

The Spanish-American War
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"The Gay Nineties" is a period in American history spanning the last decade of the nineteenth century. These years, when spoken about in these terms, reflect happiness, joy and well-being. In all actuality, the 1890's was a low-point in U.S. history far surpassing any other depression until that time. Such incidents occurred as the battle of Wounded Knee, in 1890, the Jim-Crow laws, the increased number of lynchings, the Homestead Strike, the stock market panic and the Pullman Strike. The United States was in a tail-spin, spiraling down to a choice between revolution or complete economic collapse. American businessmen, during this time, had accumulated a surplus of goods, and being unwilling to distribute these goods across a depressed America, they looked toward foreign trade to extend and inflate their profits. They looked toward Cuba, and the savage civil war between the Cubans and the Spanish. Gradually public sentiment for the involvement in Cuba began to build. There were those who feared about the United States investments, accumulating to over fifty million dollars. Still others read ". . . yellow-journalism in the newspapers of William Randolph Hearst, who wasted no opportunity to publicize alleged atrocities committed by the Spaniards against the native rebels."¹ America appeared ready to begin a "...crusade to stop a seemingly endless revolution which was shattering Cuba."² McKinley, too, was being pressured by the Republican party to help bring the war to an end.

In November of 1897, Spain, at the urging of President McKinley had granted autonomy to Cuba which had failed. While rebels continued to fight, pro-Spanish mobs opposing autonomy rioted in Havana. In response to the request of the American consul general, Fitzhugh Lee, the battleship *Maine* arrived in Havana for a 'friendly visit' on January 25.³

The 1890's, for Spain, meant revolution. The Spanish were overrun by the amount of trouble that Cuba caused. Most of this trouble was begun by Jose Marti and his introduction of the "El Partido Revolucionario Cubano (The Cuban Revolutionary Party) in

¹ Friedel and Brinkley, America in the Twentieth Century, p. 19.

² Friedel, The Splendid Little War, p. 10.

³ Friedel, p. 11.

1892."⁴ Early in 1895, the second and final war for independence began. Madrid and Havana thought little of this revolt. As hostilities grew, Spain sent Martinez Campos to take command of Cuba and rule it through martial law. Early in the war, Spain had only eighty thousand troops, twenty thousand regulars, and sixty thousand Spanish and Cuban volunteers. By late 1895, over ninety-eight thousand regulars and over sixty thousand volunteers held the island. The "insurrectos," on the other hand, totalled about fifty-three thousand during the entire war. As the Cuban civil war carried on, the United States continued to view the effects, and as already stated, the United States was ready to help out the suffering insurrectos.

The battleship *Maine* did in fact reach Havana for a "friendly visit" on the 25th of January, 1898. Captain Charles D. Sigsbee, not knowing how the reception might be, spent the night before preparing the *Maine's* ten and six inch guns and gathering together all of the ammunition. Apparently the Spanish knew nothing of the *Maine's* arrival and, although they were angry, they continued to show their hospitality in the customary meeting of officers. Sigsbee, in fact, asked one of the Spanish pilots (Julian Garcíá Lopez) what kind of welcome they may receive. "Lopez replied that he had known nothing of the *Maine's* arrival and that the Americans had nothing to fear so long as they behaved themselves."⁵ John D. Long, the Secretary of the Navy, ordered Sigsbee not to allow the crew liberty, for ". . . beneath the veneer of official courtesy the Spanish and Americans at Havana eyed each other warily."⁶ For twenty one days the *Maine* was buoyed at the same location, continuing to keep up enough steam to move the heaviest gun turrets.

"At 9:40 pm, Tuesday, February 15, 1898, the American battleship *Maine* exploded in the harbor of Havana, Cuba."⁷ The exact number of men who died in the explosion varies,

⁴ Foner, The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism 1895-1902, p. xx.

⁵ Rickover, How the Battleship Maine was Destroyed, p. 34.

⁶ Rickover, p. 38.

⁷ Rickover, p. 1

from 258,⁸ 260,⁹ to 266,¹⁰ out of a crew of 354. The exact cause of the explosion was not known until a board could be put together. In 1898, the board came to the conclusion that a mine had blown up the battleship, sealing the fate of the Spanish, and creating the battle cry "Remember the *Maine*!" Although in 1911 a second board did research the matter again, the cause of the explosion was not certain. They thought it possible that the gases from low explosives such as brown and black powder expanded where expansion was limited, thus causing an explosion. Before the 1911 board closed, they suddenly changed their decision and ruled as they had in 1898, that a mine had caused the explosion and destruction of the battleship *Maine*.

