

## *Historical Notes on Forts and Floods in Colonial Iligan*

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### **Abstract**

The Sendong experience in 2011 was not the first major destructive flood in the recorded history of Iligan. Historical sources reveal that Iligan was hard-hit by typhoons in colonial times causing rivers to overflow to its adjacent plains, washing out strategic posts such as the Spanish forts, built at the river-mouths of Bayug and Iligan. These typhoons were called huracan and in the uplands, mangas were also mentioned, waterspouts which were dreaded because of its rage and destruction. A great flood was also experienced in 1916, significant enough to be etched in written narratives but seems to be forgotten in the contemporary memory of the people.

This paper therefore is a modest attempt to revisit the available written sources which speak about the flood experiences of the riverine presidios of Iligan set during its colonial past. These selected flood disasters had already transpired and its ruins buried in antiquity, however, not given much attention in historical scholarship thus the initial recapitulation of these unfortunate yet historically-significant events through historiography. This study aims to underscore the effect that environment, natural disasters like typhoons and floods cause to the courses of events in history as in the case of Iligan City.

Keywords: fort, flood, river, Colonial Iligan

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## Introduction

The tragic experiences caused by natural calamities such as the typhoon *Sendong* in 2011 can still be found in the print media - in the front pages of notable newspapers - and still linger in the web today alongside the tragedies caused by typhoon Yolanda that devastated Leyte in 2013. People continues to connect them to the old, mythical stories they know about floods in the past, yet with the presumption among present Iliganons that the city could still be a flood-free area. This idea of a flood-free Iligan came out because of the long period of “calmness”, almost forgetting in collective memory that once upon a time, floods existed and reveal circumstances of the developments in the area especially in colonial times. Before *Sendong* strikes, people seem to believe that Iligan could be one of the safest places to live in Mindanao at least when talking about typhoon threats. But going back to historical sources might lead to other reflections.

### ***Sendong* Draws Out an Almost Forgotten Past**

Typhoon *Sendong* is known internationally as Typhoon *Washi* which started as a tropical depression on December 13, 2011 in the West Pacific Ocean about 2, 150km due east by the Southern Philippines. *Washi* only intensified marginally but never surpassing tropical storm intensity as it trailed due west towards the island of Mindanao (Lang, 2011, para. 8).

The American National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) reported that *Sendong* made landfalls on the east coast of Mindanao in the afternoon of December 16 as a moderate tropical storm. Nevertheless, it spawned a huge blow on the island. Heavy rains caused mudslides and flashfloods that resulted many deaths. Data from the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) of Region X and Balsa Mindanao<sup>1</sup> conveyed a death toll of over 2,000 (Alcantara and Lawagon, 2013, p. 16). In this catastrophe, Iligan and its neighboring city Cagayan de Oro suffered the most. In Iligan, the force of flooding comes from Mandulog and Iligan River. They overflowed and wrecked whatever hampers its course towards the direction of Iligan Bay.

In the Philippines, PAGASA or the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, Weather Forecasting Section is responsible for forecasts of tropical cyclones that enters in the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR). But in the case of *Sendong*, most of the affected residents claim that they received poor warnings and thus were caught by surprise. This is on top of the passivity of the people in Mindanao, where typhoon is a rarity. In Cagayan de Oro for instance, the local disaster council admitted that it was not convened before *Sendong* smashed into Northern Mindanao with local officials saying that storms did not usually pass their way (Severino, 2011, para.1). Most of the tropical cyclones that made their landfall in the country passes through Luzon and Visayas areas. The Manila Observatory said that around 35 cyclones crossed Mindanao in the last 65 years (from 1945 to 2010), an average of one tropical cyclone every two years

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<sup>1</sup> Balsa Mindanao or Bulig along sa Mindanao/Help for Mindanao is a relief and rehabilitation campaign led by various organizations

*(Preliminary Analysis on Extreme Weather Event Tropical Storm Sendong, 2011, para. 13).*

Indeed, typhoon in Mindanao was rare but today, there is no assurance to it anymore. What happened in 2011 was an eye-opener not only to simple folks but it also gets the interested researchers back into writing especially about natural disasters and their implications through time – the distant and recent past. Historical sources can give clarity in the many assumptions of people and through them people could reflect on migration patterns, disaster risk approaches, thoughts on urban planning and development, and even political and military dynamics. Herein lies the significance of this present study.

## **Methodology**

This inquiry made use of a combination of archival and field research methods. Most of the information of this qualitative research are pieced together from both primary and secondary accounts. Historical sources produced by colonizers were examined using ‘Cracks in the Parchment Curtain’, an approach developed by William Henry Scott (1982, p.1-2). Old photographs and maps were also retrieved as supporting documents. Most of these were sourced out from the libraries of MSU-IIT, the Filipinas Heritage Library and the National Archives of the Philippines. Digitized copies of primary sources that were available in online journals and archives were also downloaded for reference.

For corroboration and validation, oral interviews were conducted with authorities in various government agencies using interview tools. Auxiliary disciplines were referred to validate assumptions presented on this paper. These data were subjected to analysis and interpretation and using historiography, the extracted information were used for the writing of this paper.

