



SCHWINN COLLECTION, SHS (IOWA CITY)

The Fighting 51st Iowa in the Philippines

by Michael W. Vogt

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tion of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in Havana on February 15.

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wooded heights beyond Four Mile Creek, and the valorous advances on the unsuspecting foe over toward Berwick Village,” Company H Corporal John Snure later recalled. “Under this rigorous schooling, the muscles of the men hardened, and hitherto unexercised sinews became steeled.”

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While honing their martial skills at Camp McKinley, the 51st Iowa received orders in May to proceed to San Francisco and become part of the Philippine Expedition. On May 1, the U.S. Navy's Asiatic squadron, commanded by Commodore George Dewey, had destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. Land forces were now needed to surround the city and compel a Spanish surrender.

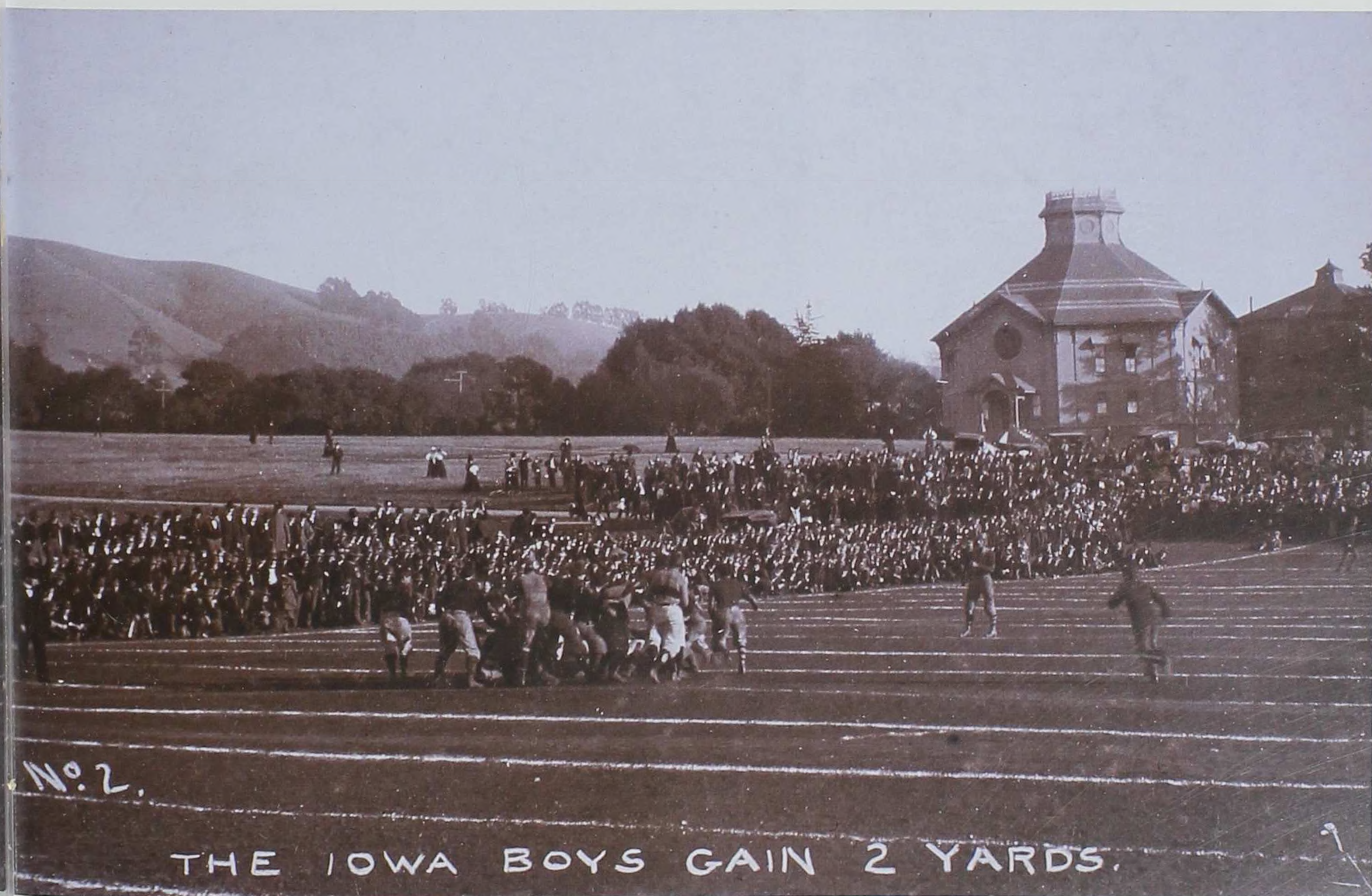
Arriving by train on June 10–11, the men of the 51st Iowa were assigned first to Camp Merritt and then to Camp Merriam at the Presidio, the military base close to the San Francisco harbor. By July 20 the 51st Regiment numbered 50 officers and 1,336 men.