The destruction of the *Maine* caused enraged Americans to blame the Spanish government without hesitation. On April 11, 1898, President McKinley sent a message to Congress, and after several days, Cuba was recognized as an independent state. Later, on the 21st of April, the Spanish saw this as a Declaration of War. On the 23rd of April, McKinley called for a hundred and twenty-five thousand volunteers, and the rush to enlist was so great, it dwarfed the historic Klondike gold rush. Patriotism was possibly at its height, ". . . setting forth to right the great wrongs, to rescue the Cubans from the cruel and wicked grasp of the Spaniards."¹¹ On the 25th of April, it was finalized, and Congress voted on a war resolution.

"After destruction of the *Maine*, acting Secretary Roosevelt sent orders to Dewey to mobilize the fleet at Hong Kong, and in the event of war attack the Spanish squadron."¹² At the time that Roosevelt sent the message, the Spanish squadron was anchored at Manila bay in the Philippines, six hundred miles away. At around 5:00 pm on the 23rd of April, the acting Governor of Hong Kong, Wilson Block, notified Dewey that a state of war existed between the United States and the Kingdom of Spain. His exact orders read:

⁸ Crabtree, The Passing of Spain, p. 420.

⁹ Friedel, p. 12.

¹⁰ Rickover, p. 1.

¹¹ Friedel, p. 13.

¹² Friedel, p. 15.

the forts at Cavite and Manila. The first shell burst from the Spanish guns and the Commodore spoke the famous command: "You may fire when ready, Gridley."¹⁶ The Spanish fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral Patritro Montojo y Pasaron was anchored in the shallow, unprotected waters off Cavite, so as to draw fire away from Manila. Montojo viewed the U.S. fleet continually passing his ships, and took notice of how they used their guns on both port sides. On the third pass of the U.S. fleet, Montojo's flag ship *Reina Cristina* sailed forth to meet the *Olympia*. Dewey personally commanded all gun crews to concentrate their fire upon this vessel. The *Reina Cristina* realized her predicament too late, and attempted to turn around and retreat. One shell from the *Olympia* completely disabled the Spanish flagship, going from the stern to the bow, and killing 75% of her crew. At 7:30, 1 May, the U.S. fleet withdrew to report casualties. Not only was there no damage to the ships (worth reporting) but also no deaths or serious casualties. Dewey then gave the order, "The battle will go on as soon as the men have had breakfast."¹⁷ At 10:30, the battle continued as the *Baltimore* moved toward the strongest land fort, at Canacau Point. After two hours of bombardment, the fort surrendered. The *Petrel* then proceeded to destroy all remaining Spanish ships; Manila Bay was in Dewey's hands and he had become a hero. Overall, the Spanish lost ten warships, about three hundred twenty-one killed and over seven hundred wounded. On 30 May, The War Department wired General William R. Shafter, in Tampa Bay, to take a convoy to the vicinity of Santiago de Cuba, land at a point he felt suitable and capture or destroy the garrison there. He was then ordered to destroy the Spanish fleet reported to be in Santiago Harbor. Although General Shafter was not even prepared; he had yet to load twenty-five thousand men and the equipment for them. The two weeks that followed were utter confusion, mass rushes of equipment, railroad jam-ups and complete disorder in loading. In actuality, the General loaded "15,058 enlisted men and 819 officers, 30 civilian clerks, 89 newspaper correspondents, 11 foreign military observers, teamsters, over 2,000 horses and mules,

¹⁶ Friedel, p. 23.

¹⁷ Buel, p. 63.