## **Summary of Findings and Analysis**

### **Iligan: A Place of Descent**

Iligan is an urban city situated in the northern portion of Mindanao, an island in Southern Philippines. It covers an area of 81, 337 hectares, which is subdivided into forty-four (44) barangays (Iligan City Government, 2012). Below is a figure showing the vicinal location of Iligan City in the Philippine archipelago.

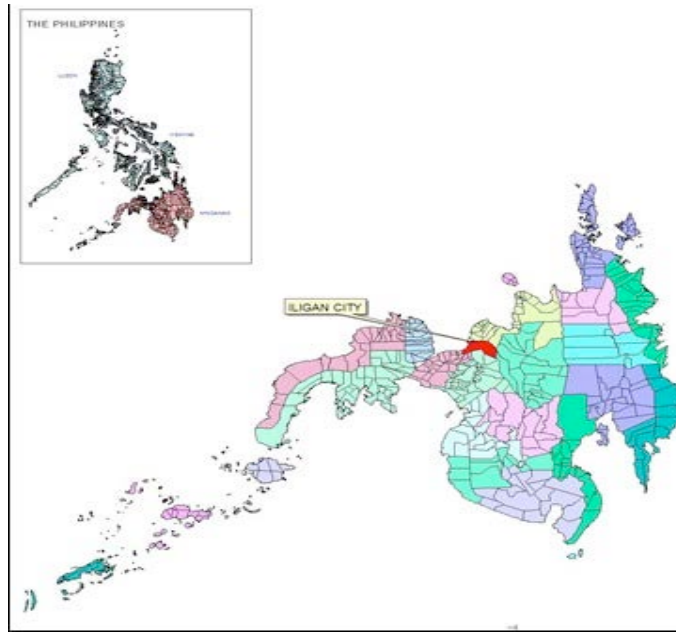


Figure 1: Iligan City is a chartered city of the lone district of Lanao del Norte, a province of Northern Mindanao ©Palattao and Almario, 2014

Physically, Iligan is characterized with plains, hills, coves and mountains. It has three (3) principal rivers which all empty to the bay of Iligan: the Agus river, Mandulog river and Iligan river. The city generally enjoys a good climatic condition and its precipitation is evenly distributed all throughout the year (Iligan City Government, 2012).

Demographically, the area recorded a total population of 322, 821, based on the 2010 census (Palattao and Almario, 2014, p. 9). It is a highly-urbanized city. The first settlers of the place as noted by Tangian (2011) called themselves as *Higaonon*, coming from the *Binukid* terms 'higa' (dwell), 'gaon' (highland) and 'non' (people) (p. 101). It literally means highland dwellers.

The naming of Iligan was originated by the *Higaonon*. The former came from the term 'ilig', which means 'to descend'. These mountain dwellers would go down to the area to engage in various economic activities. Their frequency of going down to the area made them call it Iligan, meaning, a place of descent (Acut, 1989, pp. 29-30).

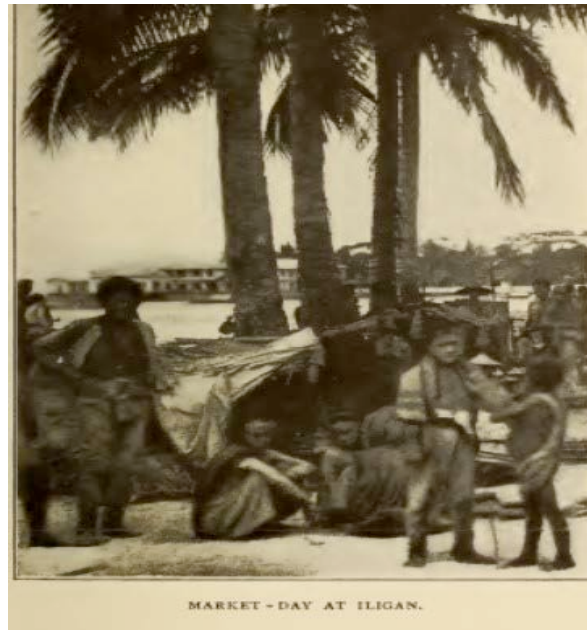


Figure 2: Market Day at Iligan, one Saturday in 1900, showing economic exchanges at the river-mouth of Iligan  
©Russel, 1907

### **Iligan: A Fortress of Defense**

In “Spain in the Philippines”, Cushner (1971) related that Spanish colonizers made a slow but steady process of Christianization in the northern region of Mindanao (pp. 87-88). In Iligan, the first Spanish contact was in 1625, when the Recollects started preaching in Bayug. Pagans concentrated in the said village but missionaries noticed few Christians. Presumably because earlier, Pedro Manooc of Dapitan who was baptized as a Christian, subdued the village of Bayug (Blair and Robertson, trans., 1903, p. 117).

The place called Bayug is traditionally identified in both oral and written literature as the oldest settlement in Iligan. It is an island, located west of the mouth of a river of the same name. Bayug River is connected with Mandulog River, which flows from the interior and empties to Iligan Bay. Below shows the location of Bayug in Iligan.



