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THE UNITED STATES MARINES
IN THE
WAR WITH SPAIN

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Preface

This pamphlet is a concise narrative of Marine Corps participation in the Spanish-American War. The chronicle was compiled from official records and appropriate historical works and is published for the information of those interested in this important period in our history.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gordon D. Gayle", is positioned above the printed name.

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Bernard C. Nalty

The sun's rays danced along the white hull and buff superstructure of the battleship Maine as she slipped past the ominous bulk of El Morro fortress, paused to pick up her pilot, then glided gracefully to her berth in Havana harbor. According to the State Department, the American warship was making a routine, friendly visit to Cuba; but in spite of this official explanation, the mighty Maine did not drop anchor in the mud of the busy port solely in the interest of international courtesy.

The series of events which brought an American war vessel to the Spanish colony had begun with the outbreak in 1895 of a second Cuban revolution. An earlier revolt had dragged on for ten years before Spanish authorities had been able to restore order. There had followed almost two decades of peace, but then the flames of war had erupted even more violently. In New York City, a band of Cuban expatriates beat the drum for American intervention, while in Cuba Spanish General Valeriano Weyler began a systematic campaign to crush the insurrection.

(1)

General Weyler was making fair progress on the battlefield, but the rebels scored a far more important victory on the pages of the New York newspapers. To circulation managers with papers to sell, the Cuban strife offered a heaven-sent opportunity; and soon the blood-red headlines screamed of Spanish barbarity--Weyler became known as "Beast." Sent to Cuba to sketch the war, artist Frederic Remington informed his editor that he could find no action. "You furnish the pictures," snapped William Randolph Hearst, "and I'll furnish the war." Remington did his best. From his facile pen flowed sketches of lean, leering Spanish policemen and innocent Cuban maidens. His editors were pleased; and, safe from the Mauser's bullet, the exiled revolutionaries beamed with delight as they scanned the pages of the New York dailies. (2)

If the average American, who knew only what he read in the papers, was somewhat confused by the Cuban situation, the American Consul at Havana was no better informed. The rebels had begun burning the cane fields, many of them owned by American firms; and no one could be certain just how the Spanish would react. To protect United States citizens living

in Cuba, Consul General Fitzhugh Lee arranged for a signal, the phrase "two dollars" followed within two hours by the message "Vessels might be employed elsewhere," which would bring the battleship Maine steaming into Havana harbor. Early in January 1898, Lee had alerted the warship when Havana was rocked by the shouts of young Spanish Army officers protesting the replacement of General Weyler; but the demonstrators did nothing to endanger the lives of Americans, and the final part of the signal never was sent. At this point, the State Department intervened. On 24 January, the Maine was detached from the North Atlantic Squadron to pay a courtesy call upon the Spanish at Havana. (3)

Spanish officials in Cuba may have resented the presence of an American man-of-war, but they kept their feelings under strict control. The usual amenities were exchanged. The acting Captain General presented a case of sherry to the Maine's officers' mess; and Captain Charles Sigsbee, in command of the battleship, responded with a copy of his treatise on "Deep Sea Sounding and Dredging." Next, the American officers were entertained at a bull fight. (4) It was, in short, a pleasant visit, completely unlike the tense situation which many of the crew had expected.

On the evening of 15 February 1898, the Maine lay quietly at anchor in Havana harbor. First Lieutenant Albertus W. Catlin, (5) officer-in-charge of the Marine detachment, was rummaging through his papers in search of a misplaced pen. He had intended to write to a friend a letter describing the exquisite mildness of Cuban cigars. Captain Sigsbee, alone in his cabin, also was composing letters. Corporal Frank G. Thompson of the Marine guard lay on his hammock beneath an awning which had been rigged above the deck. As he was lying there gazing into the darkness, a giant's hand seized him, hurled him through the awning, then let him crash back to the deck. He could remember nothing save the roar, the shock wave, and the fact that during the split second he hung motionless in the air he had looked down onto the ship's superstructure.

Other members of the crew heard two distinct blasts; the first a sharp crack like the report of a pistol, and the second an all-consuming roar which devoured the crew's quarters, twisted steel beams, and wrapped the forward third of the vessel in a pall of flame. Power failed immediately. Lieutenant Catlin, the pleasures of cigar smoking forgotten, groped his way to the deck. (6) Captain Sigsbee started along the smoke-filled companionway only to collide with his orderly, Marine Private William Anthony. The young Marine apologized to his Captain, then calmly and in the strictest military manner reported that the Maine was sinking. (7)

Together the captain and his Marine orderly stepped out on deck. It took but a single glance to convince Sigsbee that the private had shown real heroism in carrying out his duties to the letter. Already the vessel was settling into the mud. In the glare of blazing bunkers, the Captain could see one of the stacks wrenched loose and lying in the water. The bow was gone; forward, marked by a tangle of twisted frames and girders, was a gaping, black void into which tons of water were rushing. In this area had been forward magazines, and there most of the crew had slept. Almost two hundred and fifty men had been killed by the blast.

To flood the remaining magazines would have been useless. The Maine was doomed. Reluctantly Sigsbee ordered the survivors into the waters. (8)

"Public opinion," Sigsbee pleaded in wiring news of the tragedy, "should be suspended until further report." (9) He was asking too much. Ever since the early years of the United States, those first perilous decades when Spain had ruled Florida and Louisiana, Americans had distrusted the Spaniards. In short, the public had been conditioned to expect treachery. Then too, there was Hearst, his rivals, and their packs of newshounds. As far as they were concerned, to suspend judgment was to suspend publication.

