

Below is a list of such Americans. There are many more, but these individuals stand out in my mind.

Dr. H. Otley Beyer
Bernard "Benny" Gaberman
Samuel & Elsie Gaches
The Gordons of Subic
"Judge" John Hausserman
Ray Higgins
General Edward Lansdale
James "Jim" Lindenberg
Eugene Perkins
William Pomeroy
Fr. James Reuter, S.J.
Robert "Uncle Bob" Stewart
Harry Stonehill
Dr. William Alexander Sutherland

Dr. Otley Beyer was an Iowa born anthropologist who came to the Philippines in 1909, staying until his passing fifty seven years later. It was reported that he went to the St. Louis Exposition in 1904 where he saw Filipinos being exhibited like rare animals. Consisting of 47 acres, the

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Philippine Exhibit was the largest and most popular at the fair. This piqued his interest and he made his first trip to the Philippines in 1905. After a short stint as a teacher in the mountain provinces of Luzon, he traveled throughout Asia and conducted graduate work at Harvard. He returned for good in 1909. For the next forty years he conducted ethnographic studies. He married an Ifugao (one of the indigenous mountain tribes who built the rice terraces) woman and is buried in Banaue, the ancestral home of the Igorots. In addition to his own ethnographic studies, Dr. Beyer amassed a huge collection of books and pamphlets by notable Filipinos, including Jose Rizal. Dr. Beyer's papers were sold to the Australian National Library in Canberra by his son William. It is a mystery to me why the Philippine government didn't try to intervene or purchase Dr. Beyer's work. The library's website lists Dr. Beyer's voluminous work and collection. He is remembered as the Father of Philippine Anthropology.

During the 1950s, Dr. Beyer had an office in the Watson Building on Aviles St., less than a block from our house. We saw him quite often, always dressed in a white suit. It wasn't until later that I came to appreciate what he accomplished.

Bernard "Benny" Gaberman has been widely credited as the father of the Philippine Stock Exchange. The Manila Stock Exchange was the original bourse founded in 1927 but in 1963 Gaberman and several other financiers founded the Makati Stock Exchange. Thirty years later, the Manila and Makati stock exchanges merged to become the PSE. But Gaberman's greatest contribution was the help he provided Ramon Magsaysay, in the period leading up to Magsaysay's candidacy and during his presidency. The Hukbalahap or Huk communist insurgency was at its apogee in 1952 and there was serious doubt whether the young Philippine republic could survive. Magsaysay came along at the right moment to save the day, first as Secretary of Defense and later as President. Gaberman was part of Magsaysay's inner circle and one of his closest advisers. He had no official title in Magsaysay's administration but made regular forays to the presidential palace known as Malacañang for meetings with Magsaysay and his staff. Having been born in the Philippines and a Filipino citizen, he could have been appointed to any number of positions but the two men must have decided to keep the government relationship informal. After Magsaysay died in a plane crash during the fourth year of his term, Gaberman withdrew from any government association. His legacy lives on with the Philippine Cancer Society, which formed a medical assistance program made possible thru an initial donation from the Gaberman family. In this program, anti-cancer drugs are made available to indigent patients. For a hundred years the Gaberman family had a presence in the Philippines. Sadly, the last of the Gabermans left the Philippines in the 1980's.

Samuel "Sam" Gaches & Elsie McCloskey Gaches: Sam was a businessman who gained control of the H.E. Heacock Co., becoming the president and general manager. The company's flagship department store was Heacock's, located on Escolta St. Gaches grew Heacock's into the Philippines' most trendy store before and after the war. Escolta was the premier shopping street of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, long before the malls. Heacock's was the exclusive distributor of prominent brand merchandise ranging from jewelry to refrigerators, radios and flatware, all American made. They carried Elgin watches, the leading American watch at the time. In addition to Heacock's, Sam also founded the radio station KZRH, which became DZRH after the war.

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Sam's wife Elsie devoted herself to philanthropy. She donated the family's forty acres of land that was turned into the Elsie Gaches Village, providing care and rehabilitation for over six hundred abandoned and neglected children with special needs. Although EGV is now government funded, it only got off the ground after Elsie donated the Gaches property. With much of the surrounding area now devoted to commercial development, that land would be worth tens of millions today. Elsie's name is the only one among the Americans on this list whose name is memorialized.