Figure 3: Bayug, now part of Barangay Hinaplanon, Iligan City, is 3.7 km. away from the central business district of Iligan City  
 ©<http://www.iligan.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/bayug-300x251.jpg>  
 (retrieved: April 6, 2015)



Figure 4: A closer look of Bayug island showing a river flowing in its eastern side

The evangelism of Fray Juan de San Nicolas, a Recollect minister in Bayug resulted for a tribal leader named Dolomoyon to give his children for baptism, although he remained in his paganism (Blair and Robertson, trans., 1903, pp. 94). These advances infuriated Maguindanao, an Islamic sultanate which exercised suzerainty in the region since 1500. Majul (1971) said that Islamization process was underway during the same period that was facilitated by the Moslem neighbors like Borneo and Moluccas. (pp. 1-6). Thus, Islamized tribes, scornfully called Moros by the Spaniards, led punitive and preemptive attacks to the villages that had succumbed to Christianity and the Spanish rule. This made Spaniards establish fortified settlements called *presidios*.

Bayug which was vulnerable to the retaliatory attacks of the Moros of the lake region, called Malanaos was therefore fortified. It was also used for the launching of military expeditions to the lake region, located just above Iligan. Thus fortification of Bayug began in 1639. As detailed by Blair and Robertson (1905), it happened after the victory of the Lanao expedition under Capt. Francisco de Atienza de y Vañez, the *Corregidor* of *Caragha*. They said:

...Captain Don Francisco de Atienza fortified the village of Bayug with stockades, left his adjutant to defend it and retired to his province of Caraga... (p. 104)

It was presumed that this fort in Bayug was along the river-mouth of Mandulog which had natural barriers and the native settlers lived in proximity. However, none of the Spanish texts called this fort in Bayug with a proper name. This didn't make it less important as it was bolstered in few occasions.

In 1640, after the fiasco of building a fort in Lanao, Capt. Pedro Vermudez de Castro and his men, with the services of Fray Agustin de San Pedro, carried out a bloody vengeance toward the combined forces of the Moro tribes and thereafter

...Captain Vermudez, having been despatched, finished burning and destroying the little that had remained in order not to expose the troops to another and more severe siege, he considered that expense and fatigue as a useless thing and ***determined to retreat and with those arms and stores to fortify Bayug. He left the arrangement of it to the skill of Father Fray Agustin*** who so conducted the retreat in the marches of the men and in the transportation of the artillery that he did not lose a single man, although there were ambushes and dangerous passes... (Blair and Robertson, trans., 1903, p. 113)

Accordingly, Spaniards withdrew to Bayug and *El Padre Capitan* toughened its fort with the materials supposedly used for the lake region. He also erected another fort *upon the bar of the river of Iligan* and left it garrisoned with Adjutant Francisco Alfaro (p. 113). This second fort was called Fort Francisco Javier, after the namesake of the Apostle to the Indies of the Society of Jesus. This goes to show that the Recollects who pioneered in getting to Bayug, Iligan and even to the Lake region, since 1625, was replaced by the Jesuits as evidenced by the nomination of the fort.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Jesuits and Recollects fought for ecclesiastical and territorial jurisdictions in Mindanao. The rivalry was appeased by the intervention of Manila, which awarded the western portion of the island to the Jesuits and the opposite direction to the Recollects. The points of boundaries were the Suluwan point in the North and the Cape Augustin in the South. Iligan is found west of the demarcation line, thus, became Jesuit.

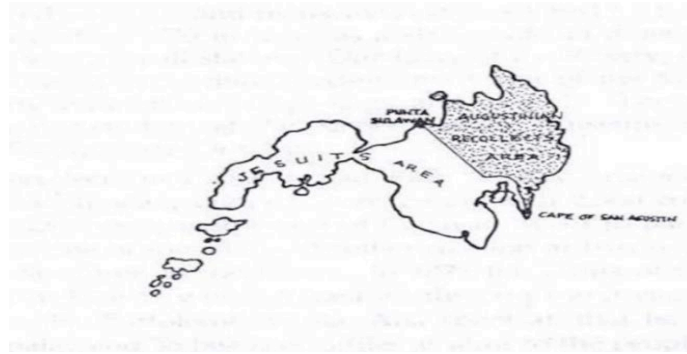


Figure 5: The Division of Mindanao between the Jesuits and the Recollects, the area of Iligan belonging to the Jesuit ©Demetrio, 1995

As disclosed by Spanish sources, the location, shape and size of the stone fort in Iligan showed the following features:

...The village is upon the shore at the foot of the great Panguil between Butuan and Dapitan, to the south of Bohol, north from Malanao, at the mouth of a river with a dangerous bar. The fort is dedicated to St. Francis Xavier, the Apostle to the Indies, in the shape of a star; the wall is two varas (6ft) high and half a vara thick and it has a garrison with artillery and weapons... (Blair and Robertson, trans., 1903, pp. 68-69)

In terms of its specifications as a military garrison, Barrantes (1878) added that:

