

COURTESY CONGER HOUSE (WASHINGTON, IOWA); PHOTO BY MARK TADE

# ‘Martial Sons of Martial Sires’

by George William McDaniel

ON FEBRUARY 14, 1898, the citizens of Washington, Iowa, gathered in the Graham Opera House to hear John Philip Sousa and his band play a concert that included the recently published “Stars and Stripes Forever.” The next day, 1,400 miles away in Havana Harbor, the United States battleship *Maine* blew up, with the loss of 260 American lives. Within weeks the United States and Spain were engaged in a brief, romantic war that one official called “a splendid little war,” and Theodore Roosevelt, the war’s most famous hero, called “a bully fight.” With Sousa’s martial music ringing in

their ears, Washington men would soon carry the Stars and Stripes into that war.

This is the story of Washington’s Company D, told through newspapers. The people of Washington received a day-by-day account of the war-time experiences of their sons, brothers, and husbands because Company D correspondents sent articles for each issue of the town’s three weekly newspapers and one daily. (Other men’s letters sometimes appeared as well.) These accounts reveal the

Above: A symbol of the hometown support in the Spanish-American War: The hand-stitched names of Washington’s Company D fill the stripes of this 45” x 31” flag.

men's expectations of what it meant to be soldiers, their impressions as they traveled through the south, and their emotions as they waited in a Florida army camp for their own part of war and glory to begin. Their expectations, impressions, and emotions were overlaid onto a legacy handed down to them by the generation that had fought in the Civil War. Many in Company D had hoped for war with Spain so they could help free the oppressed Cubans as their fathers had freed the slaves.

Indeed, the stated reason for this "splendid little war" in 1898 was Spanish oppression and cruelty in the administration of its colonies, especially Cuba. But there was another reason: by 1898 growing American imperialism "needed" a war. Throughout the nineteenth century a feature of American life had been constant expansion as wave after wave of people pushed westward. By 1890, however, they had "filled" the continent, or so the census bureau seemed to say in its report that year when it declared the frontier closed. It had been the nation's manifest destiny to conquer the continent, and now many Americans believed that that same destiny manifestly meant that they should move onto the world stage.

Thus Spanish colonial policy and American expansionism clashed, creating the conditions necessary for war. The destruction of the *Maine* provided the catalyst for war. The papers immediately blamed it on a Spanish mine, urged Americans to avenge the deaths of

American sailors, and gave the nation a new battle cry: "Remember the *Maine*!"

A few days after the *Maine* had blown up, the *Washington (Iowa) Evening Journal* polled its readers and found that, like most Americans, they believed the explosion to be the work of "those treacherous Spaniards." Most seemed to favor turning loose the "gods of war." Local ministers discussed the possibility of war from their pulpits. Downtown at the New York Store the merchant used dry goods to create a replica of the *Maine* with a flag, a picture of President McKinley, and the premature declaration that "War had been declared." And in mid-March the *Journal* ran an ad: "Twenty able-bodied, intelligent young men to join Company D. Call and leave name at east side restaurant with Capt. D. W. Harvey."

**M**EANWHILE, the citizens of Washington reflected on the last time local men had gone off to war. Company D members had grown up hearing stories of the Civil War. Many were sons of Civil War veterans, and the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was an active part

Men peer at the wreckage of the battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor, where two hundred and sixty died.



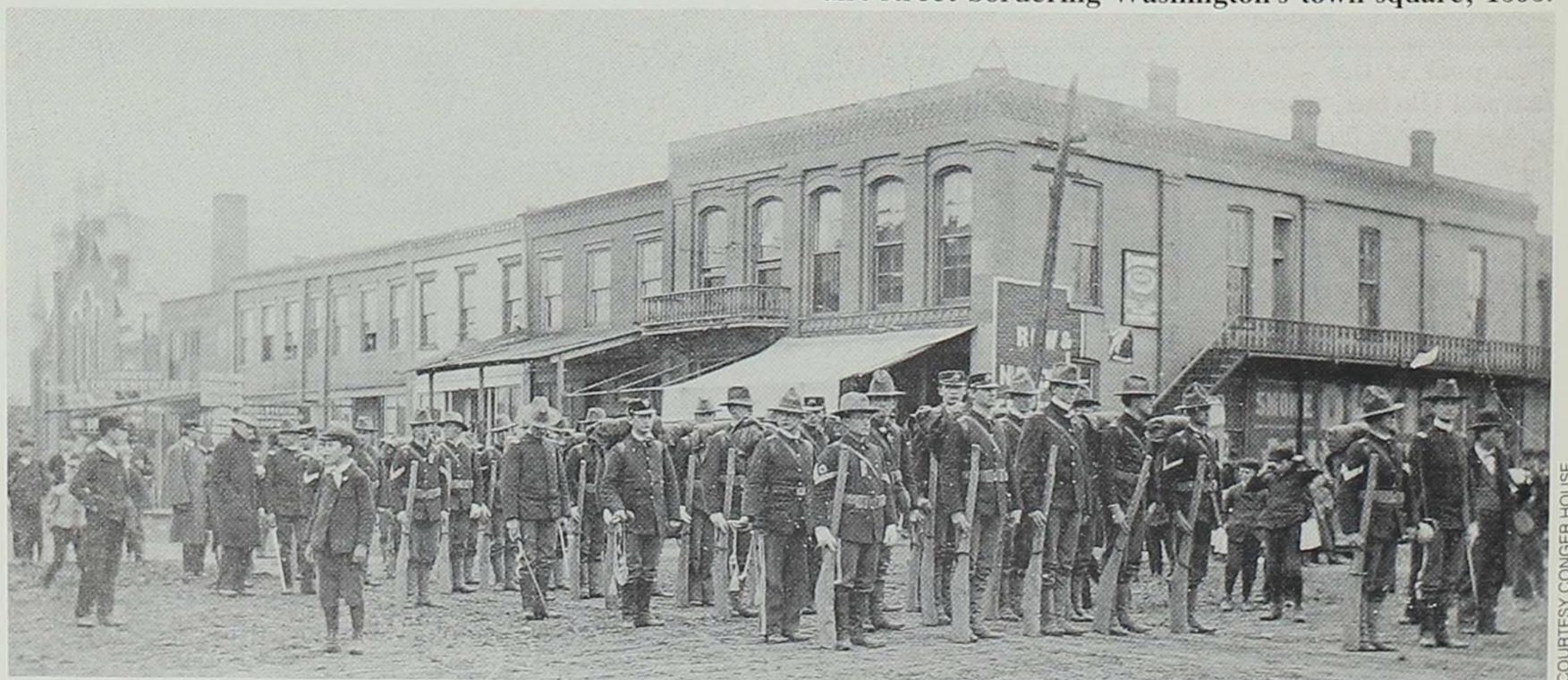
of the social life of Washington. In early April the GAR held a typical "campfire" at the Graham Theater. Speakers reminded the packed house of the glory that Washington soldiers had achieved on Civil War battlefields and assured the audience that this new generation would not fall short of this record. Everyone sang "America" and heard the old favorite "Barbara Fritchie" recited once again. Another recitation suggested a theme that would dominate the experience of Company D. Entitled "Two Voices," the dialogue between the blue and the gray declared that if war came this time there would be no North or South. The evening closed with the singing of "Tenting Tonight" and taps.