Against this backdrop, two boards, one American and one Spanish, convened to probe into the disaster. Each questioned its witnesses carefully, weighed the evidence honestly, and reached contradictory conclusions. The Spanish proved that the Maine had been destroyed by internal explosions. The Americans agreed that the detonation of ammunition in the forward magazines had destroyed the vessel, but they offered convincing proof that this blast had been triggered by an explosion outside the hull. In other words, a mine had been responsible for the holocaust. To this day, neither theory can be disproved. The United States Naval officers who made up the board remained as impartial as possible under the circumstances. They made no attempt to blame anyone for the destruction of the ship; (10) unfortunately, American newspapers were not so scrupulously just.

The United States did not declare war immediately after the Maine was sunk. President William McKinley, prodded by a number of influential businessmen, continued to walk the path of peace; but Congress, more acutely aware of popular sentiment, clamored for vengeance. Voters, a great many of them, wanted war; the newspapers screamed for war; and many a distinguished legislator burned with a desire to hang "Butcher" Weyler from a sour apple tree. On 19 April 1898, Congress passed a resolution declaring that Cuba was free and independent and authorizing the President to employ American-troops to

force Spain to relinquish her control over the island. When the President approved this bold statement, Spain on 24 April declared war. On the following day, the United States recognized that a state of war had existed between the two countries since 21 April. (11)

While the debate raged over the cause of the Maine disaster, Secretary of the Navy John D. Long, tired and worn by the problems of placing the fleet in a state of readiness, was absent one day from his office. His pugnacious assistant, Theodore Roosevelt, promptly sent a "secret and confidential" dispatch to the American squadron at Hong Kong. "Keep full of coal," he advised Commodore George Dewey. "In the event of declaration of war with Spain, your duty will be to see that the Spanish squadron does not leave the Asiatic coast, and then offensive operations in the Philippine Islands." (12) Secretary Long was not blind to the need of alerting the scattered American squadrons, for on the following day, 26 February, he returned to his desk and ordered naval units in the Pacific and Caribbean to take on coal; but he was understandably annoyed to discover that Roosevelt had "come very near causing more of an explosion than happened to the Maine." (13) The Secretary of the Navy had no intention of conquering the Philippines, but the machinery that had been set in motion could not be stopped.

Thanks to Roosevelt's timely dispatch, Dewey's squadron was to strike the first blow against the Spanish. Nerve center of the Philippine defenses was Manila Bay, a vast body of water protected by the islands of Caballo, Corregidor, and El Fraile. Located on the shores of this bay were the city of Manila and a naval station at Cavite. Just around Bataan Peninsula lay the superb anchorage of Subic Bay. To enter Manila Bay, an enemy fleet would be forced to pass between two towering, volcanic peaks and then steam along one of two deep water channels, both of which were within easy range of one or more of the island batteries. A minimum of effort could have turned the shores of Manila Bay into the jaws of a mighty trap ready to be triggered upon the approach of any hostile squadron. Fortunatley, for Commodore Dewey, the Spanish were reluctant to put forth even the minimum of effort.

As far as the Philippines were concerned, the war began on 23 April with the issuing of a long-winded proclamation by the Captain General of the islands. "The North American people, constituted of all the social excrescences," he ranted, "have exhausted our patience and provoked war with their perfidious machinations, with their acts of treachery, with their outrages against the law of nations and international conventions." (14)

Next came a survey of the defenses. Admiral Don Patricio Montojo investigated the possibility of completing the works at Subic Bay and making his stand there. To his disgust, he

found that no guns had been emplaced nor any mines laid. Since he felt that a fight at Subic Bay would result in the destruction of his squadron, he returned to Cavite. A poll of his officers helped the Spanish commander make up his mind. If the ships must perish, his captains argued, let them sink in the shallower waters off Cavite. There the crews could be saved. The Spanish, besides lacking plans, had little confidence in their cause. (15)

In the meantime, Dewey's squadron was moving to the attack. During the first few moments of 1 May, the Americans slipped into Manila Bay. Corregidor loomed suddenly out of the inky blackness, but the attackers swept past unchallenged. A pall of clouds still shrouded the moon as they drove on toward El Fraile. Sparks blossomed from the funnel of the McCulloch, an unarmed Coast Guard cutter, and an alert battery on El Fraile opened fire, its shell throwing up a column of water between the Raleigh and Petrel. Pillars of molten flame spouted from their guns as Dewey's ships replied. The Spanish battery fell silent.

As the tropic dawn exploded over the horizon, American lookouts sighted the Spanish squadron anchored a short distance offshore where it could be supported by the guns at Cavite and at Sangley Point. Aboard the cruiser Baltimore, Captain Otway C. Berryman, in command of the Marine Detachment, and First Lieutenant Dion Williams sent their men scurrying to battle stations at the port batteries. A neat chevron of spray arched from the Baltimore's bow as the mighty ship swung to starboard, unmasking her port batteries. From the flagship Olympia a great ball of orange flame and dirty smoke rolled out across the waves, hung inert for a second, then began to dissolve. The roar of the flagship's batteries was drowned out in the concussion of the Baltimore's guns as her Marines joined the battle.

Passing the Spanish fleet, the American column steamed close to the batteries at Sangley Point, veered out of their range, and reversed course. A second and third time Dewey led his vessels to the attack. Each time the Baltimore's port batteries lay on the engaged side, and each time her Marines flung death at the Spanish cruisers. Those Leathernecks whose stations were on the starboard side were released to form damage control parties and to help serve the port guns.