The Orosa family has a connection to Elsie Gaches and Heacock's. My uncle Jose Y. Orosa became General Manager of Heacock's not long after Sam passed away.

Richard "Dick" Gordon, despite his American name, is as Filipino as they come. But his heritage is unquestionably American. The most well known of the Gordon family of Olongapo in Zambales, Dick has served as a Senator, cabinet secretary (Department of Tourism) and is currently Chairman of the Philippine Red Cross. His grandfather John Gordon was an American soldier who came to the Philippines in 1898, stayed in the country and married a Filipina. John Gordon's son was Richard's father James, who got involved in Olongapo politics. Olongapo's Subic Bay, with its sheltered bay and natural harbor, housed the largest U.S. Naval installation outside the United States. James became a crusading mayor, determined to make Subic more than a town full of bars fronting for brothels catering to American sailors. His largely successful efforts to fight corruption resulted in assassination attempts. James survived two attempts but did not survive the third. The following election, James was succeeded by his widow Amelia. Mrs. Amelia Gordon was recognized by the Pearl Buck Foundation, receiving their International Woman of the Year award in 2002. Richard Gordon ran for President in 2010 but was unsuccessful against Benigno Aquino III (the eventual winner) and former President Joseph Estrada. Out of politics for the meantime, he is involved in radio and TV. Although Dick wasn't able to recapture his old Senate seat in the May 2013 elections, I don't believe we've heard the last of Dick or the rest of the Gordon family.

John Hausserman was another American who came right after the Philippine-American war and decided to stay. A lawyer by training, Hausserman was with the Judge Advocate General's Corps. He was popularly called Judge throughout his business and legal career. Early in the 20th century, he co-founded what became known as Benguet Corporation. Benguet was a gold mining operation having mines in the Mountain Provinces region. At one time I even bought a few shares of Benguet during the heady stock market days of the 1980's. Besides having the technology, capital and experience, part of the reason American businessmen gained advantage was the so-called "parity rights." This allowed American citizens to own and exploit mineral resources, one of the conditions for recognizing Philippine independence. But when Ferdinand Marcos came into power, he rescinded parity rights. Lest you think Marcos was doing this for patriotic reasons, think again. Somehow, Benguet wound up under the control of his Romualdez brother-in-law. But it was Judge Hausserman and his associates who built Benguet from the ground up, bringing capital and mining technology to a then remote mountainous part of Luzon. In its heyday, Benguet employed thousands. Known more for his association with Benguet rather than a lawyer, the Judge was sometimes called the Gold King of the Philippines.

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Ray Higgins followed a different path. The blood bank was his passion and he became Chairman of the National Blood Donor Recruitment Committee of the Philippine National Red Cross, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Philippine Eyebank for Sight Restoration, Inc. For his efforts, the Congress of the Philippines passed Republic Act No. 1384 on June 18, 1955, "An Act adopting Mr. Ray Higgins as a Son of the Philippines and conferring upon him all the rights, privileges and prerogatives of Philippine citizenship." Higgins tirelessly promoted volunteer blood donations, assisted by Filipina movie actresses of the period.

General Edward Lansdale is undoubtedly the most colorful American ever to have been involved in Philippine affairs. English writer Graham Greene wrote a best selling book titled "The Quiet American." Set in what was then French Indochina, the CIA undercover agent named Pyle was supposedly patterned after Lansdale. Both Lansdale and Greene deny it but there is a strong resemblance between Lansdale and the fictional Pyle. The difference is that Pyle was killed in the story while Lansdale survived Vietnam and rose to the rank of Major General. The early 1950's was a time of turmoil in the Philippines. As previously mentioned, the Huk communist movement was at its strongest. Lansdale, who had previously been stationed in the Philippines after WWII, returned to assist in counterinsurgency. Then a Lt. Colonel, he started working with Defense Secretary Ramon Magsaysay, to the point of going out to the field. The two formed a lasting bond. Magsaysay left his secretary post to run for President in 1953. Lansdale allied with Magsaysay during the 1953 elections. He was the de facto campaign manager. It was later revealed that the U.S. funneled millions of dollars in cash to the campaign, using Lansdale as the intermediary. An uncharitable adjective would be bagman. Besides Lansdale, Magsaysay had a coterie of American advisers such as Benny Gaberman and a CIA operative named David T. Sternberg. Flush with success after the election of Magsaysay, Lansdale went on to Vietnam before returning to Washington. But he didn't replicate his Philippines success in Vietnam.