Across the nation, public outcry for war increased steadily. On April 11, President McKinley responded, calling for war. In Washington, Iowa, the fervor grew. On April 21, merchants and shoppers watched as the GAR raised the American flag on a new pole they had just installed in the town square. Two days later, a telegram arrived for Company D: they should be ready to go to Des Moines at a moment's notice. On April 25, Congress declared war with Spain. Iowa was asked to supply 125,000 men. Governor Leslie Shaw began preparations to call the Iowa National Guard to duty.

By now Company D consisted of nearly forty men and their officers; their average age, twenty-three. In the American tradition they

were citizen soldiers — merchants, lawyers, clerks, blacksmiths, teachers, reporters, skilled laborers, students, and a very few farmers. (In the labor-intensive agriculture of the late nineteenth century, few farmers could spare an evening in town for drill — much less leave for a war of unknown duration.) That weekend in late April was filled with constant activity. The soldiers received physicals, put their personal lives in order, and packed for a somewhat uncertain future. Drilling on Sunday provoked concern among some residents, but the *Press* reasoned that since the men might have to fight on Sunday their drills did not "desecrate" the day. Many Washingtonians, however, paused long enough on Sunday to attend church. Methodist pastor William G. Thorne had scheduled a sermon on "Alms Giving" but had a difficult time avoiding the issue of war (his own son had enlisted the day before). The *Democrat* noted that many "strong men wept and with reason. These are dire times. May the God of war be with our boys."

The *Democrat's* prayer echoed a common theme. Many viewed the war as a religious crusade, a fight for the forces of Christianity against evil. For some this evil was best represented by Roman Catholicism, the predominant religion of Spain. Earlier in April a guest lecturer at the Covenanter church had discussed the "Rise and Fall of Romanism" and *Curious boys mingle among Company D, lined up on a dirt street bordering Washington's town square, 1898.*



compared the Spanish-American situation to a case of Roman power against Christianity. In early May another lecturer at the Baptist church sounded a similar theme.

Determined to give the new soldiers a proper send-off, the old veterans organized a banquet for Monday night. Seemingly the whole town gathered in the National Guard Armory. Following a sumptuous banquet the old veterans repeated the stories that the young soldiers had grown up hearing. There were toasts and songs and presentation of a flag. Accepting the flag for the company, Lieutenant Smith W. Brookhart assured his townspeople that if necessary they would defend it with their lives.

Despite the cheers, songs, and toasts, the *Press* described the evening as "a sort of solemn, sacred Last Supper." One mother was in tears all evening because her only child, just eighteen years old, had enlisted that day. The old soldiers remarked on the similarities to the banquet that had sent them off in 1861. No doubt they also remembered, though they did not speak of, the horrors they had found in war. But no one could have stopped them from going off to their great adventure in 1861 and now they knew that these "martial sons of martial sires" (as the *Press* called them) could not be stopped from going off to their own adventure.

The next morning school was dismissed, and an estimated five thousand people escorted Company D to the train. Marching alongside were the men of the GAR, carrying the flag they had received at their 1861 farewell. Leading the parade was E. T. Hebener, a local monument carver. He had been the fifer in the Mexican War and Civil War, and now the old man saw another generation leave for war.

All along the way to Des Moines, crowds assembled to greet Company D. In Keota a ragged formation of twelve men with double-barrelled shotguns fired one barrel as the train arrived and the second as it left. In Oskaloosa the citizens brought coffee and sandwiches aboard. In the late afternoon the train arrived at the state fairgrounds, renamed Camp McKinley.

Company D quickly settled into the confusion and discipline of an army taking shape.

Shiloh veteran Captain J. J. Kellogg strides alongside other GAR paraders in support of Company D's departure for the Spanish-American War.