Two Spanish torpedo boats slipped anchor and charged toward Dewey's flagship, but a blanket of shells from the Olympia's secondary batteries smothered the attack. One of the vessels wallowed helplessly for a moment then sank; the other was run aground. Next a pair of enemy cruisers tried to get underway. Hit hard, the Don Juan de Austria came shuddering to a halt; but the Christina continued to press her attack. An eight-inch shell shredded her steering gear, another ripped four of her rapid fire guns from their mounts, a third exploded in the

after ammunition room, and a fourth devastated the sick bay. In but a few minutes the cruiser had been reduced to a helpless, burning derelict.

Although two counterattacks had been beaten off, Commodore Dewey suddenly broke off the engagement and withdrew into the bay. He had received a garbled and entirely groundless report that his squadron had almost exhausted its ammunition. Once the truth was known, he ordered his vessels back into action. At 1116 they resumed firing, and at 1230 the Spanish surrendered. On 3 May, Lieutenant Williams and a band of Marines from the Baltimore raised the Stars and Stripes over the naval station, but Dewey did not have enough men to occupy Manila let alone dominate the entire archipelago. After a truly glorious victory in which a smaller but better equipped American squadron had annihilated a Spanish flotilla, the victor could do little else but show the flag and ask for reinforcements. (16)

While Commodore Dewey had been preparing to embark on his great adventure, President McKinley was equally busy calling for volunteers to supplement the thin ranks of the Regular Army. These militia were enthusiastic for a taste of glory; but they were ill-clad, untrained, and wretchedly equipped. Few militia regiments had been issued modern weapons; theirs was the venerable Springfield .45 with its old-style cartridge. Thus, whenever a militia soldier fired his weapon, he was half blinded and, more dangerous, his position was marked by a billowing geyser of powder smoke. In spite of these failings, the raw material was good. With proper training, the volunteers would fight well; but training took time, so the brunt of the Army's offensive would have to be borne by the Regulars. (17)

The problems facing the Navy were not as difficult. During the years immediately preceding the war, the Department had been blessed with a fair amount of new construction, mainly lightly-armored cruisers and coast defense battleships. There was no extensive reliance on its militia system. Finally, and most important of all, Secretary Long had shown remarkable foresight in drawing together before the declaration of war enough fighting ships to make a blockade of Cuba possible. Early in March, for example, he had ordered the Oregon to sail from Bremerton, Washington, to San Francisco. From the California port, the battleship sailed around Cape Horn to join the fleet in the Caribbean by the end of May. (18) Although he lacked Theodore Roosevelt's theories of seapower, the Secretary did a workman-like job.

Like the Navy, the Marine Corps was ready to strike as soon as war was declared. On 16 April, almost a full week before Spain declared war, Colonel Commandant Charles Heywood had been given verbal orders to organize a Marine battalion to serve in Cuba. During the next two days, while Congress was

pushing through the resolution which declared Cuba to be free, the Commandant issued orders to assemble at the Brooklyn Navy Yard men from all East Coast posts and stations. Some 623 enlisted Marines, 23 officers, and 1 Navy surgeon formed the new battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Huntington, battalion commander, had at his disposal five infantry companies and one artillery battery equipped with four three-inch rapid fire guns.

Although the Brooklyn barracks was overcrowded, the task of organization and fitting out the battalion proceeded quickly and efficiently. By 22 April, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington, full-bearded and fierce-looking veteran of the first Battle of Bull Run, had mounted a black steed and led his men on parade through the streets of Brooklyn. Upon returning to the Navy Yard, they had boarded the USS Panther and, as a Navy band blared "The Girl I Left Behind Me," sailed for Key West, Florida. (19)

While the Panther made its leisurely way southward--the vessel paused for a time at Hampton Roads--the Corps was expanding to wartime strength. A temporary increase of 24 officers and 1,640 enlisted men was authorized for the Marine Corps by legislation enacted on 4 May. A typical new recruit faced five or six weeks' indoctrination at one of the barracks, then was assigned to a ship or shore station. Perhaps the proudest moment in the recruit's life came on the day he first donned his blue uniform and strode triumphantly out the main gate. Sometimes, however, he was due for a shock; for the American people, unused to military uniforms, sometimes mistook a Marine private for an officer of the Salvation Army. (20)

Key West, where the Marine battalion was encamped, was rough and lawless. It was as though one of the old Colorado mining towns had been lifted bodily and dumped on the Florida sands. Flies and mosquitoes swarmed over the luckless Marines, dust devils eddied through the camp, and worst of all there was no fresh drinking water save for that distilled aboard naval vessels. In spite of this atmosphere, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington kept his men primed and ready. He granted frequent liberty and wisely established patrols to halt the activities of the lawless individuals who flocked to Florida in the wake of the expedition. After some of these citizens had engaged in a shooting spree, a detachment of about 50 men under command of Second Lieutenant Henry C. Davis was sent from the Washington Barracks to Key West to maintain order. Captain Harry K. White was detached from the battalion to perform the duties of Provost Marshal. Operating from an abandoned cigar factory, the small group soon brought peace to the community. (21)