... what is called San Francisco Javier is situated near the entrance of the river at eight (8) degrees, three (3) minutes latitudes septentrional and one hundred sixty-two (162) degrees, twenty-seven (27) minutes longitude east, distance from Manila, one hundred thirty-two (132) leagues and a half to the southeast, is made of lime and cut stone with raised embankment with a figure somewhat star-shaped. It had a seven hundred forty-four (744) feet enclosure at whose center is an elevated structure (*caballero*) square in shape at thirty (30) feet front, at whose side can be seen the angles providing of the fort, ten (10) pieces of cannons of various minor calibers, eleven (11) pinsotes, forty-nine (49) muskets and harquebuses constitute its armament... (p. 129)



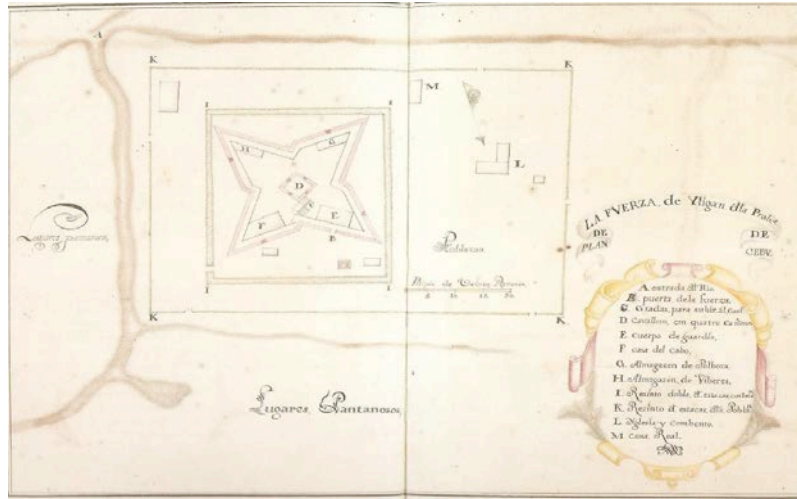


Figure 6: Fort Francisco Javier according to the Valdes Tamon report in 1738

Loyre (n.d.) referred the role of the fort in Iligan as crucial. Its strategic location required defending the eastern side of the Panguil Bay and Iligan Bay with its rivers flowing to the coast. It was revealed that the rivers of Northern Mindanao were the swift escapes of the Moros from the passing Spaniards along the coast. These rivers are Linamon, Larapan, Liangan, Maigo and Maranding. The first four rivers drain to the Iligan Bay while Maranding to Panguil Bay. The fort in Iligan had to conduct clearing operations in those outlets, to keep the activities of their enemies checked (pp. 163-174). Thus, it carried a gigantic task as far as the prevention of the movements of the Moros to the coasts on their way to Visayas, is concerned.



Figure 7: The Bays of Iligan and Panguil in Northern Mindanao mapped out by Father Paver, a companion of Fr. Ducos in 1754.

©Bernad, 1968

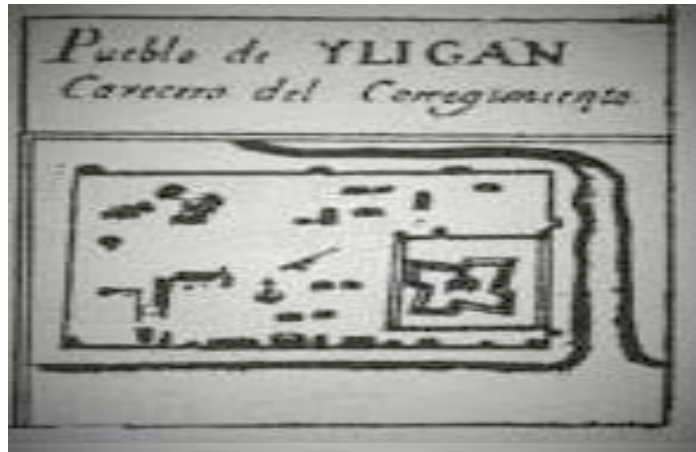


Figure 8: a closer look of the fortified village of Iligan in 1754 ©Bernad, 1968

### Challenges and Chaos

Iligan encountered various challenges in performing its supposed defensive role. One of which was food scarcity. Although there were implicit references of grain fields plagued with locusts (p. 68) and farming in groups of 25-30 men according to Loyre (n.d.), however, it was found out that the practice of agriculture was often upset by Moro assaults which climaxed during the years 1750-1760 (Loyre, n.d., p. 163).

Bernad (2004) wrote that in 1752, the fort in Iligan was besieged by two-thousand (2,000) Moros for two (2) months. The blockade broke off only when a flotilla from Cebu arrived, forcing the attackers to retreat (p. 81). From five hundred (500) tributes of Iligan in 1751, the fort was down to hardly sixty (60) inhabitants in 1753 (Blair and Robertson, trans., 1903, p. 163). The gravity of these circumstances led for the building of another fort in Misamis, so that in conjuncture with Iligan, they could both seal off the Panguil Bay. Also an armada was dispatched in 1754 composed of three galleys namely, Santo Niño, San Phelipe and the Triunfo, José Ducós, the parish priest of Iligan, who was given the title 'Captain-General', assumed military command of this Spanish fleet in July of 1754 (Bernad, 2004, pp. 82-88) and under his leadership, Iligan became relatively peaceful.