artillery, Gatling guns and even a Dynamite Gun brought by the 'Rough Riders.'"¹⁸ The flotilla left Tampa on 14 June; the trip to Santiago would take five and a half days. At daybreak on 20 June, they sighted Morro Castle of Santiago. "While the convoy waited, Admiral Sampson came aboard the 'Segurance' to sail with General Shafter eighteen miles west of Santiago to confer ashore with Cuban General Calixto Garcíá, who could give them detailed information about the Spanish land forces."¹⁹ Sampson, Shafter and Garcíá gathered together around a map of Santiago. Sampson suggested Morro and Socapa point on either side of the harbor. Shafter looked at Guantanamo, for it had been taken by the Navy and Marines ten days earlier, only it lay forty miles from the objective. This route had been tried once before in 1741 by the British, but they stopped sixteen miles short, due to over two thousand lost by heat, jungle and tropical fever. Shafter then looked at Siboney and Daiquiri (sometimes spelled with a 'B'). A road lead from Daiquiri to Siboney then turned north towards Santiago. The War Department advised him against the choice, saying that there were seven thousand Spanish troops entrenched in that area. Garcíá shook his head, he said that perhaps only a thousand soldiers were there, six to seven hundred at Siboney and three to four hundred at Daiquiri. It was decided that the landing would commence on Daiquiri beach on the morning of 22 June. Prior to the landing, the Navy shelled the beach and as a feint, they would also shell the costal points of Aguadores and Cabanas. On that morning, the beach and blockhouse were shelled. The soldiers clambered into the small boats, viewing the pier; all was quiet. As they hit the beach at approximately 10:30 am, they saw a troop of cavalry gallop towards them flying the Cuban flag; General Castillo had arrived. "The Spanish had evacuated Daiquiri at 5:00 am, permitting the American expedition to land unopposed."²⁰ The shell damage was mostly to the hillside, and not a single round had hit the blockhouse. The landing was one that rivaled the loading--disorganized and sloppy. Despite that, six thousand troops were landed and without a single Spanish shot being fired. Upon examination of

¹⁸ O'Toole, The Spanish War, pp. 254-255.

¹⁹ Friedel, pp. 59-60.

²⁰ O'Toole, p. 266.

the blockhouse, they found eight thousand Mauser rounds (the Spanish used German Mausers, and the rounds had smokeless powder) and official documents in which the commandant wrote to General Linares stating that he could hold off an invasion attempt. The Fifth Corps agreed with his assumptions. The following morning the landing resumed and General Lawton of the Second Division began to take two regiments toward Siboney. When he got there, he found it empty of Spanish but filled with a train load of ". . . some thirty barrels of liquor, wine and whiskey."²¹ Apparently the Spanish had withdrawn from here, also, to Las Guasimas, guarding the road to Santiago.

"On 24 June, Major General Wheeler threw his troops against the Spanish at Las Guasimas, the first land battle of the war."²² General Wheeler, with the First and the Tenth (negro) Cavalry would take the main road. Colonel Wood's First Volunteer Cavalry would take the jungle trail. As both groups pressed on, General Young (with Wheeler) took sight of ". . . the Spanish breastworks of loosely piled up flagstones on the crest of a prominent hill, some 800 yards to the front."²³ Though not certain as to whether the straw hats they saw were Spanish or Cuban, General Wheeler ordered the Hotchkiss one-pounder gun to open fire; the time was 8:15 am. At once, the rifle fire became thick, both Wheeler and woods were bogged down by the heavy fire. No men advanced, four hundred were motionless and the casualties began to grow. After what seemed an eternity, both Lawton and Wheeler moved the column forward and simultaneously the Spanish began to retreat. General Wheeler was quoted as saying, "We've got the Yankees on the run. . ."²⁴ The time was now 9:20, only an hour had elapsed. They moved up the ridge and took the blockhouse, the Spanish were three hundred yards more distant. The Spanish opened fire again but soon retreated due to a manoeuvre called "Woods Bluff." This manoeuvre made a small unit appear to be larger by the men running up and down the line, firing at will. The road was open now, Kettle Hill, San Juan Hill, and El Caney lie before them.

²¹ O'Toole, p. 269.

²² Friedel, p. 75.

²³ Friedel, 79.

²⁴ Friedel, 80.

General Wheeler had decided to attack El Caney first on 1 July 1898, then move against the San Juan area later. Troops moved out to El Pozo Hill on the day before the attack and set up a machine gun post. The basin of Santiago was visible in the moonlight. Some seven thousand men sleeping while another five thousand lay in the bushes along the trail waiting to march. El Caney was a small village, a hamlet of palm-thatched and tiled roofs. Five hundred yards south east, lay a ". . . stone fort, El Viso, surrounded by trenches and barbed wire. . ."25 The defending Spanish numbered about five hundred, while Shafter would attack with over sixty-five hundred. He used two batteries against the fort and two others to hit San Juan Hill, keeping four in reserve. The first shell was fired, and that started a rally of pops and crackles. The effect of the light guns could be seen, but the Spanish held steadfast. General Chaffee led off the fighting, moving forward with about fifty Cuban troops. General Ludlow moved to within fifty yards of the town, occupying a position in a sunken road. U.S. losses were high, apparently due to the black powder used in the Springfield and Krag rifles, which when fired created a puff of white smoke, visible at a great distance. As a man in the Second Massachusetts said, ". . . they are shooting our men all to pieces."26 The Spanish were using smokeless powder, and couldn't be seen. The order came, "Advance! Advance until they find the enemy!" Slowly, but surely, they crept forward, only a hundred and fifty yards from the fort. Then, from Lt. Hunt's company, the sharpshooters fired. "Thirty or forty of these dead-shots are pouring lead into every rifle pit, door, window and porthole in sight."27 That did it--scared, demoralized and panic stricken, the Spaniards ran. Our soldiers were cutting them to pieces, the tide of battle changed. So overwhelmed by the flow of energy, our soldiers continued to fire while the Spaniards were dropping in the door way of their fort, displaying a white flag. The fort fell silent. Gattling fire came then from the left flank as another, smaller blockhouse opened up. That fort, also charged, and flooded with rifle fire. The Spaniards fell over each other, trying to escape. El Caney surrendered, and the Stars