James "Jim" Lindenberg was an expatriate credited with starting the television broadcasting industry in the Philippines. His 2009 obituary called him the "Father of Philippine Television." The company he started right after the war was Bolinao Electronics Corporation. The name choice was interesting. Lindenberg had married a Filipina whose hometown was Bolinao, in the province of Pangasinan. BEC became Alto Broadcasting System (ABS) after Lindenberg partnered with a former pensionado named Antonio Quirino. Financial control was under Quirino but Lindenberg ran the business and was the creative force. They broadcast the first TV program in the Philippines in October of 1953. It may seem laughable by today's standards but during the early days there were only four hours of broadcasting every day. ABS evolved into what is now ABS-CBN, one of the Philippines' major TV networks and media conglomerates. Thanks to cable TV, you can subscribe to The Filipino Channel, compliments of ABS-CBN. But it all started with Jim Lindenberg.

Eugene Perkins: Judging from its clientele list, one of the most prominent law firms in the Philippines today is Siguion Reyna, Montecillo & Ongsiako. It is certainly the oldest, if you consider its predecessors. But what is now a 100% Filipino law firm started out over 110 years

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ago as an American law firm. We'll skip some names from the very long transition but it all started in 1901 with Army veterans Charles Cohn and "Judge" John Haussermann. The latter left the partnership to concentrate on gold mining with Benguet; he merits a separate paragraph. By the early 1920's the firm had become Fisher, DeWitt, Perkins and Brady. Eugene Perkins had the longest tenure of any American partner, staying with the firm until his passing in 1956. It was under Perkins' watch that the transition was made into a Filipino firm. I'd like to know if this was by accident or design on Perkins' part. In 1935 the firm has its first Filipino partner in Alfonso Ponce Enrile. Enrile was one of the first batch of pensionados who studied in the United States starting in 1903. As the years went by, American partners left or retired and more Filipinos became partners, including Ponce Enrile's son-in-law Siguion Reyna. Perkins was the last American name on the brass plate. Perkins found time from his practice to write a number of books including "Philippine Business Law," "The British Expedition to Manila and Freemasonry, 1762-1764" and "What the Philippines Means To Me." Perkins also left a lasting legacy in the voluminous papers on Philippine-American history that he left to the American Historical Collection. Papers of the AHC are in the care of Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City.

William Pomeroy was a soldier who came to the Philippines during World War II. He was already a communist, having joined the U.S. communist party prior to the war. It wasn't long before he was able to join the Hukbalahap insurgency. He married a Filipina communist named Celia Mariano and together they joined the Huks in waging a guerilla war against the government. He was captured in 1952 and served ten years before being deported. The U.S. refused to grant Celia a visa, so the couple migrated to the U.K. Pomeroy was a prolific writer and poet. He is credited with ghosting the autobiography of Luis Taruc, the head of the communist movement in the Philippines. Some of Pomeroy's books like "The Philippines: Colonialism, Collaboration, and Resistance!" and "The Forest" are still available. After his death, his ashes were returned to the Philippines for burial. I wonder what would have happened if Pomeroy and Landsdale had met face to face.

Fr. James Reuter, S.J., first came to the Philippines in 1938 at the age of 22, before he was ordained. Along with hundreds of other American civilians and religious, Fr. Reuter was interned during the Japanese occupation. He returned to the U.S. shortly after liberation, getting ordained a Jesuit in 1946. He returned to the Philippines in 1948 and devoted the rest of his life to the Filipino people. He served the Filipinos for nearly 7 decades. He was an educator (Ateneo de Naga and Ateneo de Manila), mentor, playwright, author, radio & TV producer. With the electronic age, he turned to blogging and text messaging. Although Fr. Reuter never relinquished his American citizenship, he was made an "Honorary Citizen of the Republic of the Philippines" in 1984. He received the Ramon Magsaysay award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts. An excellent biographical essay of Fr. Reuter was published by journalist Howie Severino in 2010. Before he passed away in December of 2012, he was the last surviving Jesuit internee.