While the Marine battalion was in camp, the Army was preparing for its first landing on the shores of Cuba, an attempt

to supply weapons and ammunition to the rebels. On 10 May, two companies of the First Infantry boarded a creaking sidewheel steamboat with the frolicsome name of Gussie and sailed for Cuba. Unlike similar operations in later wars, this particular project was hidden behind no veil of secrecy; for Frederic Remington, watching from the docks, sketched the Gussie's departure. On deck was a handful of hardy newspapermen; and when the weary vessel finally reached Cuba, a pair of press boats was hovering nearby. In spite of these many breaches of security, the landing was made. Plowing boldly into the tangled undergrowth, the soldiers exchanged volleys with some Spanish troopers; but they could not make contact with the insurrectos for whom the supplies were destined. Since nothing could be gained from a protracted clash with the Spaniards, the expedition re-embarked in the Gussie and returned to Key West. (22)

The Navy was not idle, for upon the outbreak of war the Spanish fleet had been ordered from Europe to the West Indies. This maneuver momentarily upset the American scheme of strategy. At first, Admiral William T. Sampson, Captain "Fighting Bob" Evans, and a few of the more aggressive American naval officers had hoped to steam boldly to Havana and simply blast the city to kindling wood. The threat of the Spanish battle fleet--no one yet knew that the admiral in command had glumly prophesied its destruction even before the ships had sailed--caused Secretary Long to veto Sampson's plan. (23) Later in the war, a glimpse of the fortifications at Santiago was to change his views, but for the time being Sampson was willing to pit ship against fort.

Unable to obtain permission to crush Havana, the Navy began plugging the holes in its blockade of Cuba. To isolate the island and to hinder the movement of Spanish warships, the cruiser Marblehead was ordered to cut the transoceanic cable off Cienfuegos. On 11 May, a handful of seamen and Marines piled into small boats, moved close to shore, and began dragging for the cables. Their work was slow, painfully slow; for their only tools were axes, chisels, hacksaws, and wire cutters. A hundred yards distant, startled Spanish troops watched the impudent Americans. Occasionally one of the Spaniards would fire in the direction of the boats; but for an hour or so, the sailors and Marines toiled without serious interruption. Two cables had been cut before the enemy recovered his wits. Then rifles popped along the shoreline, and machine guns snarled as enemy bullets cracked across the water or chewed through the wooden boats. Seven Americans were wounded, two of them fatally, before the boats could move out of range. The expedition had been a heroic undertaking; but it was only partially successful, since at least one cable remained in operation. (24)

Meanwhile, engines throbbing, four Spanish cruisers and a trio of torpedo boats were charging across the Atlantic. A tremor of fear swept America's East Coast at the thought of

enemy shells bursting in Boston or New York. The vessels, however, lacked the endurance to strike along the coastline; Admiral Pascual Cervera instead made for Martinique to take on coal. There one of his torpedo boats, the Terror, wheezed to a stop completely broken down. Leaving the crippled ship behind, Cervera's squadron steamed over the horizon. Admiral Sampson tried to anticipate the enemy's course, but American reconnaissance was poor and the Spaniards anchored safely at Santiago in southeastern Cuba (see map). (25)

Once the enemy had been discovered, Navy Lieutenant Richmond Hobson and a crew of volunteers attempted to scuttle a large collier at the mouth of Santiago Harbor. In the face of deadly fire, he conned his ship past the foot of Morro Castle, not to be confused with the fort at Havana, and abandoned her to sink. Unfortunately, the vessel's death throes carried her beyond the channel; and a route of exit remained open to the enemy. (26)

On 6 June, three days after Hobson's unsuccessful attempt to seal up the Spanish cruisers, Admiral Sampson unleashed a bombardment of the fortifications guarding Santiago. The explosions were awe-inspiring; but when the dust had settled, Morro Castle emerged as sinister as ever. Realizing now that there could be no single decisive thrust at the city, Sampson began looking for a good harbor to use as a coaling station and as a haven in the event of hurricanes. (27) The ideal site proved to be nearby Guantanamo Bay, and there the Marine battalion was first employed.

The light cruiser Marblehead, veteran of the fight at Cienfuegos, steamed confidently into Guantanamo Bay on 7 June, the same day that the battalion was embarking aboard the Panther at Key West. Together with the auxiliary cruisers Yankee, and St. Louis, the slender Marblehead drove the Spanish gunboat Sandoval into the shallow waters of the inner harbor. A composite reconnaissance force made up of Marines from several of Admiral Sampson's ships then landed to destroy the cable station at Playa del Este. After a cursory check of the proposed landing area, the Americans withdrew. (28) On 10 June, the Marine battalion landed to stay.

The landing itself, carried out under a blazing afternoon sun, was uneventful. Not a rifle cracked in the dense thicket as the sweating Marines dragged their gear across the beach, climbed a hill, and pitched camp. The first night was quiet, but late in the afternoon of 11 June the enemy slowly came to life. Just as the sun was plunging in the west, a handful of Spaniards or Cuban loyalists struck at an outpost, killed two Marines, then withdrew. Shortly after midnight the enemy returned. Stephen Crane, the novelist, who accompanied the expedition as a war correspondent, remembered the furious action

as a night of terror with "a thousand rifles rattling; with the field guns booming in your ears; with the diabolic Colt automatic clacking; with the roar of the Marblehead coming from the bay, and, last, with Mauser bullets sneering always in the air a few inches over one's head" (29)