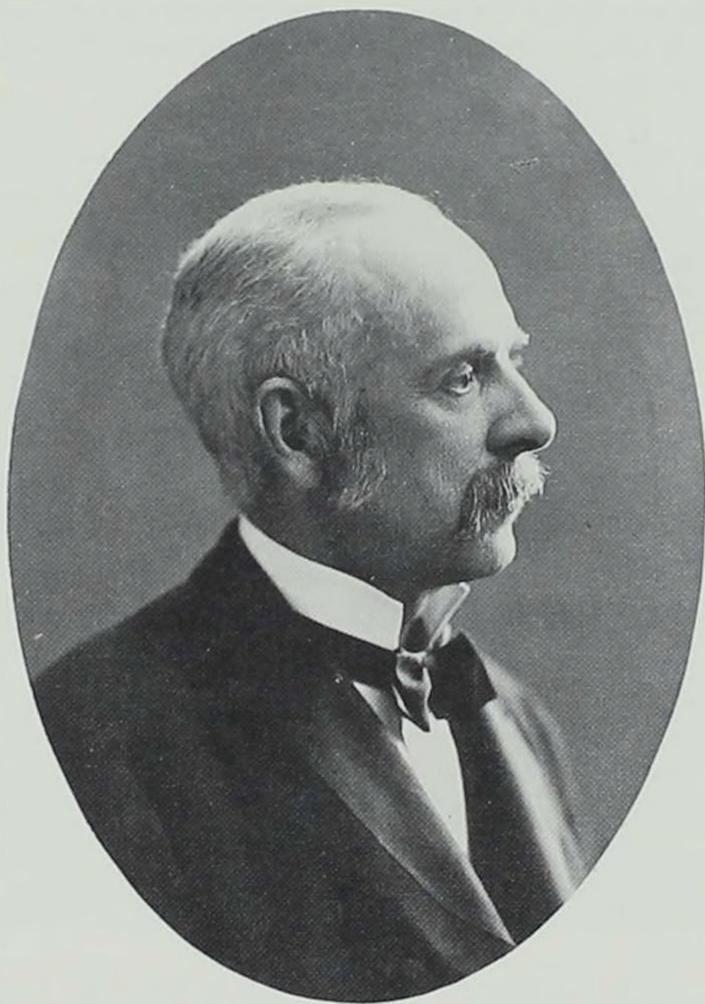


COURTESY CONGER HOUSE

The commander of the Iowa troops was James Rush Lincoln, long-time professor of military science at Iowa State College in Ames. Born in Maryland, Lincoln had been a Confederate cavalryman at Gettysburg and had been with Lee at Appomattox. Now he would lead the sons of those who had been his enemy. The first full day in camp Lincoln had the twenty-five hundred Iowa troops assemble in formation, a sight that thrilled Company D.

**W**ITHIN A FEW DAYS a situation arose that threatened the sense of loyalty and unity among the Iowa volunteers. The Iowa National Guard was a volunteer organization consisting of local companies who elected their own officers. These local officers often spent a great deal of time and their own money to equip and train the troops. Although this did not always make for an efficient military organization, it did create loyalty within the company and often intense loyalty to the local officers. The various local companies had been organized into four regiments of the Iowa Guard. The problem was that the War Department had asked for only three infantry regiments from Iowa.

As commander of the Iowa National Guard,



As National Guard commander, Governor Leslie Shaw attempted to balance orders from the War Department with demands from Iowans.

Governor Shaw proposed to reorganize the four regiments into three federal regiments. Local companies would be split up and local officers might lose their commissions — certainly their commands. The proposal brought about a “spirit of unrest” among the men, the *Des Moines Register* reported. Shaw came to Camp McKinley and appealed to the troops. Blaming the War Department’s order, Shaw said that reorganization was inevitable and that “quite a number of officers now holding commissions will be forced to stay at home or take lower rank.” He promised transportation home to anyone unwilling to enlist under these conditions.

In a show of loyalty typical of most units, the men of Company D quickly decided that they would have their own officers or none at all. Back home, townspeople supported them in letters and telegrams urging them to stick with their officers or come home. A committee traveled to Des Moines to talk with Shaw, an action taken by communities throughout the state.

Bowing to this pressure Shaw announced he would organize all four Iowa regiments to be

sworn into federal service but that only three would go to war. Iowa’s congressmen quickly succeeded in getting the fourth regiment ordered to service.

**W**ITH THEIR OFFICERS and organization intact, the next hurdle for Company D was passing their physicals. Most passed easily; those who failed often went to the back of the line and hoped for a different doctor. One man went through five times, prompting the doctor to ask how many brothers he had in the National Guard. When the man answered, “five,” the doctor said, “Well, if that is so, one of you shall go into the army.” When William White was rejected because he was underweight, his father, a Civil War veteran, asked Governor Shaw for a waiver of the minimum weight requirement. Either because of the father’s intervention or because, as Brookhart claimed, White quickly gained eleven pounds, White was sworn in. To the great joy of Company D all their officers passed the examinations, allegedly the only company in the regiment to achieve that distinction. Their joy was tempered, however, when two regimental officers from Washington, Major J. D. Glasgow and Lieutenant C. J. Wilson, failed. Glasgow reportedly “wept like a baby.” Eight others from the company failed, though the *Press* pronounced them as “patriotic and heroic as their comrades who were accepted.”

The following days were filled with drills, exercises, mock combat, target practice, reviews, and the other activities necessary to build an army. Nevertheless, with a great deal of time on their hands, the men quickly learned the universal lesson of armies to “wait patiently and ask few questions.” They claimed easy adjustment to this new habit of “lazing” around and found ample ways to amuse themselves. Relocated from the amphitheater, they clowned around in the exposition building, climbing into the glass showcases to portray various exhibits. A drunk who had wandered in and passed out was laid out for burial in a showcase. Impromptu wrestling matches and songfests were staged. Occasionally a regimental band would perform a concert. Like many of

the companies, Company D adopted mascots, a mongrel called "Pokerine" and a water spaniel named "Craps." Brookhart wrote it would take "a grand jury to find out the meaning" of the names, but the suspicion was that at least one was named for a favorite game played in a "dark corner" of their quarters.

