

## UNITED STATES MILITARY STATIONS: THE POSTAL MARKINGS OF JOLO, BONGAO, SIASSI AND ZAMBOANGA

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The resumption of the 1896 Philippine Revolution following the return of Emilio Aguinaldo from Hong Kong on May 19, 1898 resulted in the revolutionary forces taking control of most of Luzon (1) and forcing the Spanish forces to be cooped up in the walled city of Manila. The Spanish surrendered the city to American forces on August 13, with the articles of capitulation signed the following day (2). As an armistice between the United States and Spain was actually signed in Washington on August 12, the battle for Manila was the last hostile act between the principals of the Spanish-American War.

At the time of their surrender, the Spanish still held on to other places outside Luzon. The Philippine revolution, however, had spread to most of the other islands. In time, the Spanish forces were either defeated or, in the face of impending defeat had to abandon territories they held. When the Treaty of Paris was signed on December 10, 1898, the Filipinos were in control of Luzon (with the exception of Manila and suburbs, parts of Cavite held by the Americans, and holdout towns like Baler) and the Visayan islands (except for the port and town of Iloilo in Panay Island, which was under siege). Gen. Diego de los Rios, commander of the Spanish forces, notified Gen. Elwell Otis that he could not hold the city against the insurgents (3), and eventually surrendered the city on December 24, 1898 before the arrival of the American expeditionary force. The Spanish consolidated their forces in the garrisoned city of Zamboanga, Mindanao Island.

To understand the situation in Mindanao and in the southern islands, it is useful to go over briefly the actions of the Spanish in this area during its colonial administration of the Philippine Islands up to 1898 (4). Six of the 23 tribal groups inhabiting Mindanao and the southernmost islands profess Mohammedan faith, and were called by the Spanish "Moros" [Moors]. The Moros were the more influential and prominent local inhabitants and were, at the time of the arrival of Spanish colonizers, under the rule of the Sultans of the Islamic states of Maguindanao (in Mindanao) and of Sulu, with the latter being more powerful and even had sovereignty over part of Northern Borneo.

While the Spanish were successful in the colonization of Luzon, the Visayan islands and the northern parts of Mindanao and Palawan islands, they were not as successful in the southern parts of these islands and in the Sulu archipelago (5).

At one time, the Spanish laid claim to the Moluccas and undertook their administration from headquarters at Zamboanga. In 1662, they withdrew from Mindanao and finally from the Moluccas in the face of danger posed by the Chinese-Japanese Koxinga, who was threatening the Philippine Islands after expelling the Dutch from Formosa. With the Spanish concentrating in the Visayas and in Luzon for the next fifty years, the Moros destroyed the Spanish fort and periodically ravaged the coasts of the Visayan islands and even of Luzon. The Spanish reestablished the *presidio* in Zamboanga in 1718 and in 1763 built a great stone fort near the town.

The Sulu archipelago and other southern islands had for centuries been bases for piracy. The inhabitants were "a faring people and piracy was a way of life." In 1848, with the arrival of steam war vessels, there was sustained effort to suppress Moro piracy, which not only positively affected the Philippine islands to the north, but also south into the Dutch East Indies and west to British Borneo.

Greatly aided by the use of steam vessels, the Spanish colonial administration effectively eradicated most of the piracy by the destruction of the pirates' headquarters in several of the islands, occupied the Cotabato Valley in Mindanao resulting in the breakup of the power of the Sultan of Maguindanao, and in 1851 attacked and defeated the Sulu Moros, destroying their fortifications and occupying their stronghold in Jolo. These actions against piracy and the Moros were complemented by anti-piracy measures undertaken by the Dutch in the Netherlands East Indies and by Sir James Brooke, the white Rajah of Sarawak. Finally, the arrival of 18 small gunboats from Europe in 1861 gave the Spanish the capability of patrolling the southern seas. By a treaty in 1878, the Sultan of Sulu acknowledged Spanish suzerainty, under which Spanish authorities had control over some seacoast towns, but not over the entire territory, which was ruled by the Sultan and his datus. In 1898, in addition to several posts in Mindanao and the fort at Zamboanga, the Spanish had the walled town at Jolo and military stations in the islands of Siassi, Bongao, and Tawitawi in the Sulu archipelago, and in Balabac Island and in Puerto Princesa in Palawan Island.

It is thus ironic that following their defeat in most parts of the Philippines, Spanish forces had to concentrate their forces in Mindanao (Zamboanga) and the Sulu archipelago, areas over which they had not



really exercised significant control before the 1850's, but where the Philippine revolution was less active in 1898. Following the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the Spanish garrisons proceeded to Iloilo and Manila for repatriation, leaving only a presence in Jolo until relieved by American forces.