This was a typical guerrilla attack, the marauders cloaked in darkness and firing wildly, the defenders confused but standing firm. Pillars of white flame split the darkness, the stench of powder clung to the brush; but the fight seemed more violent than it actually was. Casualties, by modern standards, were surprisingly few. John B. Gibbs, battalion surgeon, was killed as was one of the Marines; two were wounded. When it had grown light, Crane, egged on by a reporter's curiosity, crept toward the surgeon's tent to view Gibbs' body. He scarcely could find it. So many Marines, exhausted by the night's fighting, lay sprawled asleep that Crane could not distinguish living from dead. (30)

After snatching a few hours of fitful sleep, the weary Marines struck the tents which they had pitched the afternoon before, improved their entrenchments, and began clearing fields of fire. From time to time during the day a rifle bullet cracked overhead; and once the sun had set, the firing increased in volume. It was another of those "swift nights" which, according to Crane, "strained courage so near the panic point." (31)

Next the battalion moved to crush Spanish resistance in the vicinity of Guantanamo Bay. Both the Americans and their enemies were hampered by a shortage of water; but the Spanish, who had no shipboard distilling equipment, were forced to rely almost exclusively upon a well at the village of Cuzco. To seal this well and force the enemy to withdraw was the task facing the Marines.

On the morning of 14 June, Companies C and D, led by Captains George F. Elliott (32) and William F. Spicer, joined a band of more than fifty insurgents and struck out for Cuzco Well some six miles distant from the Marine camp. Defended by a blockhouse and about six companies of Spanish regulars and Cuban loyalists, the well was no easy objective. The main body, commanded by Captain Elliott, nevertheless was making slow but steady progress. Second Lieutenant Louis J. Magill, with 50 men, was ordered to bypass the enemy position to cut off any opportunity of retreat, while the two other columns, under Lieutenants Clarence Ingate and James E. Mahoney, were to join Elliott's men in the final assault. Neither of these last two groups arrived in time to be of any help, but Magill's men plunged quickly into the undergrowth on Elliott's left flank. (33)

No sooner had Lieutenant Magill led his Marines to the crest of a hill overlooking the well than the Dolphin opened

fire from the bay. The fall of the first few rounds convinced Magill that his men were in the line of fire. Hurriedly he looked about for a signalman. Sergeant John H. Quick stepped forward, seized an improvised semaphore flag, and stood erect in full view of the enemy. Mauser slugs flailed the air about him, the Dolphin's shells erupted all along the hillside, but he coolly continued to signal the vessel to cease fire. The omnipresent Stephen Crane watched Quick but could discover no trace of nervousness in the sergeant's manner. "As he swung his clumsy flag to and fro," Crane related, "an end of it once caught on a cactus pillar, and he looked over his shoulder to see what had it. He gave the flag an impatient jerk. He looked annoyed." (34) This was the only emotion that he displayed.

Thanks to Quick's heroism, the Dolphin lifted her barrage; but not before the enemy had effected his retreat. The Spanish had been cut off from their source of water; the attack was a success. After destroying the well, the column marched back to the camp at Guantanamo Bay late that night.

Although the Spanish withdrawal brought a respite from full-scale night attack, the Marine battalion occasionally was harrassed by snipers and small bands of infiltrators. One afternoon early in July, a company was swimming in the surf when Mausers thudded nearby and bullets began gouging out clots of sand. Like so many startled birds, the Marines surged from the water, grabbed their rifles and took cover. Fortunately, a few rounds of artillery scattered the attackers.

Lessons learned during the first few nights ashore were not soon forgotten. Sentries remained constantly alert, ready to carry out orders to challenge anything seen moving at night. One conscientious Marine private challenged a bulky shadow prowling in the brush, received no reply, and fired. His first shot killed a hulking, black pig. (35)

While the Marine battalion was relaxing after the fight at Cuzco Well, the Army's V Corps landed on 22 June at Daiquiri, about 20 miles to the east of Santiago, and began its drive on the city. Purpose of the offensive was to drive the Spanish fleet from its lair. "It was," commented newsman Richard Harding Davis, "probably the only instance when an army was called upon to capture a fleet." (36) In any event the Army was doing quite well. A group of wild-eyed amateurs led by Theodore Roosevelt, now a Colonel of Volunteers, stormed up the slopes of San Juan Hill, while the lean and hardened Regulars captured El Caney. By 3 July, the heights were firmly in American hands. (37)

Throughout the campaign, Admiral Sampson and General William R. Shafter, the Army commander, had shown little sympathy for each other's problems. The admiral steadfastly refused to

risk his ships in any attempt to force the narrow harbor entrance and destroy Cervera's ships. Instead, he demanded that the Army first capture Morro Castle and its satellite batteries. He then would send in minesweepers to clear the entrance and follow with his armored vessels. Shafter, on the other hand, felt that ships were built to fight. If an armored cruiser or battleship could not charge past the forts without being destroyed, how could his troops capture these same redoubts without suffering tremendous losses? "I am at a loss," Shafter complained, "to understand why the Navy cannot work under a destructive fire as well as the Army...." (38)

Anxious to finish the campaign before yellow fever broke out among the troops, President McKinley finally lost his patience and ordered the two officers to come up with some sort of plan. On Sunday morning, 3 July 1898, Sampson's flagship, the New York, pulled out of formation and steamed toward Siboney, ten miles to the east, and, the waiting general. No sooner had Sampson left his station than Cervera's ships made their break for the open seas.

The handful of light Spanish vessels had no chance against the American fleet. Cervera could either surrender to the advancing Army or attempt to break through the cordon of block-aiding ships and escape. His own sense of honor and the traditions of the Spanish Navy left him no choice; on that fateful day he gambled all against impossible odds.