The men of the 51st spent four and a half months training there and acclimating to life as volunteer soldiers. In late July, Private Fred B. Carver of Company G wrote to his friend Alta Mathews in Fontanelle: "I am not a bit homesick . . . We sleep in our tents with rubber

blankets under us and woolen ones over us . . . We scour our dishes in the sand and then rinse them off under the hydrant." The tedium of camp life—including re-filling ticks with fresh straw (*left*)—was occasionally broken by a spirited football game (*below*). The team from the 51st Iowa beat Berkeley, 6–0.

Company H Cook Frank E. Wood wrote home, "Our rations are very good. We have fresh meat every other day and soup for dinner and for supper we have fried bread and bacon, for breakfast we have oat meal or mush with boiled potatoes and coffee."

As the months passed, enthusiasm for army life faded, distractions lost their appeal, disease took its toll, and the likelihood of combat against the Spanish dwindled. Fred Carver commented about the soldiers' morale: "The glitter of the brass buttons has faded and they want to get home."



JETTY HAZARD COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)

More than 90 percent of U.S. casualties in the Spanish-American War were caused by disease. Crowded conditions in the tent cities at the Presidio military camp didn't help. Early in September, this funeral procession for two men of the 51st Iowa made its way down a San Francisco street. Company B Private Barton J. Brown, age 18, of Guss, Iowa, died of "measles complicating pneumonia" on August 30. Company I Private Louis Dunn, age 23, of Lenox, perished from typhoid fever on September 2.

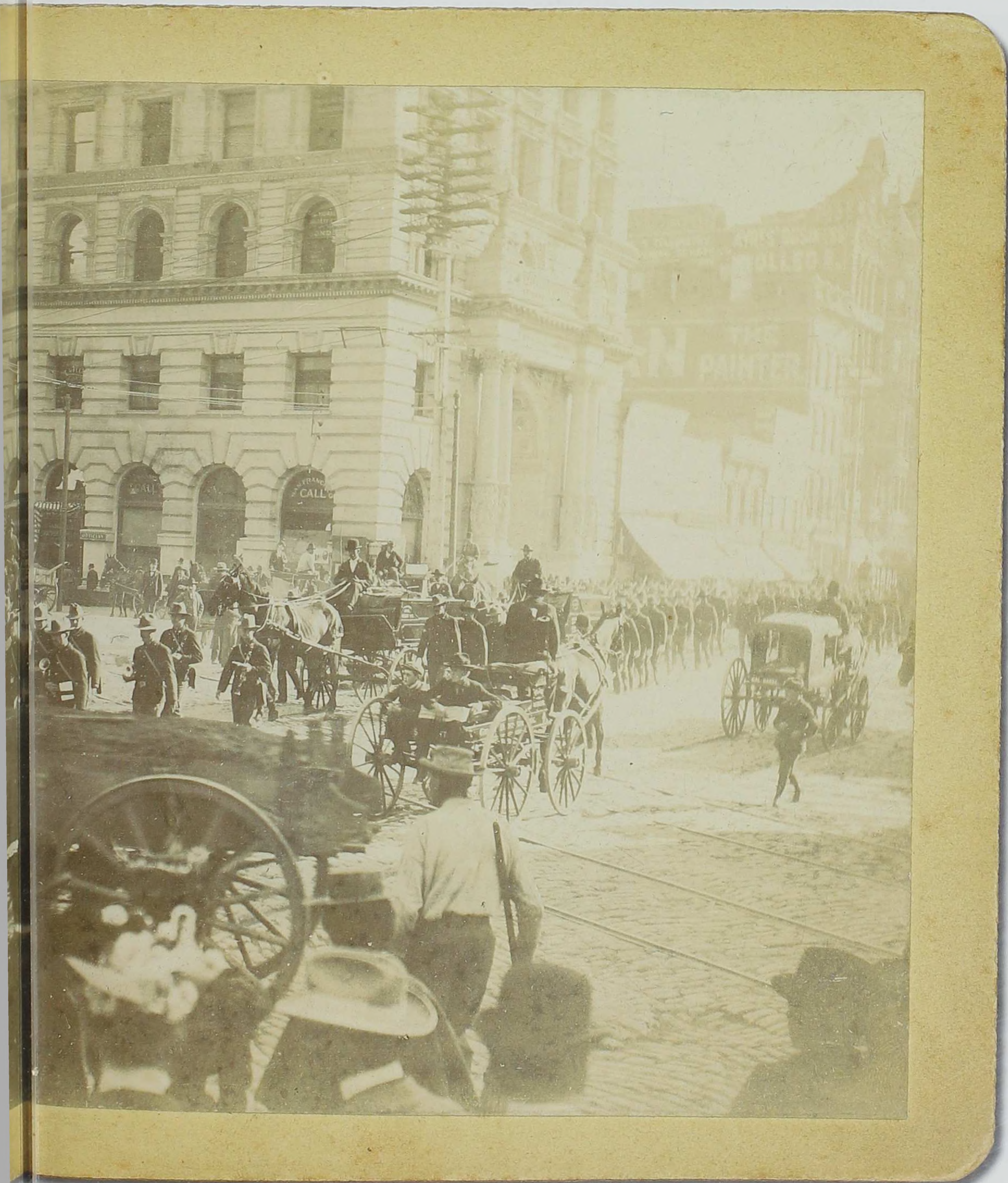
Disease had also struck down Company I Private William W. Holden. From San Francisco, the soldier's father, John Holden, of Leon, sent a telegram to Governor Leslie Shaw on September 3: "Return homeward to-night with body of my only son. Remains of two other Iowa boys on same train . . . Use your strongest efforts for a speedy return of regiment boys want to go home."