Jolo (said to be the smallest walled city in the world, according to Forbes) is the main town on Sulu Island, the major island in the Sulu Archipelago (6). By previous arrangement, two battalions of the 23rd infantry under Capt. Pratt relieved the Spanish forces in Jolo on May 20, 1899 (7). Once in place, the Americans found that, like the Spanish, they had to take into account the role of the Sultan in the administration over the islands. Capt. Pratt was succeeded in July 1899 by Maj. Goodale and subsequently by Gen. John Bates, who concluded with the Sultan on August 20, 1899 an agreement known as the "Bates Treaty." As reported by Gen. Elwell Otis to the War Department, "an agreement was made with the Sultan and his datos whereby the sovereignty of the United States over the entire Jolo (sic) Archipelago is acknowledged; its flag to fly on land and sea; the United States to occupy and control all points deemed necessary. Introducing firearms is prohibited. The Sultan is to assist in suppressing piracy. He agrees to deliver criminals accused of crimes not committed by Moros against Moros. Two other points in the archipelago will be occupied by American troops when trade and commerce can be controlled." President McKinley approved the agreement on October 27, 1899 with instructions that the Sultan is to be informed that the United States does not give consent to the existence of slavery in the archipelago. Goodale writes that civil government was established in the Sulu Archipelago on August 8, 1899 by agreement with the Sultan (8).

The postmarks of Jolo are:



DS1. Single-ring rubber postmark, 30 mm in diameter, with 4-bar killer (horizontal) 14 mm wide. Struck in violet or black. Seen used as circular "datestamp" without date (month, day and year), with Manila backstamp of August 24, 1899. Earliest: August 8, 1899 Latest: July 8, 1900



DS2. Single-ring steel datestamp 29 mm in diameter. Nine-bar barrel killer. "Standard" type of civilian government postmarks. Struck in black. Also seen as receiving mark.

Earliest April 26, 1900

Latest: Used well beyond July 4, 1902



RC1. Single-ring rubber postmark, mm in diameter, Struck in violet.

Earliest: September 1, 1899

Latest: May 7, 1901

REGISTERED  
MAY 15 1900  
Military Station,  
JOLO, PHIL. ISLANDS.

RG1. State 1. Four-line registration datestamp in mixed seriffed capital letters "and block letters. "Military Station," constitutes the third line; the registration number is usually written close to the postmark. Struck in violet. Also seen as receiving mark Oct. 9, 1899

Earliest: October 9, 1899

Latest: May 21, 1901

REGISTERED  
JAN 18 1902  
76  
JOLO, PHIL. ISLANDS

RG2. State II. As in State I, but with third line deleted, to show that Jolo was no longer under military control. The space created has been seen used for marking the registration number. Struck in black.

Earliest: May 21, 1901

Latest: January 12, 1902

POSTAGE DUE \_\_\_\_\_ CENTS.

PD1. "POSTAGE DUE . . . CENTS." rubber marking in seriffed capital letters, 62 mm long. Struck in violet.

Earliest: October 26, 1899

NC 3

Latest:

The two islands mentioned by Gen. Otis in his communication regarding the "Bates treaty" apparently were Siassi and Bongao. Forbes mentioned that the Sultan of Sulu was reported to have gained the impression that the Spanish were returning sovereignty back to him upon their withdrawal from the Sulu archipelago, and that he had



been put in place in Siassi when the Spanish post was evacuated. The situation thus demanded immediate attention; American troops were first sent to Siassi soon after Jolo was occupied. Siassi is a small island but was a port of entry, and one of the six ports opened for commerce. Goodale states that he was stationed at Jolo and Siassi from June 1900 to September 1901 (He probably meant just Siassi, since he succeeded Capt. Pratt in Jolo earlier in July 1899.)

The only recorded postmark of Siassi is:



DS1. Single-ring rubber datestamp, 28 mm in diameter, with 3-horizontal bar killer Struck in black or violet. Seen also used as receiving mark.  
Earliest: November 20, 1900  
Latest: April 14, 1902

While Goodale lists Siassi (a small island south of Sulu Island) among the military postal stations, he does not list Bongao (also a small island southwest of Sulu and very close to the North Borneo coast) (8). Forbes mentioned that "American garrisons were placed at Siasi (sic) and Bongao, the latter nearly in sight of the shores of Borneo, a few months after the occupation of Jolo." Baker lists the opening of the postal station there as August (?) 1899 (9).