Of the many visitors who entered the camp, including many there to make a fast buck, none were resented more than insurance men. Company artist Milan Shields made a banner that proclaimed: "Beware! Insurance agents will be hung without trial." Quickly established kangaroo courts rounded up insurance agents and assessed them fifty cents for the privilege of talking with the men. (The "fees" were spent on cigars or food.) When one suspected "insurance man" produced a policeman's star, however, the "court then adjourned *sine die*."

Other visitors were welcomed, especially those from home. The Washington depot agent arranged round-trip trains to Des Moines on Sundays, attracting eighty-five riders on the



Lieutenant Smith W. Brookhart assured his townspeople that Company D would uphold their expectations.



Waiting for war — or at least word to head south — a soldier at Camp McKinley (Des Moines) washes dishes.

first day. The men also let it be known that they appreciated letters from home. A notice in the *Journal* announced: "If any of the girls in Washington wish to write to Co. D boys, have them write to the undersigned. We are being neglected. Other members are receiving two and three letters per day. [Signed] Shanafelt, Hollingsworth, Hugh Rupp, J. T. Brady, Ortus Adams."

**A**FTER THREE WEEKS of drills and examinations Company D and the other regimental companies were sworn into federal service on May 18. Now part of the Fiftieth Regiment Iowa Volunteer Infantry, most knew they would be going south soon — they hoped to Cuba.

The camp was in a flurry. The men sent home anything that was not regulation and drew lightweight clothing from the commissary. Barbers shaved off beards (some newly grown in camp) and cut hair close to the head. On May 21 they would leave for Florida.

Roused awake at 4 AM, they marched to the railway station in a downpour — a presage of much of their stay in Florida. Despite cheers

Soldiers in the Iowa 50th line up for inspection at Camp McKinley at the state fairgrounds in Des Moines. The dairy building is in the background.



and band music, despite their jubilation at being the first Iowans to go to the front, the men of Company D seemed quiet. A few shed tears.

After a celebration in Davenport and a layover in Chicago, Company D boarded their railroad car, ironically named the "Maine." A superstitious railroad man thought they were doomed because of the name. A soldier remarked that he hoped that they would not be as "unfortunate as the occupants of that notable vessel" (though actually the name would bring them special attention on the trip south).

The train rolled south through Indiana, and at every junction and station townspeople boarded with food, hot coffee, and encouragement. At one station a band played "Marching Through Georgia."

Indiana reminded the men of Iowa, though the soil seemed of poorer quality. But once they crossed the Ohio River into Kentucky, they began to feel they were in the South. The land was all hills and solid rock. The people, too, were different, with different speech patterns, and the Iowans were not immediately impressed. In Stanley Miller's opinion, they were in the country of poor white trash who

had no more idea of what civilization was than a "hog in Sunday School."

At every stop, people pulled up in wagons to sell pies, sandwiches, and vegetables. Company D began to notice old soldiers in gray, their first encounter with members of the Confederacy. Whatever private thoughts the old rebels may have had about so many soldiers in blue, publicly they encouraged the Iowans to "take care" of the Spaniards. Although impressed with the Confederate veterans' patriotism and expressions of unity, Company D noted fewer American flags flying in the South.

Another indication that they were in the South was the large number of blacks they began to see. In their correspondence home they mentioned that they had seen blacks working in the fields behind mule and plow, or hoeing corn, followed by a white overseer on horseback. The men remarked on the large numbers of "excited" blacks selling produce at stations during stopovers. Howard Wilson speculated that their excitement stemmed from seeing so many men in blue, knowing what their mission was, and remembering what it meant for blacks the last time northern soldiers were in the South.

To the Iowans the mountains and rushing streams were new terrain. At the first mountain tunnel they learned the hard way about train travel through tunnels: failing to close their windows, they emerged covered with soot and smoke. In another tunnel, their car was damaged when they scraped against rock. Some wondered if the railroad worker's suspicions about the name "Maine" weren't true.

Eager to see legendary Civil War battle sites, they were disappointed when they pulled into Chattanooga after dark, missing Lookout Mountain. Still Chattanooga proved to have other interests: Sam Kellogg reported "quite a merry time" when they stopped alongside a car filled with southern girls. Kellogg also wrote the folks back home about a southern landmark, the Swannee River. Comparing it in size to the Skunk River in Washington County, he remarked that the Georgia soil

Right: Company D passed Lookout Mountain at night, missing the legendary battlesite of their "martial sires." Another company in the 50th Iowa made the stop.

made the water dark red. The men thought it less beautiful than Stephen Foster's song had led them to believe.

At 6:15 that evening they pulled into Jacksonville, Florida. Writing home Private Claude McCoy probably spoke for them all: "It was a great trip for a young chap to make. Something I would never have seen if it had not been for the war."