"Camp has been rather quiet this week," Private Joseph Markey of Company M wrote the following day. "So much sickness in every company has a depressing effect on the spirits of all. B Company has more sickness at present than any other, some twenty-five of their men being in the hospital."

The 51st Regiment lost 27 men to disease before even leaving for the Philippine Islands.



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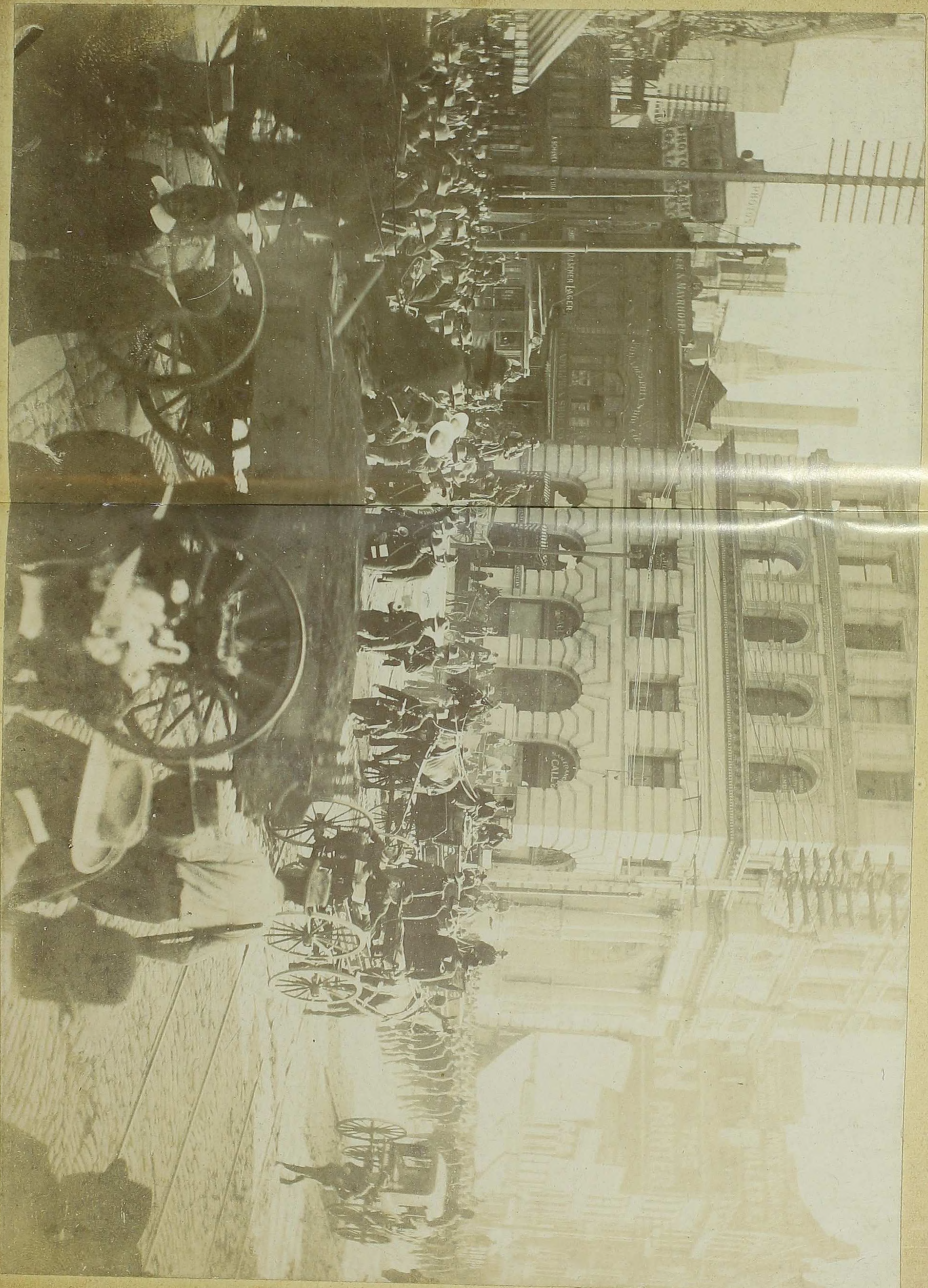


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BETTY HAZARD COLLECTION, SHS (DES MOINES)

On October the 51st Regiment received orders to sail for the Philippines. Soon the men were disassembling their camp (*left*), packing their equipment for the trip overseas, and marching out through the Lombard Gate of the Presidio (*below*).