Haste to do now what must be done anon
Or some mad hope of selling triumph dear
Drove the ships forth... (39)

Leaking boilers, barnacled hulls, defective guns, the Spanish vessels were hopelessly outclassed; but pride demanded their gallant sacrifice.

The fact remains that some of the Spanish vessels nearly escaped. Cervera could have chosen no better time for his dash than a calm Sunday morning when the Americans, lulled into carelessness by weeks of comparative inaction, were relaxing. Signal flags blossomed over the American battlewagons as one by one, the flagship Maria Teresa in the lead, the enemy ships sortied through the narrow channel, paused to set their civilian pilots safely ashore, then turned and drove west along the Cuban shore. The time lost in dropping the pilots foretold disaster, but it was a mark of courtesy required by Cervera's code of chivalry.

Recovering from their initial surprise, the American warships set out in pursuit. The cruiser Brooklyn, westernmost ship in the blockading fleet, was in the best position to join battle. The Oregon, the only battleship which had steam up

in all her boilers, leaped across the sparkling waters; while the Indiana, Iowa, and Texas, belching smoke from their funnels, rumbled like charging bison to the attack. Since the New York, with Admiral Sampson aboard, already was nine miles to the east when the battle began, neither that ship nor the admiral himself had much influence on the drama that followed. Commodore Winfield Scott Schley, aboard the Brooklyn, directed the action.

The Maria Teresa opened fire as soon as she cleared the harbor. Four battleships and the Brooklyn concentrated their salvos upon Cervera's flagship. Mangled by these rending blows, the light Spanish cruiser lasted just half an hour before she was beached a flaming wreck. Pluton and Furor, the two torpedo boats, remained afloat scarcely 20 minutes. One ran aground and exploded, the other blew up and sank. The Oquendo, ripped to shreds by shells from the secondary batteries of her heavier opponents, clung grimly to life. She was beached a short distance west of the charred Teresa. She too was consumed by flames.

Now only two of Cervera's ships remained in the fight. Badly damaged shortly after she had reached the open sea, the Vizcaya gradually fell astern of the Colon and came under fire from the onrushing American vessels. Crippled and barely afloat, the Vizcaya was beached some 20 miles west of Santiago. For a time, it seemed as though the Colon actually would make good her escape; but her boilers were weak and her hull fouled. Early that afternoon both the Brooklyn and Oregon brought her within range of their guns, and the Colon had little choice but to strike her colors and go aground. (40)

The Spanish had no monopoly on heroism that day. Heedless of the danger of exploding magazines, American vessels came close to shore to rescue Spanish seamen from their burning ships. Of some 2,150 crewmen in Cervera's squadron, 1,782 were captured, (41) or, more properly, rescued; for had the Americans not aided them most of them would have drowned, been burned to death, or, if they reached shore, killed by Cuban guerrillas.

Aboard the Brooklyn, Marines displayed great courage. Captain Paul St. C. Murphy and Lieutenant Thomas S. Borden moved calmly among the sweating gun crews to inspire their men. Private Harry L. MacNeal, assigned to the same vessel, deliberately exposed himself to the screaming shell fragments while clearing a jammed gun. (42)

Snatched from the holocaust that consumed his fleet, Admiral Cervera paused to reflect on that day of horror. The result of the battle was what he had predicted months before. He was, however, thankful that so many of his men had been

saved. "The country," he wrote, "has been defended with honor, and the satisfaction of duty done leaves our conscience tranquil, with nothing more than grief for the loss of our companions and the misfortune of our country." (43) With the destruction of the fleet, the fate of Santiago was decided.

In the meantime, while the eyes of the world were focused on Cuba, the United States had snatched up the island of Guam in the Spanish Marianas some 3,000 miles west of Hawaii. On 22 June 1898, the cruiser Charleston, escorting a pair of transports loaded with troops destined for the Philippines, appeared off Apra harbor and began shelling unoccupied Fort Santiago. Captain Henry Glass, in command of the cruiser, had been ordered to seize Guam, believed to be the hub of Spain's mid-Pacific empire. Don Juan Mariana, the Spanish governor, did not know of Glass' mission, nor did he know that hostilities had begun. To him, the booming of cannon meant but one thing, a salute to be promptly returned.

In keeping with the niceties of international etiquette, the governor ordered an officer to round up a detachment of soldiers and move a pair of old cannon to Piti, a journey of some six miles. While the lieutenant was getting his expedition organized, a group of Spanish officials boarded the Charleston to apologize for their tardiness in returning the salute. Only after they had become prisoners did they learn that war had been declared. One of their number, released on parole, was able to reach the young lieutenant in time to prevent his returning the "salute," and thus precipitating a carnage. On the following day, the Charleston's Marines shepherded their prisoners aboard the transports and raised the Stars and Stripes over the island. (44)

On the other side of the world, the war in the West Indies continued. The destruction of Cervera's fleet gave Admiral Sampson and General Shafter more leisure in which to criticize each other, but their arguments were resolved by the surrender of Santiago on 12 July. The city's capitulation did not mean the end of the war, for parts of Cuba and the entire island of Puerto Rico still remained under Spanish control.

Not until late in July did an American expeditionary force appear off the coast of Puerto Rico. First it was planned to disembark the troops at Guanica. A small naval landing party went ashore, hauled down the Spanish flag, unfurled the Stars and Stripes, then drove off the handful of defenders. A detachment of Army Engineers landed, but in the meantime General Nelson A. Miles had decided to land the bulk of his forces elsewhere along the coast.