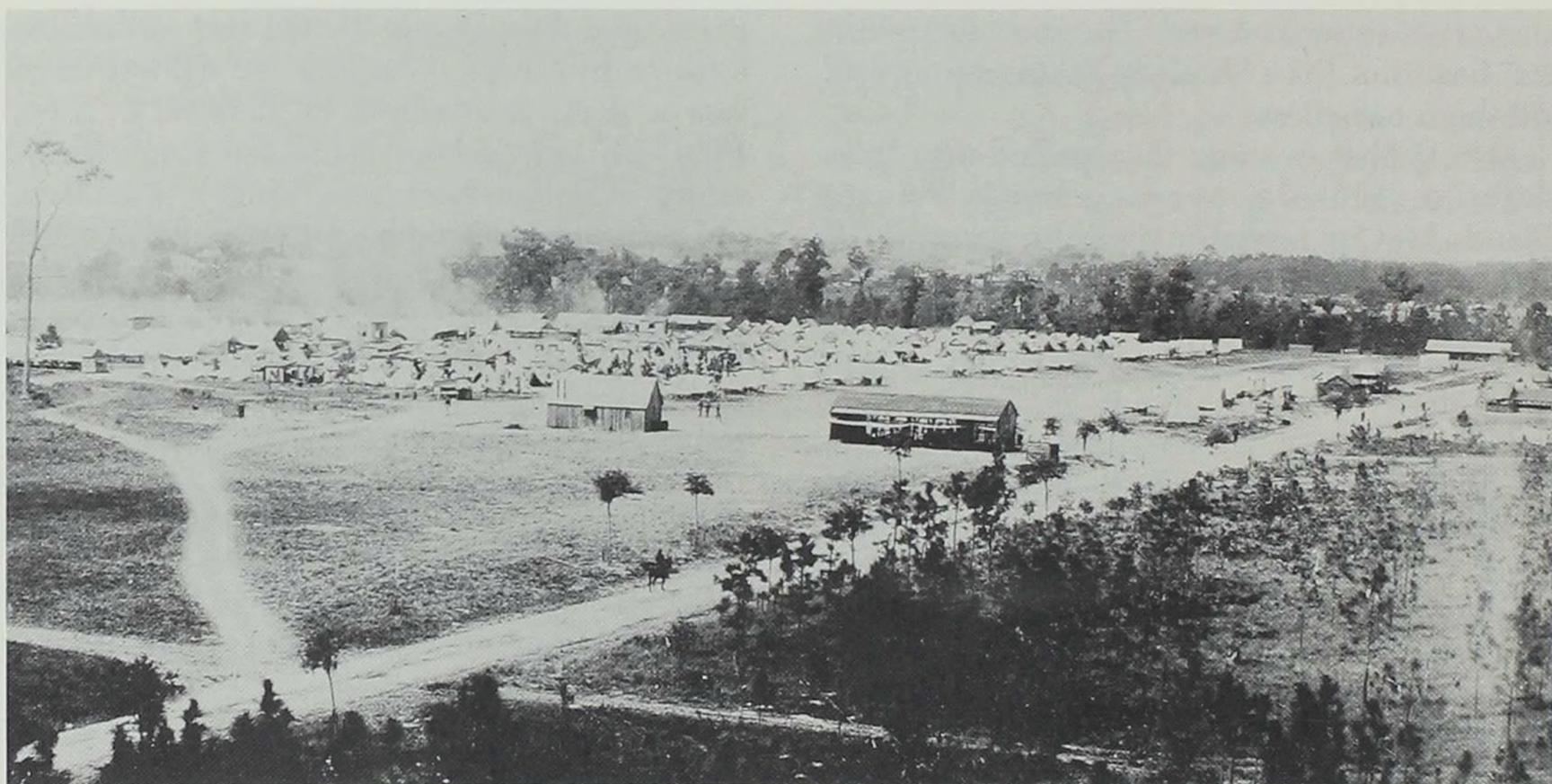
**T**HE DECISION to locate an army camp in Jacksonville, a town of thirty thousand, had been made only a few days before the Fiftieth Iowa arrived. The camp was well situated near rail terminals on sandy ground that provided good drainage, although heavy rains later that summer would force the camp to move to higher ground. Running water was piped out from the city water company and nearby lumberyards supplied all the camp's needs. On May 29 the new commander, Major General Fitzhugh Lee, arrived

to command the nearly 30,000 men of the Seventh Army Corps, of which the Fiftieth Iowa was a part. A nephew of Robert E. Lee, Fitzhugh Lee had served in the Confederate Army. Within a short time Camp Cuba Libre, as he named it, would become a model of how a camp should be organized.

Company D set up its "street" within the Fiftieth Iowa campsite. First priorities were shelter and food. Rubber blankets served as temporary tent floors until wooden floors were ready a few days later. Company D hired the first in a long line of cooks. They supplemented their mess fare from local food stands on the edge of camp, by provisions sent from home, and at Jacksonville restaurants on pay day.

It seemed that everywhere the Iowans turned there was a new experience awaiting them. Forests of tall pine were a new sight to those accustomed to the hardwoods of Iowa. Anticipating having their fill of inexpensive oranges, they were disappointed to find that an 1895 frost had killed most of the trees. Pineap-





Camp Cuba Libre, near Jacksonville, Florida quickly took shape, on terrain new to Iowans.

ples grew abundantly, however, and Howard Wilson was amazed to discover that they did not grow on trees but on short shrubs, like cabbage. They delighted in chasing lizards around camp and in catching alligators (shipping some north for family pets).

The people of Jacksonville seemed friendly, although it took a while for the Iowans to get used to the local accent. Company D men found the young ladies of the city to be very beautiful and not as “flip” as northern girls. Apparently Company D also made a good impression. The Jacksonville *Times-Union and Citizen* reported that the company had a “membership of fine-looking young men” who were “as merry a set of fellows as will be found in camp.”

The “merry fellows” quickly began the daily routine of drills, inspections, exercises, and mock battles. In charge of instruction, Lieutenant Brookhart regularly took the men to the rifle range and established a company school for noncommissioned officers. The work began to pay off. In late June Brigade Commander General Bancroft praised Company D as the best drilled in the regiment. Former Confederate officers who frequented the camp agreed, adding that they made a better appearance than any other northern group.

**T**HE OLD CONFEDERATES were only one reminder that the “martial sons of martial sires” were now in the land of the former enemy. Even before the northerners had arrived the local paper had urged its readers to welcome them so that an army could be assembled to “battle in the cause of humanity to drive a blight from the hemisphere.” While not forgetting the past, the editor reminded his readers that “our future is a common inheritance, our past a common pride, and our country one and indivisible.”