It was around those years when the Jesuits came out with the first printed map of the Philippines by Father Pedro Murillo Velarde in 1734.

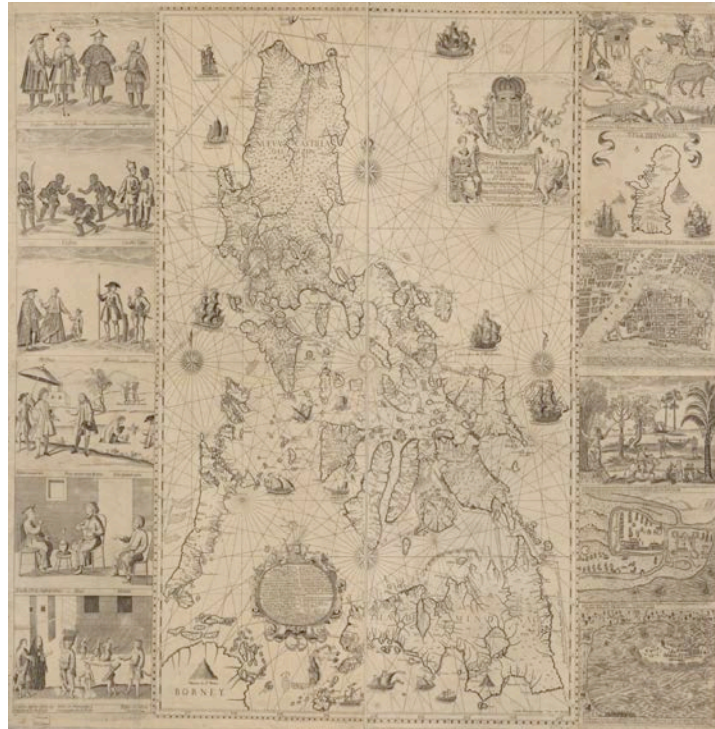


Figure 9: The Mother of Philippine Maps, the Velarde map (1734) ©Quirino,



Figure 10: a closer look of the 1734 Velarde map showing the island of Mindanao in the 18th century

The map shows the towns and settlements established by the Jesuits and the missions opened up for evangelization. The map is also seen with veins representing river systems and markings of terrains in the region. Iligan is spelled Yligan where Agus and Bayog rivers are found in the area. What is noticeable is a triangular shape marked east of Yligan River. There is also one in the location of Cagayan. Though crudely-shaped, but the symbols suggest the presence of a fort, something that was common between the two. But at the river-mouth of Bayog, the symbol for a fort is

non-existent. It can be recalled that Recollects fortified Bayug in 1639 and 1640. What does this mean? Where did the fort in Bayug go?

### **The Fort in Bayug: Sunk By a Flood?**

As early as 1655, the Jesuits wrote that in their territories in Mindanao, they only had two forts. As Blair and Robertson (1903) stated:

...His Majesty possesses two forts in this great island, that of Yligan and that of Samboangan, to which two priests of the Society attend. Father Ygnacio Navarro attends to that of Yligan, and Father Nicolas Cani to that of Samboangan... (p. 59)

There was no mention of Bayug as another fort, despite the fact it was part of the Jesuit territory. In the absence of other plausible reason, oral tradition usually points out to a destructive flood which buried the fort underwater. This must be the explanation why it wasn't reflected on the 1734 Velarde map.

Floods had been common even during Spanish Philippines. Floods occur in the country during typhoons or depressions which usually fall in the months from November to January as reported by Buencamino (n.d., p. 391). In Mindanao, they are too experienced especially while low pressure areas (LPA) cover the island in the rainy months.

River floods happen following an excessive rain that could overwhelm the river and send it spreading to its adjacent land that is called a floodplain (National Geographic, n.d.). According to the Manila Observatory (n.d.), the rivers in the Philippines, with few exceptions, are generally short, sluggish and shallow, a predisposition which makes river flooding common in the country. On the other hand, coastal flooding is triggered during a strong typhoon or a tsunami that results the sea to surge inland - a phenomenon experienced when Typhoon Yolanda struck the Philippines in 2013. These flood disasters that incur massive damages and losses in properties and lives are considered a national calamity in the Philippines.

This and the location of the fort in Bayug that was beside a river, increases the likelihood that the wooden fortification was washed out by a river flood. A geo-hazard survey in 2011 following Typhoon Sendong in Iligan which came out with a map shown below, further supports this claim.



