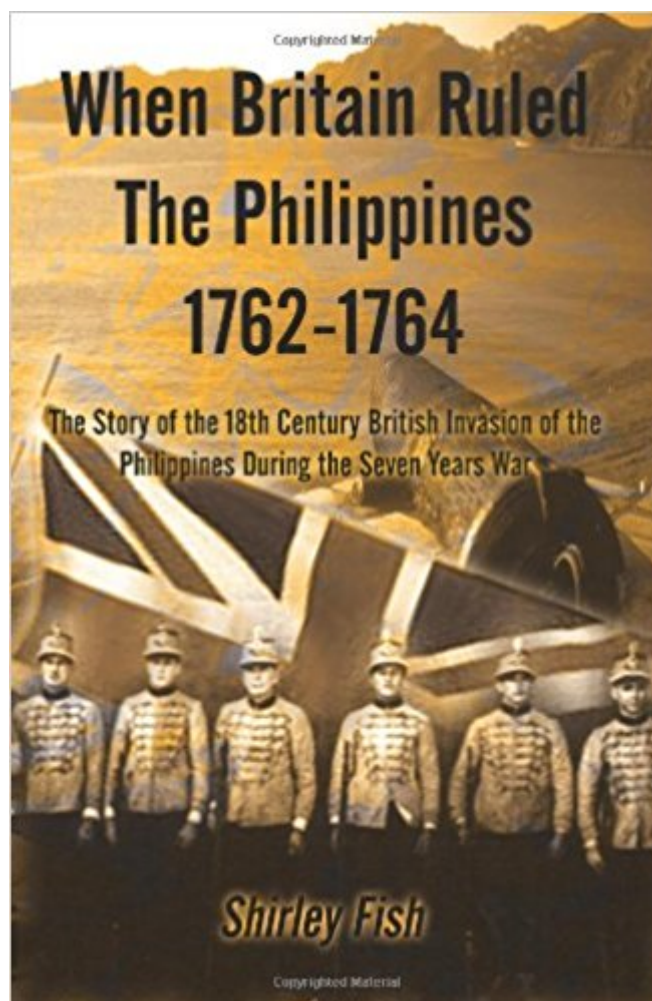


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# When Britain Ruled The Philippines 1762-1764





## Synopsis

The British invasion of the Philippines was the first challenge to Spain's control of the archipelago after 191 years of rule. The Royal Navy and British Army joined with the East India Company in Madras to capture Spain's Asian colony. In conjunction with the attack against Spain's key possession in the Americas, Havana, both settlements were successfully seized. However, in the Philippines, whilst the expedition was launched as part of a plan to harass the Spaniards in their possessions, as well as for commercial gain and new territories, the military campaign led by General William Draper and Admiral Samuel Cornish, may have been launched under the guise of an invasion in order to gain prize money. The author describes the events as they unfolded at the Admiralty in London and at the East India Company in Madras, leading to the invasion and occupation of the capital Manila and the port city of Cavite. The capital was looted, a galleon was seized, and the British commanders imposed a ransom of four million dollars upon the Spaniards. The enormous sums in prize money and valuables seized mainly benefited the commanders...

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Shirley Fish is an American Freelance Writer and Researcher working in Asia for the past 23 years. She has lived in Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia and is currently in Manila, Philippines. Over the years she has been a magazine editor and correspondent with various Asian publications. She has a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Southern California.

Philippine British Society Newsletter, Manila, Philippines, September 2003 "Shirley Fish, American



resident in the Philippines since 1995 (and married to a British executive), has written a book titled: *When Britain Ruled the Philippines 1762-1764*. The subtitle is: *The Story of the 18th Century British Invasion of the Philippines During the Seven Year's War*. The book is now available at [www.fishbooks.com](http://www.fishbooks.com) ... in the USA. The British Invasion of the Philippines was the first challenge to Spain's control of the archipelago after 191 years of rule. The Royal Navy and the British Army joined with the East India Company in Madras to capture Spain's Asian colony. In conjunction with the attack against Spain's key possession in the Americas, Havana, both settlements were successfully seized. However, in the Philippines, whilst the expedition was launched as part of a plan to harass the Spaniards in their possessions, as well as for commercial gain and new territories, the military campaign led by General William Draper and Admiral Samuel Cornish may have been launched under the guise of an invasion in order to gain prize money. The author describes the events as they unfolded in the Admiralty in London and at the East India Company in Madras, leading to the invasion and occupation of the capital, Manila, and the port city of Cavite. The capital was looted, a galleon was seized, and the British commanders imposed a ransom of four million dollars upon the Spaniards. The enormous sum in prize money and valuable seized mainly benefited the commanders.