The only recorded postmark of Bongao (10) is:



DS1. Single-ring rubber datestamp, 28 mm in diameter, with 3-horizontal bar killer Struck in black.  
Earliest: June 1, 1900  
Latest: March 4, 1901

Zamboanga was the most "Spanish" town in Mindanao Island. It had a long history of Spanish occupation, such that the town population's language evolved into "Chabacano," a Spanish-based patois (without proper verb conjugation) which evolved into the lingua franca of the local population, similar to the situation in Cavite. Zamboanga's philatelic claim to fame lies in the "Zamboanga" issues, which are 1898 "curly head" issues of Alfonso XIII overprinted "RESELLADO" (11).

Zamboanga was occupied by the American forces after the Sulu archipelago has been brought under military control. The town was evacuated by the Spanish in May 1899 as they were unable to hold on against the insurgent Filipinos. While embarking his troops during the

evacuation, Gen. Montero was fatally wounded (4). According to Goodale, "Zamboanga was occupied November 16, 1899 (8) by a U.S. naval force which was immediately followed by infantry detached from the forces in Jolo (Sulu) (12). A post office was opened on December 1, 1899. Zamboanga was the headquarters of the District of Mindanao and Jolo in March 1900."

The postmarks of Zamboanga are:

Philippine Postal Service

December .8. 1899,

Zamboanga, Mindanao.

- ☆ ☆ DS1. Three line rubber datestamp "Philippine Postal Service" with six hollow stars to the right. Styling in fancy letters. Struck in violet.

Earliest: December 6, 1899

Latest: December 27, 1899



DS2. Single-ring rubber datestamp 28 mm in diameter with 3-bar (vertical) killer. Letters in block capitals. Seen used as a receiving mark. Struck in violet.

Earliest: January 5, 1900

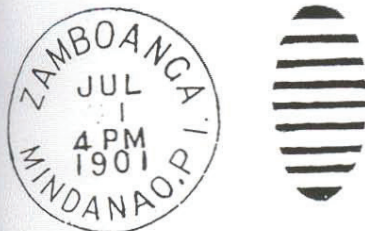
Latest: April 14, 1900



DS3. Single-ring rubber datestamp 28 mm in diameter with 3-bar (vertical) killer. As in DS2, letters are in block capitals, but slightly lower than DS2, and letters marginally narrower, particularly both "S" in "ISLES." The uprights of "M's are more spread out at the base, compared to the more upright in DS2. Lastly, using "PHIL. ISLES." to "stand up" the dial, the time slug is oriented to the 12:30 position compared to 11:00 position in DS1.

Earliest: March 13, 1901

Latest: July 11, 1903 (as receiving mark)



DS4. Single-ring steel postmark 29 mm in diameter, nine-bar barrel killer. "Standard" type of civil government postmarks. Struck in black.

Earliest: August 22, 1900

Latest: Used well beyond July 4, 1900

POSTAGE DUE.....CENTS.

PD1. "POSTAGE DUE———  
CENTS." rubber postmark, 58  
mm long. Struck in black,  
Earliest: August 28, 1899  
Latest:



AX1. Four irregular rectangles, seen  
used with DS1.  
Earliest: December 6, 1899

Collectors and other readers of this area are encouraged to look into their collections with a view of adding types not included in this article, and/or extending the earliest or latest dates. Information should be sent to the authors, P.O. Box 1337, San Mateo, CA, 94401. Postage and photocopy (preferably color) costs to be reimbursed, and credits to be attributed (13). (Copyright reserved by the authors).

#### POSTMARK LIST CONCORDANCE

Núñez/Kugel	Goodale (8)	Baker (10)
<u>Jolo</u>		
DS1	A-1	C-3
DS2	A-2	—
RC1	RC1	CE-5
RG1 5.I	RG1	SR-3
RG1 5.II	—	—
PD1	—	—
<u>SIASSI</u>		
DS1	A-1	C-4
<u>BONGAO</u>		
DSI	—	C-4
<u>ZAMBOANGA</u>		
DS1	—	—
DS2	A-1	C-4
DS3	—	—
DS4	A-2	—
PD1	—	—