Hospital Steward Raymond D. Weakley wrote to his mother in Des Moines, "We broke camp at 9 am Thursday Nov. 3 '98. We hospital men were left to draw up our ground and so got out of the 5 mile march to the ferries. One of the sad sites that did anything but cheer us up was to see the Iowa Camp fall."

Captain Warren H. Ickis (Company G) wrote to his cousin, "We had remained in San Francisco so long we had made many friends and acquaintances there."

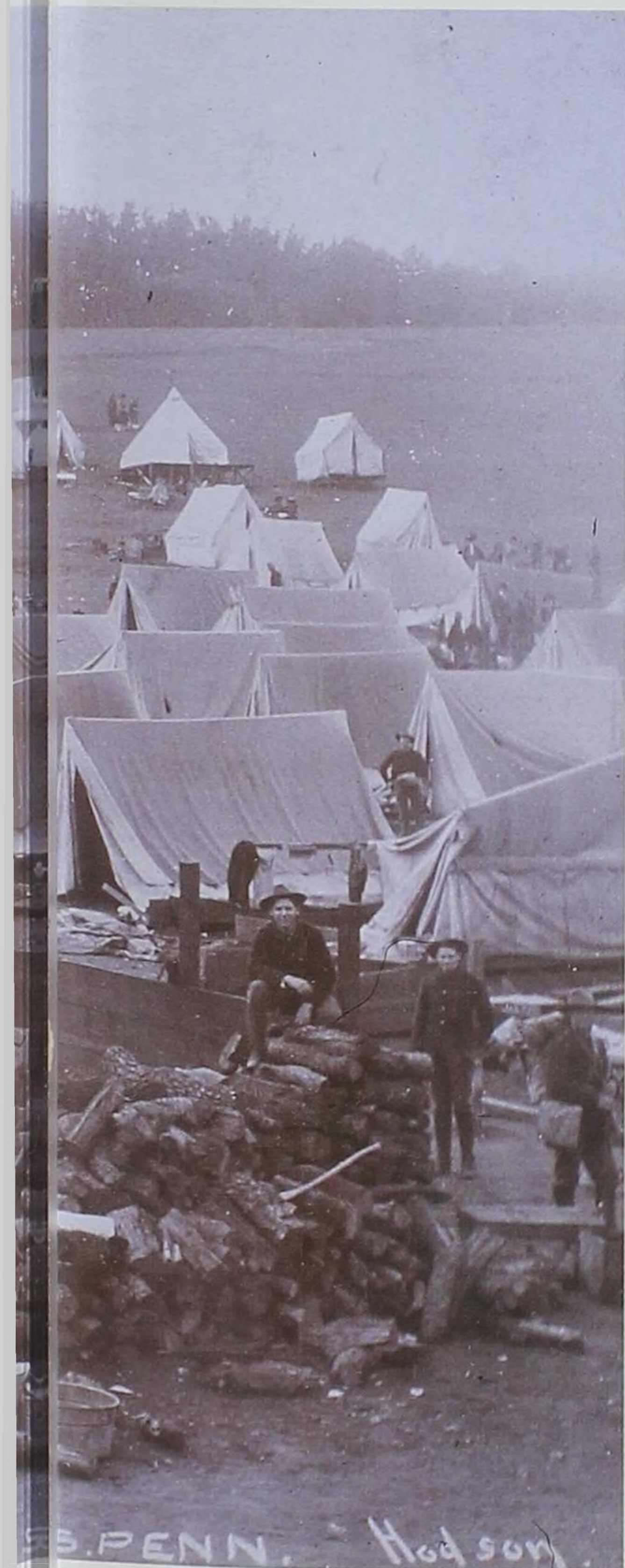
Hostilities had ended with Spain in mid-August. Under the protocol agreement, the United States would occupy Manila until a peace treaty was signed. Filipinos had assisted U.S. forces in the fighting against Spain, believing that they would be given independence.



FRANK MERRITT COLLECTION, SHS (DES MOINES)



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FRANK MEREDITH COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)



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Few if any of the men of the 51st Iowa had traveled outside the United States. Private Ole Oleson of Company M described in his diary the *Pennsylvania* (left and front cover) pulling away from the dock: "Right there is where the tears began to flow and the white handkerchiefs began to wave from every hand."

Like most other transport vessels contracted by the U.S. government during the war, the *Pennsylvania* was a hastily converted freighter with cramped quarters, inadequate ventilation, and few amenities. Only hours after departure, the soldiers grappled with an unseen enemy. Seasickness had set in. "About midnight I went up on deck," Oleson wrote. "It sounded mighty mournful." Private Francis Hime of Company A wrote in his diary: "Rough seas sick as h___ can't through up." Raymond Weakley, who worked in the ship's hospital (below), wrote to his mother: "And how sick I was. I wished the ship would sink and I would sink with it."

Others proved immune to the debilitating effects and enjoyed the gruesome, rail-gripping spectacle of their fellow passengers. Among them was Warren Ickis, who recounted: "About two-thirds of the men were seasick, and it was better than a circus just to watch the hundreds of them hanging over the rail . . . We felt perfectly justified in tying a piece of fat pork to a string and letting it down in front of one of the officers as he was looking over the railing vainly trying to increase his contribution to feed the fishes."