²⁵ Friedel, 96.

²⁶ Friedel, 101.

²⁷ Friedel, 102.

and Stripes were raised. As this battle was raging, however, eighty-four hundred men had to fight, the remainder of the troops pulled back by General Linares, on San Juan and Kettle Hills. The Spanish had the range of all surrounding territory, and when Captain Grimes began firing at 8:20 am, he suffered the fate of the dreaded black powder. The only road to the heights of San Juan, the Americans marked out well for the Spanish. An observation balloon lingered above the men, presenting itself as a perfect target. One, two, three shell bursts and the balloon began to die a gigantic public death. The Spanish then concentrated their fire on the road and morale began to fall. The hill must be taken, and General Hawkins was assigned to do it. As he advanced with General Sumner and Colonel Roosevelt; they approached Kettle Hill. The U.S. was pounded, even before they could take position. Captain O'Neal, who (foolishly) strolled up and down in front of his men to try and motivate them, felt an officer should never take cover; he should dare the enemy fire and encourage his men. "A bullet is sure to hit you," cried a sergeant. "Sergeant, the Spanish bullet isn't made that will kill me," he answered. . . . As he turned on his heel a bullet struck him in the mouth and came out the back of his head."²⁸ With the amount of casualties, the men either had to advance or retreat. The enemy began to withdraw, and our soldiers in blue began to move, but only slowly, and on their hands and knees. At 1:00 pm, General Sumner ordered the attack on Kettle Hill! Roosevelt rallied his Rough Riders and in the spirit of things, they began the famous (to a degree) charge. He was equipped with some twenty pairs of spectacles,²⁹ his Krag carbine and his horse, "Little Texas." He went up the majority of the hill on horseback, passing most of his troop and the men of the Ninth. As the crest of the hill was reached, the Spanish opened up from deeply dug, trenched positions. There was a clear view of Hawkins' charge up San Juan Hill and Lt. Parker's charge on the blockhouse with his detachment of Gatling guns. Roosevelt saw Parker open fire at 1:15 and then saw him cease fire at 1:23, the Spanish were shredded. The Sixth and the Sixteenth started to the crest of San Juan. On Kettle Hill, Roosevelt again rallied his troops, jumped the wire, and charged the Spanish

²⁸ O'Toole, 314.

²⁹ Roosevelt, 36.

trenches. He realized, a hundred yards into the charge, that only five men were with him and two of them were wounded. He went back, got everyone's attention and made the charge again, only to see the Spanish running away. While Roosevelt thought he was safe, the Spanish counter-attacked, the Rough Riders were pinned down. Only due to a rescue by the Tenth (negro) Cavalry under Lt. John J. Pershing, were they able to escape. By 4:30, most of the resistance had stopped. General Shafter was shocked at the condition of his men, over a thousand men were killed or wounded; there was no reserve and the exhausted troops had to hold until even the more exhausted troops of Lawtons Brigade could arrive from El Caney. The battle for Santiago was primarily a siege. U.S. troops circled the city and entrenched themselves, every day stacking up piles of ammunition and adding heavier guns to the line. The weather was hot, wet, and raining, almost every day. The hopes were to starve out the Spanish, before disease crippled the U.S.. On 3 July, General Shafter received a telegram stating that the Spanish fleet had escaped from the bay, and surrender of the city was certain. Shafter was also receiving reinforcements of some six thousand men. The afternoon of 3 July, Shafter sent a message to General Jose Toral in command of the city, ". . . surrender or suffer bombardment. . ." ³⁰ Toral declined the surrender of the city; he had until 4 July. Later that day, our men heard a terrific bombardment, and word got around that our fleet had been destroyed by the Spanish, a gloom spread across our trenches. Shortly after the awful news, the fact that our Navy had sunk theirs in a monumental battle, was let loose. The morning of the Fourth, a rag-tag group from the regimental band began to play the "Star Spangled Banner" and the men cheered. "Underneath their gaiety was exhaustion, and beneath that, disease." ³¹ Shafter extended the deadline for a surrender to the Fifth and asked that all women and children exit the city; they did. Shafter wasn't a butcher and did not feel it would be necessary for them to suffer. Reason after reason, excuse after excuse, the date for the bombardment was extended. Finally, on the ninth and the tenth, the city was shelled but only for a few hours. On the thirteenth, Generals Toral, Miles, and Shafter met, it was then that Toral said

³⁰ Friedel, 168.