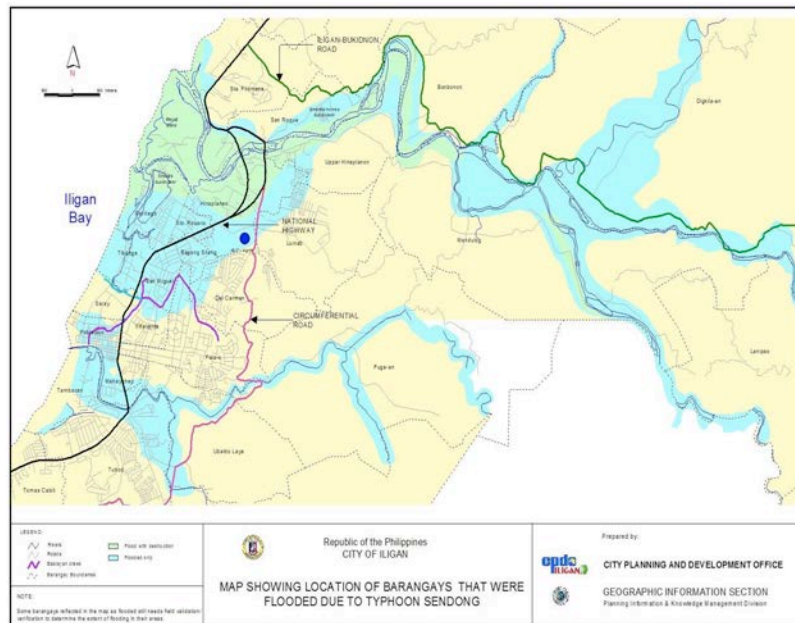


Figure 11: Map Showing the Flood-prone Areas of Iligan  
 Retrieved from: [https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/Iligan\\_Map%20of%20flooded%20areas%20\(Barangays.jpg](https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/Iligan_Map%20of%20flooded%20areas%20(Barangays.jpg)  
 Accessed: April 13, 2015

The map tells that Iligan is naturally a flood-prone area because of the river systems which cut across its expanse. Especially, the areas near to Mandulog and Iligan Rivers which are colored blue, they are the most disposed to flooding. On lands where Mandulog River drifts in particular, the susceptibility is high with the Bayug Island directly located at the trajectory of the river. Bayug is shaded green indicating that flooding on its ground might bring ruin.

This map seems to give the widely-held speculation of a flood submerging the Spanish fort in Bayug credence. It probably happened during a typhoon, a prolonged rain or even a waterspout. Miguel Selga (n.d.) wrote that from 1639 to 1655, years after Bayug was fortified, there were at least five (5) destructive typhoons that raged over the islands. But due to the absence of instruments, authorities weren't able to trace the origins of these typhoons nor locate its trajectory. They could only feel and see its wrath. In Manila, during the June 27, 1639 typhoon, witnesses saw how strong winds carried small boats up in the air (p. 33). The locals labeled this phenomenon as *buhawi* which was also seen in Visayas and recorded in writing in 1668 by the Jesuit Fr. Francisco Alcina (Borrinaga, 2014, p. 11). Unfortunately, this weather disturbance was too experienced in the Lanao area. Spanish accounts stated:

...Heavy storms of wind and water are experienced on this lake (Lanao), and are called mangas by sailors and bohai by the natives a form of storm-the waterspout-which was much dreaded because of its fury and ravages... (Blair and Robertson, trans., 1903, p. 92)

Interestingly, the portrayal of waterspouts resonates in the testimonies of survivors of Typhoon Sendong in 2011. They related how a ‘buhawi’ spilled out the river to the banks, causing flashfloods on the adjacent plains of Mandulog or Bayug River. The latter was the heavily-damaged area in Iligan in the aftermath of Sendong. It was where the wooden Spanish fort once stood.

### **Fort Victoria and the Advent of the Americans**

It looks like its location that was susceptible to river flooding was a dilemma to Iligan as the years progressed. The Augustinian Recollect compilation called “Sinopsis” recounts an occurrence sometime in 1780<sup>3</sup>. Accordingly, the Order had to move the old town of Iligan as it was “eaten up by the sea”<sup>4</sup> (Ruiz, 1925, pp. 286-287). It was set at the east bank of Iligan River, facing the Iligan bay (see figures 7 and 9). The record further reported that there was a construction of a fort which used to be in the left side of the river and is now in the right. Sources attribute this new fort as the Fort Victoria, built during the time of Gobernadorcillo Remigio Cabili (Cabili, n.d., p. 9)



Figure 12: Fort Victoria in quadrilateral shape, in contrast to the star-shaped Fort Francisco Javier,

Source: Filipinas Heritage Library

Fort Victoria supplanted the star-shaped Francisco Javier, although no longer standing on the same location. Bautista (1968) reinforced the role of fort Victoria as a scene of a local uprising, considered as a spinoff of the Philippine Revolution of 1896. This proved futile as the unfolding of events in the capital, led to the entrance of USA in the Philippines. By virtue of the Treaty of Paris of 1898, Philippines was ceded to US as a colony (pp. 252-256).

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<sup>3</sup> The Augustinian Recollects replaced the Jesuit missionaries in Iligan as the latter were expelled from the Spanish empire in 1768.

<sup>4</sup> This area was reclaimed by the City government of Iligan during the administration of Mayor Camilo P. Cabili (1960-1984) to serve as a marketplace

When Americans arrived in Iligan, initial observations of the former towards Iligan was not very assuring. Russel (1907), in her travel accounts, mentioned a Headquarters Building and she furthered:

...In front of it (headquarters), reaching to the left for some distance, stood along, single row of cocoanut-palms, so tall that the green foliage was far above the top of the house, making the trees look like stiff bouquets in absurdly long wooden holders. At the foot of these trees water, blue as indigo on wash day, lashed itself into a white fury against the stonework of the pier... (p. 92)

The Americans proceeded to work from what was left by the Spaniards. Infantrymen were detailed to dig the trench (Russel, 1907, p. 93). It is deduced that parts of Fort Victoria as shown in the 1903 image may have been reworked through American efforts. An American military camp was also established called Camp Overton, located west of the city, near the old Spanish road to Lanao. Iligan was still seen useful as a gateway for the Americans to the Malanaos, described as the most warlike people in Mindanao (Acut, 1989, p. 70).