Robert Stewart was a media pioneer whose career spanned radio and television programming. He founded what later became Republic Broadcasting System, starting with radio in 1950 and

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expanding to television in 1961. He is best remembered for his nationwide radio coverage of the 1953 national election and later on a children's Saturday morning show. Along with his friend and colleague Francisco "Soc" Rodrigo, they broadcast continuously during and after the 1953 election. Citizens were asked to call in and report any anomalies occurring. Then as now, Philippine elections can be unruly, even bloody. One feature during Philippine election campaigns is the body count, the number of homicides attributable to the election. Their work is credited with helping keep the 1953 election clean. The exposure helped Rodrigo's political career, getting elected Senator in 1955. Stewart was affectionately called Uncle Bob by his admirers but he fell into political disfavor and got ensnared in that tangled web called Philippine politics. He left the country with his Filipina wife, returning to the U.S. to retire in Arizona. After he passed away in 2006, his ashes were returned to the Philippines for burial.

Harry Stonehill: If James Reuter was the most beloved and Edward Lansdale the most colorful, Harry Stonehill was the most notorious. Born Steinberg, Harry was an army officer who came with the liberating American forces in 1945. Sensing business opportunities, he built a business empire from the ground up, becoming one of the wealthiest men in the country in little more than a decade. He was a one man conglomerate with interests ranging from tobacco to glassmaking to publishing. Stonehill had a saying, "everyone has a price and in the Philippines it is cheap." A crusading justice secretary caught up with him in 1962, raiding his offices and gathering incriminating evidence. Part of the evidence was a rumored list of Filipino politicians on his payroll which included the sitting President Diosdado Macapagal along with Senator and future President Ferdinand Marcos. Reminiscent of Nixon's Saturday night massacre during the Watergate affair, an embarrassed Macapagal sacked his justice secretary. He then hurriedly ordered the deportation of Stonehill. It was a clear case of shooting the messenger. In his lifetime Stonehill was featured in Time magazine and Forbes but he died a man without a country. Although married to a Filipina, the Philippines wouldn't take him back and he lived in exile. The irony is that Stonehill really didn't have to resort to dirty tricks. He was a visionary, astute and innovative, establishing business practices that vaulted him ahead of the competition. Some of the companies he founded still thrive to this day. An excellent balanced summary of Stonehill's exploits was written by blogger Francis Yumul in his blog "A Fiddler's Brew" on September 29, 2011.

I had written about **Dr. Alexander Sutherland** before in my "Pensionado Story." Fluent in Spanish, the New Mexico native came to the Philippines to become Spanish secretary to Governor General William Howard Taft. He only lived in the Philippines for a short period but there are more than 200 young Filipinos, barely into their teens, whose lives were forever changed through the effort of Dr. Sutherland. He became Superintendent of Filipino Students. Along with his wife Minnie, Sutherland accompanied the first batch of 100 Filipino boys who came to America in 1903. After the pensionado program started to wind down in 1908, Dr. Sutherland left to join New Mexico State University where he eventually became President. Dr. Sutherland's last visit to the Philippines was in 1950. His pensionados now occupied lofty positions in Philippine business and government. He was welcomed by no less than President Elpidio Quirino, who feted him in Malacanang Palace. Dr. Sutherland published an account of the program, titled "The Filipino Pensionado Story."

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Postscript: The generations that followed mine aren't going to see American characters described above. Hollywood characters don't count. American influence waned over the years and its suzerainty is long gone. The terminal event was the Philippine Senate rejection of the U.S. military base lease in 1991. The huge U.S. naval and air force bases were vacated by the end of 1992. The American century in the Philippines was over.

But wait, there is a new Asian power seeking hegemony over its neighbors. American and Philippine military ties are being rekindled. The next chapter is unfolding.

Mario E. Orosa
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