The trauma of seasickness subsided and the monotony of shipboard life took over. Two weeks out, Hime penned a typically negative entry in his diary: "same old song living like hogs." Four days later on Thanksgiving he wrote: "general opinion of regiment that we have nothing to be thankful for."

The 51st Regiment arrived in the Philippines on December 7 but remained on board awaiting orders. On December 10 Spain signed a treaty in Paris, ceding the Philippines to the United States in exchange for \$20 million. The Filipinos settled into an uneasy peace with the United States. After 94 days on the *Pennsylvania*, the 51st began to disembark on February 3. Fighting erupted the next day between U.S. forces and Filipino insurgents who desired independence. The Philippine-American War had begun.



R.D. WEAKLEY COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)



HENRY HACKTHORN COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Private Henry Hackthorn described these barracks in Fort San Philippi as "solid comfort." Hackthorn was in Company E, which shared these quarters for a while with Company M. Most of the time, however, men in the 51st Iowa were out in the field, where they slept in "dog tents" or improvised huts.

Writing from the trenches south of Manila on March 11, Corporal Paul Bellamy described the more typical experience: "We are very comfortable here in the trenches plenty of rice straw to sleep on and a palm leaf roof." The following day: "It rained pretty hard last night and I found out what it is to sleep in the rain . . . I couldn't keep my feet under and as a consequence they are clean this morning." Three days later: "Our life here in the trenches is not as bad as it might seem altho' it is bad enough . . . We sleep in our shoes and leggings with our belts and guns by our sides."

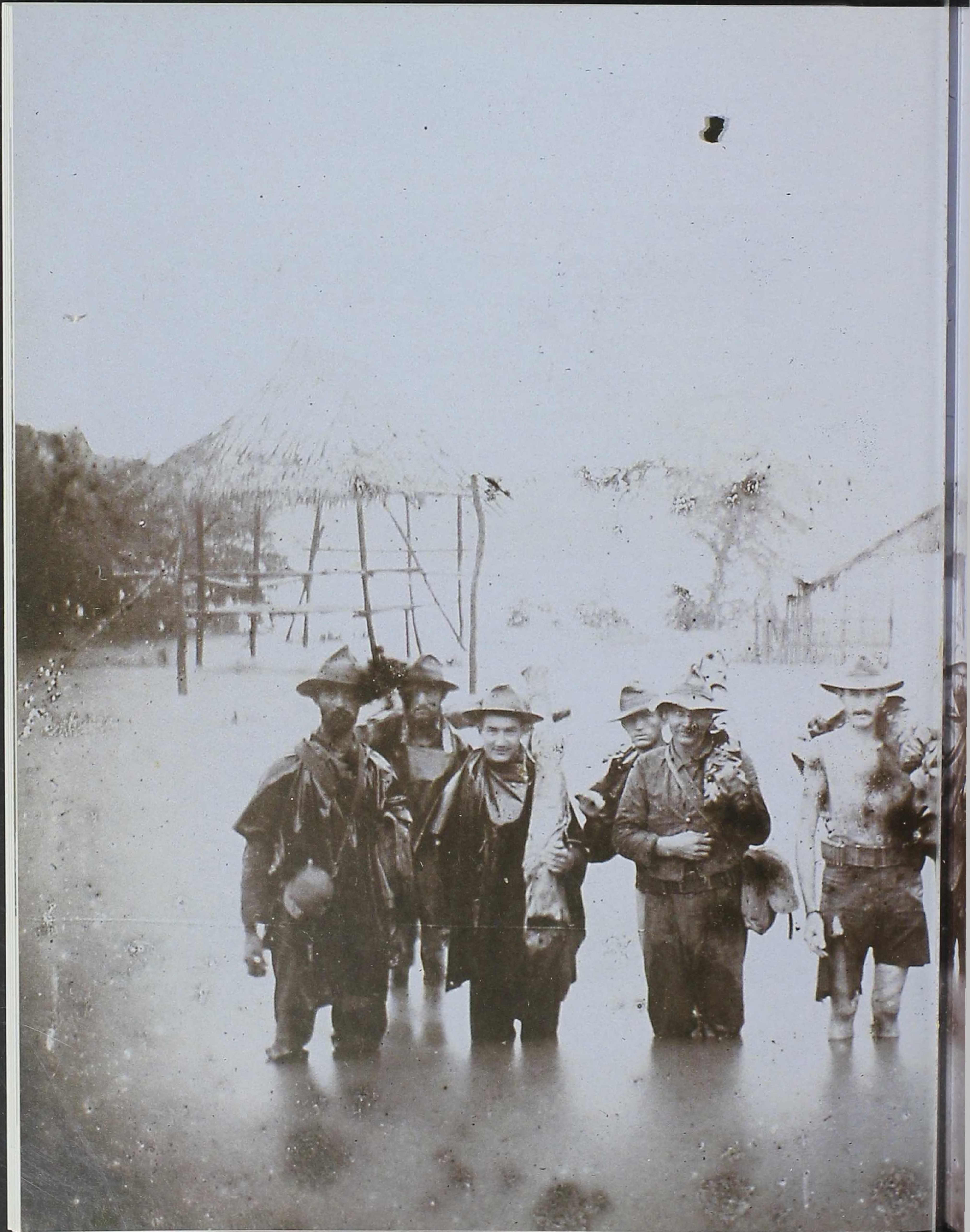
One of the problems faced by the U.S. Army was transporting fresh meat and rations to soldiers in the field. Supplied rations were supplemented by "liberating" chickens and livestock along the line of march or from areas adjacent to camp. Francis Hime jotted in his diary on April 21: "chicken hunt 35 chickens," and predictably added the following day, "fine dinner roast chickens."