Individual southerners seemed to agree that there was no longer animosity over the war, and that they should put the past behind them and get on with life. As one Virginian remarked, “This war will settle all of that old feeling”; with a common cause “under the same flag why should we be enemies?” The northerners also took some initiative to smooth over the situation. On Decoration Day they joined in a “service perhaps no Union soldier has ever participated in before” — helping decorate Confederate graves.

The most visible event that brought North and South together was the June dedication of a monument to Confederate soldiers in Jacksonville. Planned long before Camp Cuba Libre had been established, it had now become an even larger celebration when “new Yankees”

from North Carolina marched beside men from Iowa and Illinois. On the reviewing stand, a nephew of Robert E. Lee sat beside a grandson of Ulysses S. Grant. The speakers emphasized the valor of the Civil War soldiers and hoped their trials would "cement more firmly our country and make our love for each other greater." The editor of the paper wrote that "from Appomattox this country took a new path — a course the compass of the present shows will dominate the Caribbean, and lead us across the Pacific."

Still there were tensions. The local celebration of Jefferson Davis's birthday was cancelled because of the presence of so many northern troops. A Virginia regiment arrived in camp flying the Confederate flag instead of the Stars and Stripes. Lisle Morehouse wrote home that they had better not do that on July Fourth or there would be trouble.

Most days were deadeningly the same. Day after day the correspondents reported "nothing new today" or "nothing of interest what-

Waiting for orders: idle soldiers at Camp Cuba Libre.

ever occurred today." As early as June 6 Brookhart would write his wife that his was a lazy life and that "unless we go to Cuba soon and get some fighting to do, I am afraid my hitherto industrious habits will be seriously impaired." In his spare time he and a few others from Company D took Spanish lessons from a Cuban refugee they had hired.

Company D men occupied their time in a variety of ways. They were forever improving their campsite, building new tables for the mess tent, or adding more mosquito netting. Out of necessity one became a barber and did a good business. Company artist Milan Shields drew tattoo designs and James Burnham worked the needle and ink, reportedly doing a "landoffice business." Baseball games and regimental band concerts filled some hours. Many of the organized activities took place in the YMCA tent on the edge of the Fiftieth Iowa campsite. Hundreds of men each day took advantage of the services available there. The YMCA established a writing room in the tent and supplied paper and ink. Various church



groups conducted services and gave out thousands of New Testaments. The YMCA tent became a place of entertainment and encouragement for lonely soldiers.

Camp humor flourished, as the men purposely spread outrageous rumors to catch the gullible, or poked fun at their comrades. A favorite Company D joke involved the Rough Rider who was hanged because when he had curried his horse, he had forgotten to "remember the mane."

Faced with many uncertainties in the weeks ahead, they seemed determined to fully enjoy occasional outings. Before the summer was over most of the company had taken the eighteen-mile train trip down to historic St. Augustine, founded in 1565. (In contrast, the Iowans were barely a generation beyond the founding of their own town.) The favorite off-duty place was Pablo Beach, seventeen miles away — especially for boys accustomed to swimming in the Skunk River or Crooked Creek. They reveled in the breakers and salt water, collected sea shells to send home, and delighted in the porpoises. Claude Reister wrote, "I enjoyed myself more yesterday [at the ocean] than I ever did before in my life."

In one of his first dispatches home Stanley Miller had discussed the fear that the men had of yellow fever (malaria) but that the Florida locals feared typhoid and pneumonia more. Throughout June all the correspondents regu-

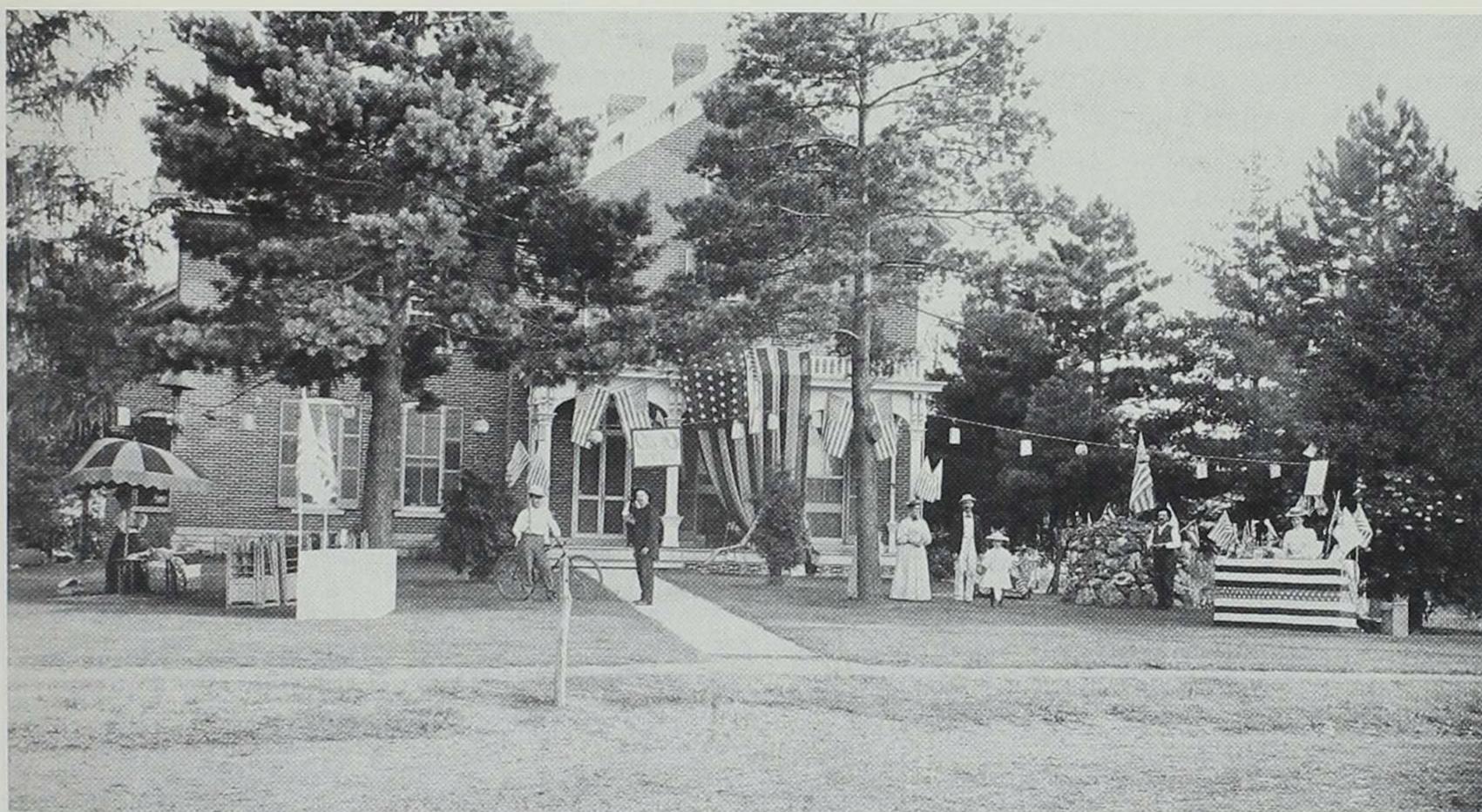
larly reported that the health of Company D was good. The only man in the hospital from Company D was Sidney Smith, who first had the mumps and then the measles.

