

*Charles Hayes*  
**MacArthur's Palo**

**L** aughing and pretending to pray at the base plate of the statues depicting the American General and his entourage wading ashore here on Red Beach, Palo, Leyte, the pair of pubescent schoolgirls, dressed in earthy brown uniforms, are making fun. Cast in bronze, twice the size of real life, the statues tower above the girls. Appearing from behind to stand beside their kneeling poses, I am not as monumental as the statues, but my height and similar facial features quickly gain the girls' full attention. Realizing, in real life, the possible significance of this place, they jump up and attempt to flee their embarrassment, falling over each other in that clumsy and coltish way that people of their age have. My smile along with my wife's indications that there is no need for fear brings the shy one back to pose with the Monument to MacArthur's return to the Philippines.. However her companion refuses and gives me a hard look. An old Filipina friend of mine once told me that this kind of look was sometimes the way girls hid their interest here, having never learned the wiles and ways of the "sophisticated." I watch her as she sidles away with that oblique frown and hope that she is not really mad.

When we were growing up MacArthur and his "I shall return" was a big deal, a real important part of who we were and how we saw things that lay ahead of us. Some of us even found ourselves also going ashore on other people's property, but we were making no return like MacArthur's. Or as they say here, "Balik-Balik."

MacArthur returned to give an impressive speech which indeed, I believe, helped free the Filipino people from Japanese rule. And they, along with our rescued POWs, welcomed it. They eagerly cast their lot with that old soldier and fought beside him. It was such a big enough deal that its occurrence was passed down to us, pretty ribbons and eloquent speeches all intact. It built this Memorial for us to honor and for these school girls to play around. But those that employ the genre of its honor and its sacrifice to render us useful tools for conquest and establishment of a power hierarchy, in my opinion, do a disservice to this memorial, these school girls, you, and me. No unsophisticated dullards among a rich and preoccupied people, you can figure out the tone of this missive and where you stand in relation to it. That the big enough deal has built as well. But for myself it calls to fore, having went ashore other places to establish something not of the people who lived there, how it is supposed to be. As for some who came after me, and even unto today, I will not attempt to expound upon. We do not live in the time of MacArthur and his duty, nor that kind of need for our return to foreign shores. Our patriotism can sometimes be a cloak for darker designs. And speaking my piece covets not loose cannon fire from those quarters. But being here in the presence

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of this memorial to an old soldier who has long faded away is an honor that I wish you all could enjoy, contemplate and realize. Or, if you are like me, gain a little therapy from.

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This is the same place where the fiercest typhoon in history will later make landfall, knocking over one of these statues. It will be repaired by the people who live here and standing back with the others within a day..... while the rest of the Tacloban area lies in shatters.