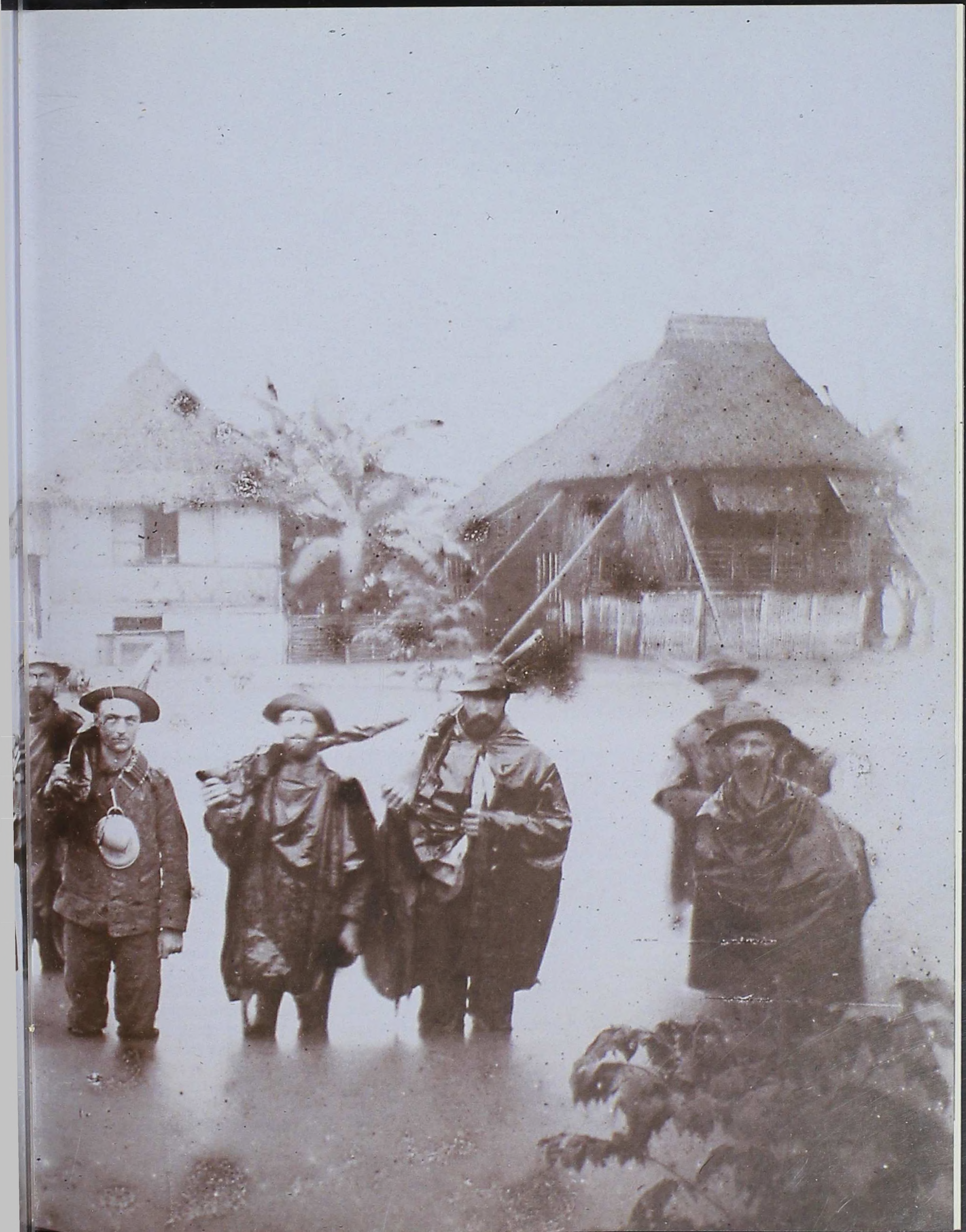
Under a picture in his diary of a slain swine, Ole Oleson wrote: "wild pig for evening mess," and on April 26 he described the day's field rations as "two slices of pork sow belly, three small potatoes, . . . large spoonful of beans, . . . two pieces hard tack."