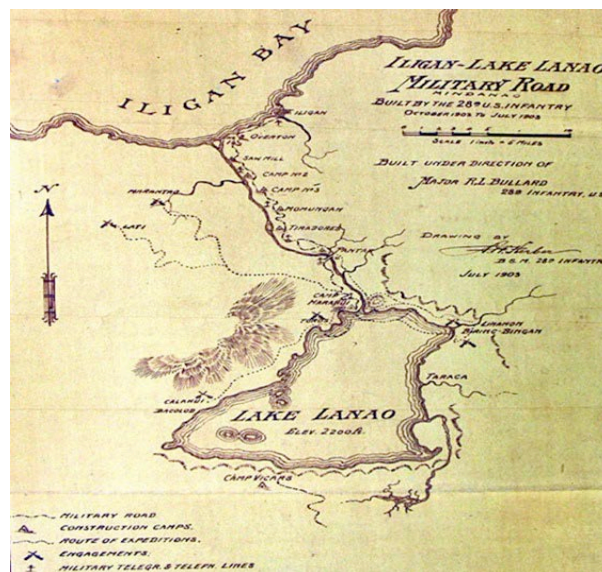


Figure 13: the military road to the lake region from Iligan in 1903

Source: [http://www.morolandhistory.com/09.PG-Camp%20Vicars/camp\\_vicars\\_p1.htm](http://www.morolandhistory.com/09.PG-Camp%20Vicars/camp_vicars_p1.htm)  
(retrieved: July 7, 2015)

### The Deluge of 1912 and 1916

Americans during their occupation, put Iligan under the following administrative structures: Military government (1899-1903), Moro Province (1903-1913) and Department of Mindanao and Sulu (1913-1920) ("Muslim-American Relations in the Philippines, 1899-1920", 2014, pp. 98-108). Fort Victoria was still standing,

serving its purposes, with Camp Overton. The latter would go down in years for a while. The Spanish fort Victoria would give up; not to a foe but to a flood.

In November of 1912, a typhoon struck the country which approximately claimed 15,000 lives. On November 24, strong winds were felt that vented itself over Samar area then two days after, on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>,<sup>5</sup> the tempest made a landfall and left a terrible wreckage on its pathway. The magnitude of the typhoon and the destruction it produced made waves and even appeared on the pages of Washington Herald on its November 30, 1912 issue:



Figure 14: the Washington Herald which headlined about the Philippine typhoon in 1912, Source: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045433/1912-11-30/ed-1/seq-1/> (retrieved: April 15, 2015)

The image is barely readable but the text about the Philippines reports:

...15,000 DIE IN PHILIPPINE STORM. That 15,000 persons were probably killed and wounded in a typhoon that swept the Philippine islands last Tuesday was reported yesterday in cable dispatches to the Bureau of Insular Affairs... (Ocampo, 2014, p. 10)

The path of the storm was towards the direction of Visayas, but the wall of the storm was surmised to be around the vicinity of Northern Mindanao, as shown by the image below

<sup>5</sup> Francisco Demetrio, Historical Jottings of Mambajao, Camiguin, Misamis Oriental, from 1887-1929



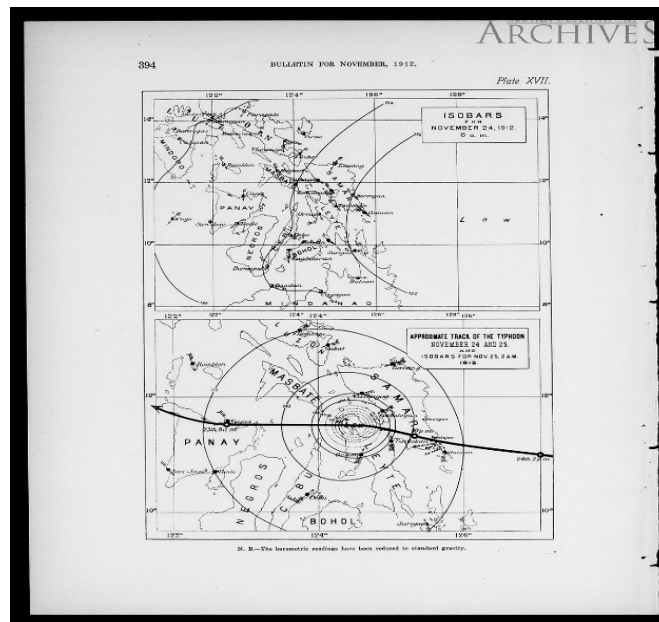


Figure 15: the pathway of the storm that hit the country on November 24-25, 1912 and its isobars.