**Author's Note:** When I arrived in Manila in 1995, I became interested in the fascinating history of the Philippines. After looking through many history books written in the Philippines by various historians, I was amazed to see that almost all of these devoted only a minimal amount of space to the British invasion and occupation of the archipelago in 1762-1764. The invasion was part of a broader campaign launched by the Admiralty in England against Spain and was a direct result of the ongoing Seven Year's War - the world's first world war. I thought that this was an important part of Filipino history, which had basically been ignored by historians in the Philippines. Intrigued by the lack of information available concerning this momentous event, I began researching the activities of the British Royal Navy and Army during the 18th century, in London and in Manila, to find out the true story behind the invasion. Thus, what appears in the book is a result of my four years of researching the story.

For those of us living in the Philippines, this little-known part of local history always seems to be passed over too quickly. The English presence is most often referred to only on old historical plaques listing "English desecrations" of local churches during the 1762 conquest of Manila. Fish's work could have addressed this period in greater detail, but falls short. A large introductory section provides too much historical background on the Philippines and leads to a disappointingly brief handling of the major topic. This work fills a gap, but begs for a more detailed handling of the subject



in the future.

The British occupation of the Philippines, or more specifically Manila, was part of the Seven Years War that was fought globally. The British saw the opportunity during the war to seize what they believed would be a rich city and possibly one of the famously wealthy Manila galleons. The campaign to capture Manila was agreed upon between the East India Company and the British Government. At the time of the operation the Spanish Empire was on the decline and the British were powerful in Asia and rising. The Spanish had never really been able to penetrate and conquer the Philippines beyond Manila and the British would face a similar limitation. Despite the British military victory the Spaniards 'won the peace.' The diplomats that drafted the peace treaty that concluded the Seven Years War were not informed of the British victory in the Philippines and so did not specifically mention the islands in the treaty so the Spaniards regained what they had lost. Shirley Fish has written an admirable book on this period in Philippines history. Indeed, she has probably tried to write too much and because of that the book starts strongly with the immediate background and preparations to the venture but then meanders through a historical background that goes back to the early days of the Spanish colonisation of the Philippines. As an example, there is a section that comprehensively details the Spanish defences throughout the Philippines that while informative it does not seem to add much to the narrative because the British were limited to Manila in their conquest and so never sought to fully test those defenses. The section on the actual invasion was good. With the Philippines being without a governor at the time of attack the Bishop became the de facto war leader for the defences. While he had numbers on his side he did not have the discipline of the British. A telling incident that Shirley Fish related was the fate of the Bishop's son. He was captured by the British when the Spanish vessel that he was travelling on was seized by the Royal Navy ships patrolling off Manila. The Bishop asked for the return of his adult age son on humanitarian grounds and the British commanders honoured his request. A truce was agreed and a British officer landed with the Spaniard to accompany him to Manila. However, this was not Europe and the Western practices of professional European Armies were not understood by the hastily assembled Filipino militia that the Bishop had as defenders. Both the Spaniards and British looked on in horror as the two men were slaughtered on the beach by the local militia. While the Bishop agreed to take action against the militia for the violation of the truce it did bring home the issue of a culture clash between Europeans and the local Filipinos. Despite the title of the book the invasion coverage was the highlight of the book with the almost two year long occupation being covered quickly and in an almost haphazard way. The tensions between the military and the East India



Company appointed administrator received much coverage but it went backwards and forwards often with different parts of the story coming out at different times in an apparently unstructured way instead of a straight narrative. This was not due to thematic lines it was just that the facts emerged in different places without an indication as to why it was structured that way. This tension also became the focus of the text on the occupation despite the newly arrived Spanish Governor maintaining a guerrilla type force in the districts outside of Manila. There was no real discussion about what he was doing. There was a brief mention of a sepoy mutiny and that the descendants of the troops that deserted still lived in that area until today but the causes and consequences were not fully explored. Two further criticisms of the book were the lack of an index and the limited footnoting. The absence of an index meant that when the author introduced people or events it was very hard to track back to that mention when their names appeared again much later in the book. It was frustrating to be given only a surname later in the book and not being able to remember the position of that person and not being able to look up an index to go back to find out what their role was in that period. While the author footnoted all direct quotes she did not footnote all the facts and figures that she included. I suspect that this book was not aimed at the academic community but rather at those with a general interest in the Philippines and so it may have been a marketing decision to leave out footnotes in the text. Again, it was frustrating when the author made a reference to an interesting fact in the book and there was no indication of where to go to find out more about that issue. The author did have a good writing style and when she was on story she could relate the events very well. You do not need to have a background in the Seven Years War or in the history of the Philippines to read this book. It is a good read and it will provide a good starting point for others to build on should they wish to write about the occupation or other facets of the story.

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