**O**N THE FOURTH OF JULY, Company D awoke to firecrackers, but rain postponed the afternoon parade in Jacksonville. Pooling their money, the men planned a banquet, complete with cigars. As they ate, news reached them that the Spanish fleet had been defeated the day before, at Santiago harbor in Cuba. With that the real celebration began, and continued long into the night. One remarked, "If Washington people had laid low and listened I believe they could have heard the yelling done by Company D."

The people of Washington, Iowa, may well have heard the celebration, at least in spirit. Since spring, the four newspapers and their correspondents had enabled them to follow war news closely, and in various ways they supported their men in Florida. Small boys had taken to wearing military caps and parading around town with tin horns and flags and banners proclaiming: "Remember the *Maine*, to hell with Spain." The local theater presented slide shows of battle scenes to the accompaniment of hisses for the Spanish and cheers for the Americans. The city water standpipe was painted red, white, and blue. And storekeeper



For land-locked Iowa soldiers, the novelty of the ocean made Pablo Beach a favorite spot to while away time.



COURTESY CONGER HOUSE

J. D. Glasgow, rejected from service, sold "Remember the *Maine*" cigars for five cents.

Several churches held fund-raising activities. In early September St. James Catholic Church raised \$166 at an ice cream social. Perhaps remembering the anti-Catholic lecturers who had been in town at the beginning of the war, the *Democrat* noted the interest of Father Bernard Jacobsmeier in Company D. This concern, the paper noted, had made the pastor many friends, especially "from well-meaning but mistaken people who have such a prejudice against Catholics."

The women of Washington organized sewing projects and fundraisers. An auxiliary of the GAR, the Women's Relief Corps quickly sewed seventy-nine "housewives" (vest-like jackets with pockets for personal items) and sent them off to Florida. The women met in a member's home, amidst patriotic decorations and souvenirs. Made up largely of the wives or mothers of Company D men, the Ladies' Aid Society had formed in late May to raise funds and support the war effort. Other groups and individuals helped the Ladies' Aid Society raise money. The owner of the New York Store gave a portion of one day's receipts to the society, and the Fourth of July Committee donated left-over celebration funds. Local promoter Frank Brinton shared his proceeds from a

Hometown fund-raiser at the C. J. Wilson home in Washington (now the Conger House). At the evening social, guests strolled below flags and paper lanterns, stopping at the frappé stand or at the "Florida orange tree" (far right) with oranges tied to the branches.

showing at the Graham Opera House of moving pictures of the war.

The Ladies' Aid Society also planned elaborate and well-attended evening receptions and dances set in patriotically decorated lawns. At one, held at C. J. Wilson's house, a costumed Uncle Sam strolled through the grounds lit by Chinese lanterns. Vendors sold Florida oranges, candies, ice cream, flowers, and lemonade. For a nickel, one could see Jap Neiswanger's pet goat Dewey, born May 1 and named after the admiral who had defeated the Spanish fleet in Manila on that day.

The Ladies' Aid Society provided Company D with bandages, magazines, newspapers, sugar, soap, and food. Although several national tobacco companies regularly supplied tobacco for Camp Cuba Libre, the soldiers complained of the poor quality and asked the Ladies' Aid Society for certain brands. Although citizens criticized the group for sending tobacco and contributing to the vice of smoking, the *Democrat* defended them: "We'll bet a forty-dollar day that those same



News of the defeat at Santiago inspired Iowa Falls citizens to proclaim: "America rules the world."

critics wouldn't shoulder a gun if the Spanish invaded Washington County." The soldiers' letters home show their gratitude for such support. Their bond with the home front was an important factor in company morale.

**A**S SUMMER WORE ON, the soldiers in Florida grew increasingly restless. The victory over the Spanish fleet at Santiago and the surrender of the Spanish garrison there on July 17 spelled the virtual end of the war. The possibility of active service had now become remote. Company D was filled with rumors about its future. Every day it seemed a new "kite," or rumor, took flight. One day they were headed for the Carolinas, the next, to Pennsylvania, or Puerto Rico, or Cuba for guard duty. They learned to take such "kites" in stride. Stanley Miller reportedly was writing his memoirs, "Side-tracked in the Florida Swamps, or the Experiences of a Soldier in the Seventh Army Corps." A current riddle asked: "Why is the Seventh Army Corps like the seat of a man's pants?"