Another problem was the heat of the tropics and the rainy season. Company G Artificer Ernest C. James, of Greenfield, recalled: "The thing that stands out in my mind was the way we fought the mud in the Philippines . . . during the rainy season the mules kept getting stuck."

Private Karl Kraemer (Company H) described in his diary a heavy rainstorm at San Fernando on July 16: "On outpost started raining in evening between 1 am and 5 am. It was so you couldn't see a foot in front of you. The rain poured down the fields covered with water the ditch overflowed we waded around in water up to our waist the water run over the tops of the trenches."

A compelling image of the rainy season was captured in a photograph (*next page*) owned by Frank Meredith of Company G and labeled, "Co. C going on out/post in high water San Fernando."









HENRY HACKTHORN COLLECTION, SHS (IOWA CITY)

Cannons—like this one, captured from the insurgents and inspected by men in Company E—were rare in the arsenal of the Filipinos. Most of their artillery pieces were outmoded muzzle-loading Spanish cannon barrels or reinforced pipe attached to field-made carriages. They fought with a variety of captured or smuggled firearms, swords, and knives.

Many Iowa soldiers remarked on the insurgents' inferior marksmanship due to their lack of formal small-arms training. Warren Ickis wrote to his aunt and uncle in Indianola that "the natives always shoot high." Henry Hackthorn noted that although "the 51st to date

has been in 9 engagements, 3 battles, and 6 skirmishes some of which have been quite warm," few had been killed or wounded because the enemy "are such poor shots and fire upon the men so far away that they can't hit us only once in a great while."

Many U.S. troops arrived in the sweltering Philippines wearing blue wool uniforms. Newly adopted uniforms of durable cotton duck were issued to officers and later to enlisted soldiers when available. The major (*above, center*) wears a Pattern 1898 blouse and trousers of tan duck. The soldier in the background holds a .45-70 caliber single-shot trap-door Springfield rifle and wears a typical enlisted man's campaign uniform.

During the first months the 51st Iowa was divided by battalion. Each battalion rotated between front-line duty in the trenches around Manila (*bottom right*) and guard duty in Cavite (*top right*).

The 51st Iowa served in the Philippines for eight months and was most often deployed in forward areas. Its companies or battalions participated in combat at Guadalupe Church (March 5); Quingua (April 23); East and West Pulilan (April 24); Calumpit (April 25); and San Thomas (May 4). The entire regiment served together in engagements at San Fernando (May 5, 25–26, and 31; June 16, 22, and 30; July 4) and at Calulut and at Angeles (August 9).

The 51st Iowa remained on the



BOTH PHOTOS: MATHEW TINLEY COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)

front line northwest of Manila until relieved by a battalion of the 22nd U.S. Infantry on September 4, 1899. Fifty-three percent of the regiment was on the sick list.

Several Iowans stayed behind to serve with newly formed volunteer regiments or to pursue entrepreneurial ventures in the Philippines. "I have thought a great many times that I would like to stay here and take my chances in the further development of this country," Warren Ickis wrote home, "but I haven't been able to give up the idea of going back to Iowa which is a pretty good place after all."

The 51st soon departed from Manila Bay aboard the U.S. *Senator* and headed to American shores.





DAN W. TURNER COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)



The regiment arrived in San Francisco October 22 and then marched back to the Presidio (*above*). Private Joseph Markey of Company M recalled: "Along the entire line of march the street was congested with people and traffic was suspended . . . It was certainly a strong testimonial to the place held by

the Iowa boys in the hearts of these hospitable residents of the coast."

Discharged and mustered out on November 2, the 51st headed back to Iowa, recounting their experiences and pondering their losses: 2 men killed in combat, 38 wounded, and 41 deaths from disease or other causes.



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Four days later, two trains pulled into Council Bluffs with the Iowa troops, home after 18 months. A brief and final diary entry by Private Francis Hime understated the joy of the returning soldiers: "pulled into Council Bluffs a great time."