© Manila Observatory Archives (retrieved: April 14, 2015)

Four years after, another strong typhoon visited the country on January 22-24, 1916. *Observatorio de Manila*<sup>6</sup> projected the track of the typhoon which was shown on the map below:

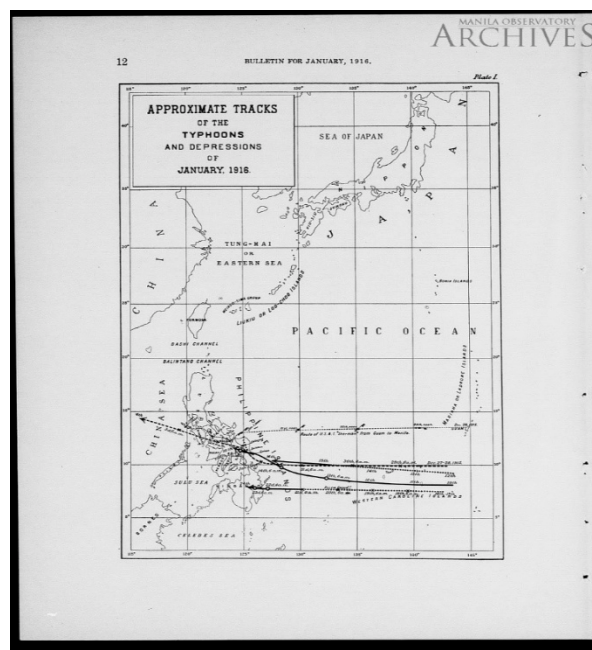


Figure 16: the approximate track of the typhoon that fell on January 1916

©Manila Observatory Archives (retrieved: April 14, 2015)

<sup>6</sup>The Manila Observatory or Observatorio de Manila, established in 1865, became the official weather forecasting station during Spanish Philippines. It was reestablished in 1901 by the Americans as the Philippine Weather Bureau.

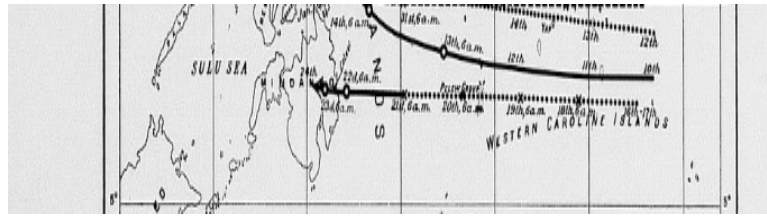


Figure 17: a closer look of the trajectory of the typhoon which directly hit the island of Mindanao, where Iligan is. ©Manila Observatory Archives (retrieved: April 14, 2015)

The typhoon in January 1916 which directly hit Mindanao and lingered for two days (23-24) was the most remarkable which happened in Mindanao in recorded memory. The strength of the storm can be gauged based on this statement:

...Generally considered as the worst and most destructive experienced in many years in that island (Mindanao). The losses were enormous. In Lanao, many strong bridges were washed away, a great number of roads were destroyed or greatly damaged and the crops, particularly in the low valleys, were either totally or particularly lost... (Buencamino, 1920, p. 391)

In the neighboring city of Cagayan de Oro, the three-day typhoon caused the Cagayan River to overflow. The suspension bridge called Puente del General Ramon Blanco was washed out by the rampaging waters. In Bukidnon, a barrio called Mapait was abandoned as the strong winds wrecked their place. The people in exodus found a new settlement, three kilometers away, in Danatag (Montalvan, 2004, pp. 100-102).

Acut (1989) wrote that in Iligan, the effects left by the typhoons of 1912 and 1916 were irremediable. The Spanish fort Victoria that was along the Iligan River which withstood the tests of time and tribulation for half a century, was destroyed by the power of flood. Wars and insurrections failed to tear the fort down. It was the turbulence of flood waters that submerged it leaving no trace as a memorial of its military exploits. Even in the Bayug area, the flood altered the watercourse of the river. Until that time, the river drifted to the area of barangay Sta. Felomina. But the great river flood directed it towards barangay Santiago.

...This place (Bayug) used to be a solid plain. The site where the present Bayug hanging bridge was only a small brook about a step wide. The route of the Mandulog River was at Pandan, a part of Barangay Santa Felomina... (Acut, 1989, p. 22).

## **Conclusion**

One interesting aspect of Iligan's history is that its location was repeatedly recognized by colonizers as important for their pacification campaigns in the back region. As shown in the accounts, it served as a strategic location for both the Spaniards and Americans, thus explaining the presence of forts: that of Bayug, Fort Francisco Javier and Fort Victoria. Serving their expected purposes came not without problems though manageable. However, it never came easy when challenged by nature – in this case by the power of flood. Nature has proven it so many times already in human history that it is a formidable force man has difficulty to control much more evade. In this study there were at least four times of flood occurrences that brought considerable effect to the established forts and other strategic areas such as the poblacion. These precedences falsify the widely-held notion that Mindanao is safe and Iligan is a typhoon and flood-free area. Shortly after the Sendong tragedy, the local government declared parts of Bayug as a “no man” and “no-build” zone. Perhaps Iligan could still be a much safer place to live but not without heeding to what past circumstances and lessons provide.

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