The general's choice for base of operations was the town of Ponce, a short distance inland from the seaside village of La Playa (properly called Playa del Ponce). On 27 July, the

Dixie anchored off the beach. Navy Lieutenant Greenlief A. Merriam went ashore under a flag of truce to demand the surrender of La Playa and Ponce. The Spanish colonel in charge, his honor at stake, refused to act without instructions from higher authorities. Actually, whether he surrendered or not made little difference, for he did not have the means to resist. Later in the day, after some tedious dickering, Lieutenant Merriam returned to the Dixie carrying the signed articles of capitulation. An American landing party took over both objectives. At La Playa, Marine Lieutenant Henry C. Haines ordered the American Flag raised and mounted a Colt automatic gun atop the customs house to encourage cooperation on the part of the townspeople. There were no incidents during the night, and on the following morning General Miles' army began to troop ashore. (45)

Early in August, a handful of American sailors occupied the lighthouse at Cape San Juan, Puerto Rico. This was a massive brick structure, thick-walled and perched on a steep hill overlooking the San Juan Passage. Marking the difficult passage around the northeastern tip of the island, the lighthouse was an important military objective; and scarcely had the sailors taken charge than excited Puerto Ricans came with stories that almost a thousand Spanish cavalry were massing for an attack. These reports were exaggerated, but on the night of 9 August the Spanish did strike. Possibly a hundred of the enemy milled around in the darkness, while the 28 Americans fired steadily through loopholes in the walls. When the firing increased in fury, Lieutenant Charles N. Atwater, in command of the sailors, ordered the lighthouse beacon extinguished. American warships anchored off the cape then turned on their searchlights and opened fire. One round came screaming in short, crashed into a brick wall gouging out a two-foot gash, but fortunately did not explode. A cloud of dust momentarily blinded the defenders as chunks of masonry rattled off the walls and pavement. Immediately the lamp atop the building was relighted.

After midnight the firing gradually died down, and in the pale light of morning reinforcements were landed. First Lieutenant John A. LeJeune, later to become thirteenth Commandant of the Marine Corps, led a detachment of 37 men from the Cincinnati. These joined a landing party from the Amphitrite to stand guard while the lighthouse garrison withdrew. The American flag was left flying as the sailors and Marines rowed back to the waiting ships. (46)

While the lighthouse was undergoing its brief but hectic siege, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington's Marine battalion, having embarked from Guantanamo aboard the Resolute, was on its way to capture the Cuban town of Manzanillo. When approached on the subject of surrender, the Spanish Commandant at Manzanillo cited his code of honor and refused to yield unless forced to

do so. Later that same day, 12 August, the Americans saw what they took for a white flag flying over the city. One vessel hoisted a flag of truce and steamed into the harbor to investigate, but the enemy opened fire as soon as the intruder came within range.

Early the following morning, the attack was resumed. While warships bombarded the enemy's shore batteries, the Marine battalion prepared to go ashore and outflank the Spanish entrenchments. This operation, however, did not come to pass; for daylight revealed dozens of white flags fluttering along the shoreline. Soon a Spanish official came out from the harbor to inform the Americans that a peace protocol had been signed between the warring nations. (47)

Since operations in the Caribbean were suspended under terms of this agreement, the Marine battalion sailed almost at once for the United States, arriving at Portsmouth, New Hampshire on 26 August. These sun-bronzed veterans received a heroes' welcome which was climaxed by a clambake sponsored by local citizens. It was a gala event with food for everyone. The Y.M.C.A. presented a Bible to each member of the battalion while the Salvation Army passed out cakes, tobacco, apples, and writing materials. (48) When it became obvious that hostilities were at an end, the battalion was disbanded.

Portsmouth, where the return of the battalion was feted, was the site of another important wartime activity of the Marine Corps. At Seavey's Island, Maine, only a few miles from Portsmouth, Marines had guarded Spanish soldiers and seamen captured during the conflict. The first group of prisoners, 10 officers and 692 enlisted men, arrived at the camp early in July. Marines also guarded Admiral Cervera, who was interned at Annapolis, Maryland, after his capture off Santiago. (49)

As far as numbers were concerned, the Marine Corps made no striking contribution to the victory over Spain. Although some 2,055 enlisted men served with the fleet throughout the world, only a little more than 600 fought with the famed 1st Marine Battalion in Cuba. (50) The importance of the Marine Corps lay not in numbers but in the speed with which its expeditionary force had been assembled and dispatched, and its ability to do the job once on the field of battle. Huntington's battalion embarked from Brooklyn less than one week after the first order for its organization had been issued. In that short time, Marines by the handful had been gathered from posts and stations all along the East Coast, formed into companies, and issued the equipment necessary for combat. Amid the confusion that was Key West, Marine Corps supplies moved smoothly; and when the battalion was unleashed against the Spanish at Guantanamo Bay it struck quickly and hard. Although the battalion was successful, this action showed the need for an

American force in readiness. The activation of the Marine battalion on such short notice and its effective performance in battle reflected Marine training and discipline, but the experience at Guantanamo also revealed lack of familiarity with large unit tactics, which had to be learned the hard way.