³¹ Friedel, 170.

he could not surrender as long as he had food and ammunition. For some unknown reason, General Toral surrendered the very next day, his entire command consisting of twenty-three thousand and five hundred troops. By the seventeenth, the surrender became official.

"The expedition to Puerto Rico, planned as one of the main campaigns of the war, turned out to be almost anti-climactic proceeding smoothly and bloodlessly."³² General Miles planned to leave from Guantanamo on 21 July with over thirty-four hundred troops, to land at Fajaro, Puerto Rico and attack the nearby capitol of San Juan. He believed his messages were being intercepted by the Spanish, and he moved the landing to Guanica, at the end of the island. The Gloucester was the first ship in; she landed at a small wharf where the men proceeded to the flag pole. The Spanish flag was taken down and the stars and stripes were unfurled. Guanica was now fully occupied and the only resistance seemed to be a few small skirmishes. Through one of these small battles, the road to Ponce was taken. General Wilson steamed into the port at Ponce, while General Miles' troops marched there. The "Puerto Ricans came out to extend a welcome."³³ Music was in the streets and invitations were extended to the General Staff to dine with Ponce's public officials. Movement was slow at first, due to the fact that the Generals were in no hurry. As they pushed on to Juan Diaz, they found that it was a ". . . one-night stand, surrendering without a fight to General Wilson."³⁴ The battle at Xoamo on 9 August, was the most serious and yet ". . . prettiest skirmishes of the campaign."³⁵ A blockhouse was located on the hill and an artillery round made a direct hit on it, causing the blockhouse to burn and crumble. The Spanish troops pulled out alongside the road, facing the Sixteenth Pennsylvania. The Spanish comandante rode out into the meadow as shots were being exchanged. He stood there motionless, as if he wanted to die. When he finally was shot, the Spanish raised a white handkerchief on a stick to surrender. General Hains and General

³² Friedel, 185.

³³ Friedel, 190.

³⁴ Friedel, 194.

³⁵ Friedel, 195.

Schwan pushed on, driving the Spanish from Guayama and Las Marias. These two skirmishes, as many others, broke out on the day the armistice was signed.

Returning to the Filipino Campaign, Dewey's blockade of Manila meant ultimately, its occupation. To maintain control, Dewey estimated a need for at least five thousand men. Aguinaldo, the insurgent leader, had, for the most part, surrounded Manila and occupied much of the land at Cavite. He looked toward the United States as a nation that would help the Filipinos to win their independence. On 1 July, he announced himself as the president of the revolutionary Philippine republic. The soldiers Dewey needed to take Manila set sail from San Francisco 25 May. En route, they stopped at the island of Guam. Prepared for a fight, Captain Glass fired a few shots at Fort Santa Cruz, there was no reply. The Spanish authorities on the island did not even know that a state of war existed. On 30 June, General Anderson's troops arrived in Manila Bay. The question was whether or not Manila could be taken in a bloodless fashion before the war ended. General Green landed his men south of Manila on 17 July. The troops there felt useless as a besieging force rather than a combat group. Dewey then used similar measures as Shafter had used on Santiago. Talks dragged on and the soldiers became restless. Aguinaldo began to become extremely aggressive and had to be kept out of Manila by our own troops. Finally on 13 August, the armistice was signed. Tension still grew between Aguinaldo's men and U.S. troops, until finally the insurgents broke through our soldiers and got to the already defeated Spanish. The conflict between the Americans and the Filipinos was about to erupt, the seeds for the insurrection had been planted.

The shortest war in American history, only lasting one hundred and ten days, ended up costing the lives of thousands. After the war had ended, still more died of disease and complications due to wounds. From this war, the U.S. acquired Puerto Rico and Guam. We established Naval bases in Cuba and Manila. As fate would have it, the 1890's was a time of U.S. imperialism, a time for her to show off her might, it was a time for a ". . . splendid little war."³⁶

³⁶ Friedel, 215.

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