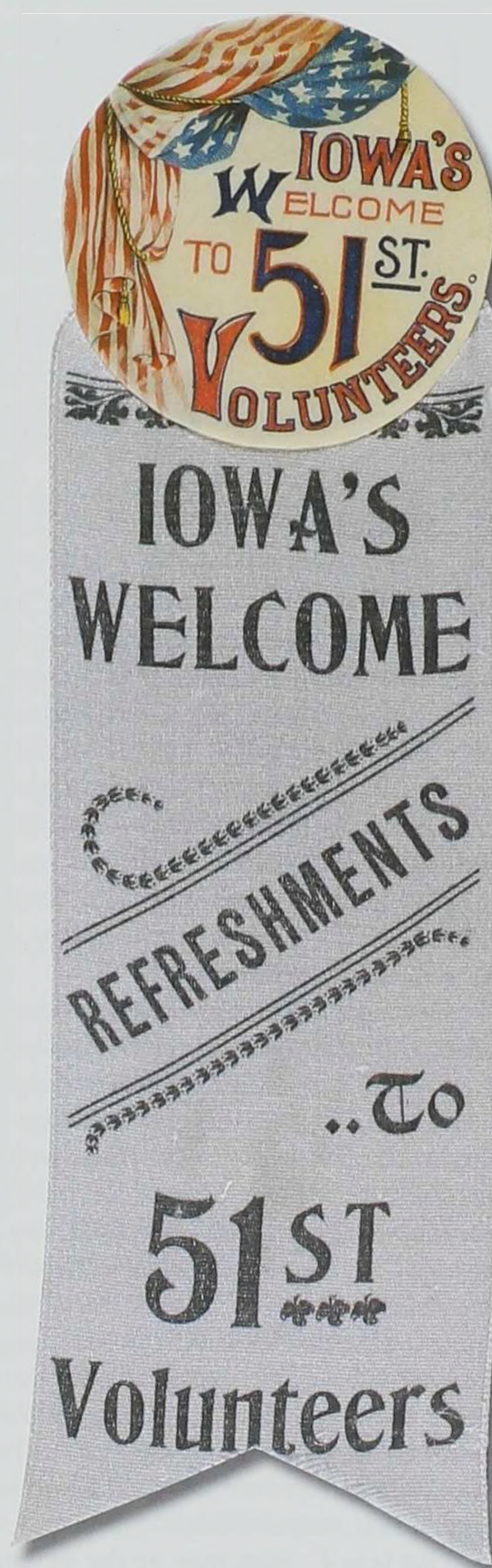
The train carrying Company M arrived in Red Oak at 11:40 p.m. The company smartly formed up for the march into town, down streets lined with admiring friends and family. Private Joseph Markey described the scene: "Turning east on Coolbaugh the scene which greeted the eyes of the returned soldiers must have impressed them with Red Oak's love for her heroes. The street from the court house to the armory was brilliantly lighted, added to which were the hundreds of electric lights in red, white, and blue, which studded a splendid flag-decorated arch at Third and Coolbaugh, and a gigantic letter M a block further on . . . surmounted with 'Welcome Co.' in colored electric lights . . . How proud the fathers and mothers, and sisters were of their heroes."

Similar events were repeated in southwestern Iowa communities as grateful citizens welcomed home Iowa's "bamboo veterans" of the 51st Iowa Volunteer Infantry. Soldiers closed their war diaries and boxed up photographs and letters. Mathew Tinley of Company A pasted a ribbon (right) into his scrapbook and carefully labeled it: "Badge worn by the ladies who served at the banquet given the soldiers. Nov. 6, 1899."

While organized resistance in the Philippines lasted another month, and guerrilla warfare until mid-1902, the men of the 51st resumed their lives in Iowa. Mathew Tinley would later practice medicine in western Iowa. Dan Turner, who had posed for the camera on a grassy hillside at Camp McKinley, became a state senator in only a few years, and then Republican governor in 1931. Henry Hackthorn, who remembered the "solid comfort" of barracks at Fort San Philippi, would become, at age 84, state adjutant of the United Spanish War Veterans of Iowa. Some of the men published their accounts of the war or donated their letters, diaries, and photographs to the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Years later the regimental chaplain, Major Hermon P. Williams, summarized the role of the 51st Regiment: "Our veterans of the Spanish war deserve the gratitude of generations to come. The bondage of the past was broken and the people set free . . . We did not see the significance of all these things then, for the God of History leads us only step by step in the path of duty." ♦

Michael W. Vogt is curator for the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum at Camp Dodge in Johnston, a trustee of the State Historical Society of Iowa, and co-chair of the Iowa Battle Flags Preservation Committee.



NOTE ON SOURCES

The major primary sources for this article are the papers of several individual soldiers, including those of Francis (Frank) Hime, Warren H. Ickis, Karl Kraemer, George W. Landers, Walter C. Larson, and Raymond D. Weakley (all at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines); Ole M. Oleson and Ernest C. James, Jr. (Iowa Gold Star Military Museum Library, Camp Dodge, Johnston); James R. Lincoln (Special Collections, Iowa State University Libraries, Ames); Paul E. Bellamy (Special Collections and Archives, I. D. Weeks Library, University of South Dakota, Vermillion); and Fred B. Carver (Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City). Joseph I. Markey published his firsthand account as *From Iowa to the Philippines* (Red Oak: Thomas D. Murphy Co., 1900). A valuable newspaper account appeared in the *Iowa State By-stander*, September 9, 1898.

Also crucial to the study of this topic are a number of official reports: *Report of the*

[Iowa] Adjutant General, 1900; Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers, vol. 6, 1911; and U.S. Army, Adjutant General's Office, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902).

Useful secondary sources include H. Roger Grant, "Letters from the Philippines: The 51st Iowa at War, 1898-1899," *Palimpsest* 55 (Nov.-Dec. 1974), 162-77; Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); John Snure, "Official History of the Operations of the Fifty-First Infantry, U.S.V. in the Campaign in the Philippine Islands," in Karl Irving Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines* (San Francisco: Hicks-Judd Co., 1899); and Hermon P. Williams, "Iowa's First Overseas Expedition," *Annals of Iowa* 32 (April 1955): 561-75.

Annotations to this article are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).