Lacking the decisiveness of drama of Dewey's smashing victory in the Philippines, the landing at Guantanamo nevertheless was vital. Because of their relatively short operating ranges and their instability in heavy seas, the warships of that day could not operate for long periods unless an anchorage and coaling station were near at hand. In addition to this tactical importance, the action at Guantanamo clearly demonstrated the need for Marines as assault troops to be employed with the fleet. Since the victory had been won by a Marine unit commanded by a Marine officer, Guantanamo gave added ammunition to those who would make the capture and defense of advanced bases a primary mission of the Marine Corps.

(51)

NOTES

- (1) Herbert H. Sargent, The Campaign of Santiago de Cuba (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1907), V. 1, pp. 1-22.
- (2) John Edward Weems, The Fate of the Maine (New York: Henry Holt, 1958), pp. vii, 40.
- (3) Ibid., pp. 41-45.
- (4) Walter Millis, The Martial Spirit (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931), p. 96.
- (5) Catlin later commanded the 6th Marines in France in World War I until severely wounded at Belleau Wood in June 1918.
- (6) Weems, op. cit., pp. 66, 73-77.
- (7) Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 1, p. 865.
- (8) Weems, op. cit., pp. 81-84.
- (9) Ibid., pp. 92-93.
- (10) Joint Committee on Printing, U. S. Congress, Message from the President to Congress and Selections from Accompanying Documents, 55th Congress, 3d Session, (Washington, 1899), v. 4, p. 17; hereafter Messages and Documents, v.4.
- (11) H. H. Sargent, op. cit., v. 1, pp. 32-33.
- (12) Messages and Documents, v. 4, p. 23; Henry F. Pringle, Theodore Roosevelt (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931), p. 179.
- (13) Nathan Sargent, Admiral Dewey and the Manila Campaign (Washington: Naval Historical Foundation, 1947), p. 23.
- (14) Ibid., p. 30.
- (15) Ibid., p. 26.
- (16) Ibid., pp. 36-40; J. M. Ellicott, "Manila Bay," Marine Corps Gazette, v. 37, no. 5 (May 1953), pp. 54-55.
- (17) H. H. Sargent, op. cit., v. 1, pp. 80, 92; Millis, op. cit., p. 216.
- (18) Messages, and Documents, v. 4, pp. 47-56.

- (19) Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 1, p. 822; John H. Clifford, "My Memories of Cuba," Leatherneck, v. 12, no. 6 (Jun 1929), p. 7.
- (20) Clyde H. Metcalf, A History of the United States Marine Corps (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), p. 255; see also the personal log in Biography File "Charles B. Hobbs," Historical Branch, HQMC.
- (21) Clifford, op. cit., p. 7; Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 1, p. 828.
- (22) Millis, op. cit., pp. 200-201.
- (23) H. H. Sargent, op. cit., v. 1, pp. 150-155; Office of Naval Intelligence, Notes on the Spanish-American War (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1900), pp. 108-110.
- (24) Millis, op. cit., pp. 200-201.
- (25) H. H. Sargent, op. cit., v. 1, pp. 157-170.
- (26) Ibid., pp. 225-226.
- (27) Ibid., pp. 227-228.
- (28) Carlos C. Hanks, "The Marines at Playa del Este," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, v. 67, no. 11 (Nov 1941), pp. 1591-1593.
- (29) Extracts from the log of the battalion in Subject File Spanish-American War, Historical Branch, HQMC; Stephen Crane, Wounds in the Rain (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1900), pp. 178-179. See also Frank Freidel, The Splendid Little War (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), pp. 56-57. Unfortunately, this latest history of the war contains little else pertaining to Marine operations.
- (30) Crane, op. cit., p. 239.
- (31) Ibid., pp. 178-179; Extracts from the log of the battalion, loc. cit.
- (32) Promotion came fast to Captain Elliott who served as tenth Commandant of the Marine Corps, 1903-1910.
- (33) Extracts from the log of the battalion, loc. cit.
- (34) Crane, op. cit., p. 189.
- (35) Clifford, op. cit., p. 54.

- (36) Weems, op. cit., pp. 134-144.
- (37) H. H. Sargent, op. cit., v. 3, pp. 83-166, passim.
- (38) Louis J. Gulliver, "Sampson and Shafter at Santiago," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, v. 65, no. 6 (Jun 1939), pp. 799-800.
- (39) George Santayana, Spain in America, cited in Morison and Commager, The Growth of the American Republic (New York; Oxford University Press, 1950), v. 2, p. 334.
- (40) Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 2, pp. 506-509; Messages and Documents, v. 4, pp. 517-520; H. H. Sargent, op. cit., v. 2, pp. 213-217; see also Joseph C. Gannon, The USS Oregon and the Battle of Santiago (New York: Comet Press, 1958).
- (41) H. H. Sargent, op. cit., v. 2, pp. 216-217.
- (42) Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 2, pp. 524-525.
- (43) Ibid., pp. 559-560.
- (44) Frederick J. Nelson, "Why Guam Alone Is American," U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings, v. 62, no. 8 (Aug 1938), pp. 1132-1133.
- (45) Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 2, pp. 642-645.
- (46) Ibid.; Metcalf, R. cit., p. 262.
- (47) Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 2, pp. 301-303.
- (48) Clifford, op. cit., p. 54.
- (49) Annual Report.. of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, v. 2, pp. 828-830.
- (50) Ibid., v. 1, p. 827.
- (51) W. H. Russell, "The Genesis of FMF Doctrine: 1879-1899," part IV, Marine Corps Gazette, v. 35, no. 7 (Jul 1951), p. 59.