## ENDNOTES:

1. Some isolated towns resisted takeover by the revolutionary forces. A good example was Baler, capital town in El Principe province on the eastern coast of Luzon. According to Faust (Endnote 2), the Spanish garrison there had been under siege for nearly a year, when American soldiers aboard the *Yorktown* arrived in late March 1899 to "acquaint the insurrectos" about the change in government in the country and to rescue the garrison. This mission failed and led to the capture of Lt. J. C. Gilmore and some soldiers by the insurgents. The *Yorktown* was unable to get the prisoners freed, and after a few days, continued on her voyage to Iloilo. According to Forbes (Endnote 4), the *Yorktown* was sent in April 1899 by Dewey at the request of Spanish Gen. Rios to rescue the garrison (three officers, 80 soldiers and two priests). Forbes mentions that "many months later, a vigorous pursuit by American troops caused ... abandonment [of the prisoners] by their captors in the mountains of northern Luzon." The heroic defense by the Spaniards aroused the admiration of Gen. Aguinaldo, who ordered on June 30, 1899 the siege of Baler to be raised and the Spaniards permitted to go free in recognition of "Valour and constant heroism worthy of universal admiration." The "Gilmore incident" was such a well known episode that the *Harper's Encyclopedia of United States History*, Harper & Bros., New York, 1906, listed the following entry among the "more important events" of Philippine-American War: "Jan. 7 [1900]. Lieutenant Gilmore and the party of Americans held prisoners by the Filipinos arrive in Manila."
2. The terms of capitulation are reproduced in Faust, Karl Irving, *Campaigning in the Philippines*, The Hicks-Judd Publishing Company, San Francisco, 1899.
3. Gen. Otis responded by sending a special brigade to Iloilo; Karnow, Stanley, *In Our Image*, Random House, New York, 1988; and Nuñez, Nestor C. and Kugel, Alfred F. *United States Military Stations: The Postmarks of Iloilo*, second article in this series.
4. Summarized from Forbes, W. Cameron, *The Philippine Islands* (in 2 volumes), Houghton Mifflin Company, Cambridge, MA 1928.
5. Spanish failure to thoroughly colonize Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago was in great part due to the non-conversion of the native population to Christianity. Added to this was the lack of military forces to make a permanent presence and to exercise adequate degree of control over the area.
6. The matter of the Sulu archipelago was a nettlesome negotiating point during the negotiations for the Treaty of Paris. Henry Watterson writes in *History of the Spanish American War*, B. F. Johnson Publishing Co. Richmond, VA, 1899 that the archipelago had been "... a cause of dispute between Spain and Germany, but the sovereignty had been finally settled upon Spain some years ago. The Spanish Government by a decree of the Cortes had formally annexed the group to the Philippines. During the war with the United States, the Spanish Government had secretly revoked this decree and attached the Sulu group directly to the home government." The Sulu archipelago had been coveted by Germany and would probably have been sold to them by Spain had the United States not insisted upon it being part of the package paid for \$20 million. Additionally, the United States had to pay Spain \$100,000 for several small southern islands which were omitted from the description in the Treaty of Paris.
7. Summarized from Faust, which is also the source for the quoted portions of Gen. Otis' communication to the War Department on August 24, 1899 regarding the "Bates Treaty." Forbes and Goodale (Endnote 8) gave May 19, 1899 as the date the Americans took over Jolo.



8. Goodale, George S., "U.S. Military Postal Stations in the Philippines (1898-1904), *Cyclopedia of United States Postmarks*, edited by Delf Norona, Quarterman Publications, Lawrence, MA 1975. Forbes implies that civil government was established in the area only after the creation of the Moro province on June 1, 1903. Before this date, Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago were governed by a military governor (Bates' successors were Gen. William A. Kobbe on March 20, 1900, Gen. George W. Davis on August 31, 1901, and Gen. Samuel S. Sumner on July 10, 1902; Sumner was succeeded by Gen. Leonard Wood as military and civil governor of the Moro province in 1903). It was during Davis' tenure that John J. Pershing showed extraordinary military ability in the campaign against the Moros in Mindanao, resulting in the unusual distinction of his being promoted by President Roosevelt to brigadier general from the grade of captain.
9. Baker, Philip E., *Postal Markings of United States Military Stations*, 1898-1902, 1963.
10. Not listed in the standard Goodale work (Endnote 8). However, writing for *Postal Markings*, (Vol. 5, No. 12, May 20, 1936 to Vol. 6, No. 6, Nov. 20, 1936). Goodale listed Bongo (sic) among the unnumbered military postal stations, although he did not show a postmark illustration.
11. A skeptical view of these overprints can be found in Harradine, Peter W A., *Philippine Postage Stamp Handbook*, McFarland Co., 1987. A set of eight covers franked with combinations of all known examples of the overprints, appeared at an auction in Barcelona in March 1997 with a reserve price \$40,000. The covers were postmarked in Zamboanga on March 13, 1899, and received at the Manila Post Office on April 10, 1899.
12. According to Forbes, "Beginning in December 1899, as troops became available, American garrisons were placed at Zamboanga and other strategic points in Mindanao."
13. The authors would like to acknowledge the help from other Philippine specialists, especially the opportunity to view actual covers or photocopies of collections of Capt Weston Burnett, Wolfgang Haberland, Fritz-Walter Lange, the late Lynn Warm-Griffith, Robert F. Yacano and Robert C. Hoge, who supplied some of the earliest/latest recorded date.