

# DECISIVE VICTORY

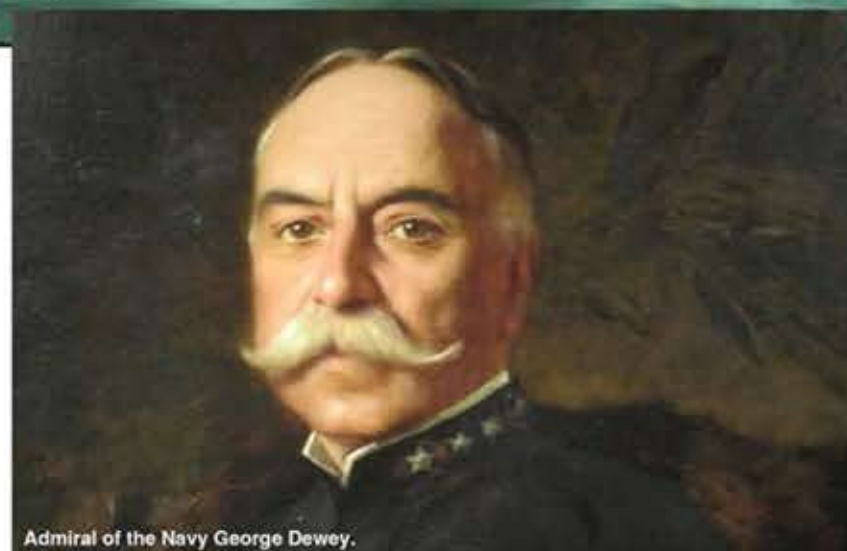
THROUGH CAREFUL PLANNING BY GEORGE DEWEY AND INTELLIGENT USE OF THE ASIATIC SQUADRON, THE US NAVY WOULD SCORE AN IMPORTANT VICTORY DURING THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR  
BY ROB GREENWALD



USS *Olympia* would lead the American effort at Manila Bay.



This 1899 oil painting by captured Spanish naval medical officer Alfonso Sanz is regarded as an accurate depiction of Dewey's victory over the Spanish fleet. It was the first major clash between squadrons of mechanically-driven steel warships. Dewey's flagship USS *Olympia* leads the American battle line. The painting hangs in the US Embassy in Thailand.



Admiral of the Navy George Dewey.

It has been rare throughout history that a battle — particularly a decisive one — has been as one-sided as the Battle of Manila Bay. On 1 May 1898, the Asiatic Squadron of the United States Navy, under the command of Commodore George Dewey reduced the Spanish fleet to ruins, thus allowing the United States to eventually take possession of the Philippine Islands. The overwhelming American victory can be attributed to superior planning, training and leadership. These are in sharp contrast to the condition of the Spanish forces, who were poorly trained, ill-equipped and led by

incompetent, defeatist officers.

When Commodore Dewey took command of the Asiatic Squadron at Nagasaki, Japan, on 3 January 1898, he had at his disposal only four ships: the protected cruiser *Olympia*, which served as his flagship, the protected cruiser *Boston*, the small gunboat *Petrel*, and the *Monocacy*, an antiquated Civil War-era paddle-wheel steamer which was barely seaworthy and wholly unfit for combat. As though this small squadron were not a sufficient handicap for a new commander preparing for a possible war with Spain, Dewey had other problems. His

little fleet was short on ammunition, and the Navy was able to provide him with almost no information regarding the Philippines. For example, "the latest official report" relative to the Philippines on file in the Office of Naval Intelligence bore the date of 1876, and when navigating the passage into Manila Bay on the morning of 1 May, the Americans had to rely on British charts.

While Dewey tried to deal with these difficulties, the United States and Spain drifted toward war. On 15 February, the USS *Maine* blew up in Havana Harbor. Of his own initiative,

Dewey had already decided to move his fleet to Hong Kong, the best place from which to launch an attack on the Philippines should a war with Spain ensue. It was at Hong Kong on 25 February that Dewey received the following message from Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt:

**DEWEY, HONG KONG:**

*Order the squadron except the Monocacy to Hong Kong. Keep full of coal. In the event of declaration of war Spain, your duty will be to see that the Spanish Squadron does not leave*