Because it was never intended for the front."

The war officially ended August 12 when the Spanish and American governments signed a protocol that provided for a peace treaty to be written. General Fitzhugh Lee sent a telegram to Camp Cuba Libre calling for a cease fire and cessation of all hostilities. Company D took the news in good humor. Hugh McCleery wrote that they were happy with the Florida territories they had captured and would hold on to them as best they could. Hometown newspapers noted the event with some relief. The *Press* called it the end of a four-century epoch of Spanish presence in the new world. "War ends, with its anxieties," the *Press* wrote, but added, "peace comes in with its duties no less arduous."

**F**OR THE MEN of Company D, peace did not end the threat of death. By mid-July death by disease had begun to visit the Fiftieth Iowa. Although on July 8 the Jacksonville paper had complimented the Fiftieth Iowa for the cleanliness of its camp, within days the rainy season began,

frequently flooding their camp. They would eventually be forced to move the camp to higher ground, but not soon enough. The first death from typhoid in the Fiftieth Iowa came on July 18. Still at the end of the month Brookhart could write that Company D had the best hospital records in camp.

During the first weeks of August the sick call list began to grow, and along with it more reports of deaths in the Fiftieth Iowa. On August 23 Company D lost its first man; a twenty-three-year-old clerk, Albert Huff of Kalona, died of typhoid. Huff's body was brought back to Kalona for the funeral, attended by nearly three thousand people. At home, concern increased for the eleven others in the hospital. One week later "taps sounded" for Ralph Conger. At age thirty-seven Conger could have avoided service, but he had sold his harness and saddlery business and enlisted, to fulfill what he felt was his duty. The day he had left for Florida he had said that he did not fear bullets but did fear fever and the southern climate. The sorrow hit Washington hard, for Conger was from that town. It seemed that all of Washington turned out for Conger's funeral. The citizens were now aware of the danger that Company D faced.

The danger was real. On August 30, Stanley

The rains came in mid-July, flooding tents and sending soldiers to higher ground — then to the hospital tents.

Miller reported that one month before, the company had ninety-six men; now only forty-five turned out for review. Of the rest two were dead and the others were too sick for duty. Pressure mounted at home and in the company to get the Iowa men out of there. The *Democrat* declared that it was "not right nor sensible nor patriotic to hold our troops in that Jacksonville pest hole any longer." Samuel Kellogg wrote home, "I will be glad to leave this country for I don't like it. All it contains is malaria and fever."

Most of the enlisted men from Iowa who wrote Governor Shaw claimed that up to ninety percent of them at Camp Cuba Libre wanted to be brought home. Although the men had been willing to fight to liberate Cubans, they had no desire to go to Cuba for peacetime guard duty. (Company D had received a taste of this kind of duty when they had spent a week in August on provost duty patrolling the "tenderloin" district of Jacksonville rounding up drunks.) Several of Shaw's Iowa correspondents in Florida implied that their officers, who received higher pay and had greater career opportunities, wanted to stay in Florida with the hope that they could still be sent to Cuba.

Back in Iowa, pressure mounted on Shaw. Brookhart, home on leave, reported to his townspeople that although the camp was on





Downed by typhoid and pneumonia. Original caption: "Note milk cups under bed. Flies not shown."

high ground, the city sewage dump and swamps were but seventy-five yards away. In Brookhart's opinion six more weeks would be very bad for Company D. The group voted unanimously to appeal to all appropriate officials in Des Moines and Washington, D.C., and the mayor fired off a telegram.

Individual citizens also wrote Shaw, none more eloquently than Wesley Shanafelt: "The only boy I have is down at Jacksonville . . . liable to be stricken down any day with fever. . . . I was willing and thought he ought to go to war but as there is no enemy now to contend with but disease I am very anxious to have him . . . brought out of that sickly hole as soon as it is possible." Signing himself a Civil War veteran, Shanafelt added that he had "always . . . been *to date* Republican."

Shaw was in a spot. He knew that although

the war was over, there was still a need for an army and he was reluctant to have the War Department think that Iowa was unwilling to do its part. Yet privately, he was angered by the War Department's claims that the men were receiving adequate health care. Shaw had visited the camp in August and had seen the sick unattended in their beds, with dead soldiers lying in the cots next to them. For a day or so he wavered, apparently unsure of just what the Iowa soldiers wanted. Then he took action. He asked the Secretary of War to bring the Fiftieth Iowa home.

The order was issued almost immediately. Company D was relieved of all duty except guard duty as they waited to hear their departure date. Stanley Miller knew only that there were "good times a-comin'." At home the Ladies' Aid Society continued to send money every few days for care of the sick and transportation home. The *Press* urged citizens to make

plans to welcome the boys: "get your kissers ready for instant use, and don't disappoint fond expectations."

At the Washington depot, five hundred citizens greeted the first group of ten invalids, released from camp on September 4. Two days later another dozen started out, and even more greeted them at the depot. In camp the others began to pack up their belongings; anything that was not to be taken home was burned to prevent the further spread of disease. At guard mount on the morning of September 13 the band played "Home Sweet Home," and then the Fiftieth Iowa started north. Two of their numbers were too sick to travel.

The trip home retraced their route of nearly four months before. This time they passed through Chattanooga during the day; Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge were visible from the train windows. In Chicago, large crowds greeted them during a brief stop-over. The company let out a great shout as they crossed the Mississippi into Iowa. At DeWitt the train stopped long enough for the sickest to be taken off and sent directly home to Washington. The rest would report to Camp McKinley in Des Moines.

Three days later, Company D was given a thirty-day leave and started for Washington. There, the GAR with its torn battle flag had led the welcoming parade, now waiting at the

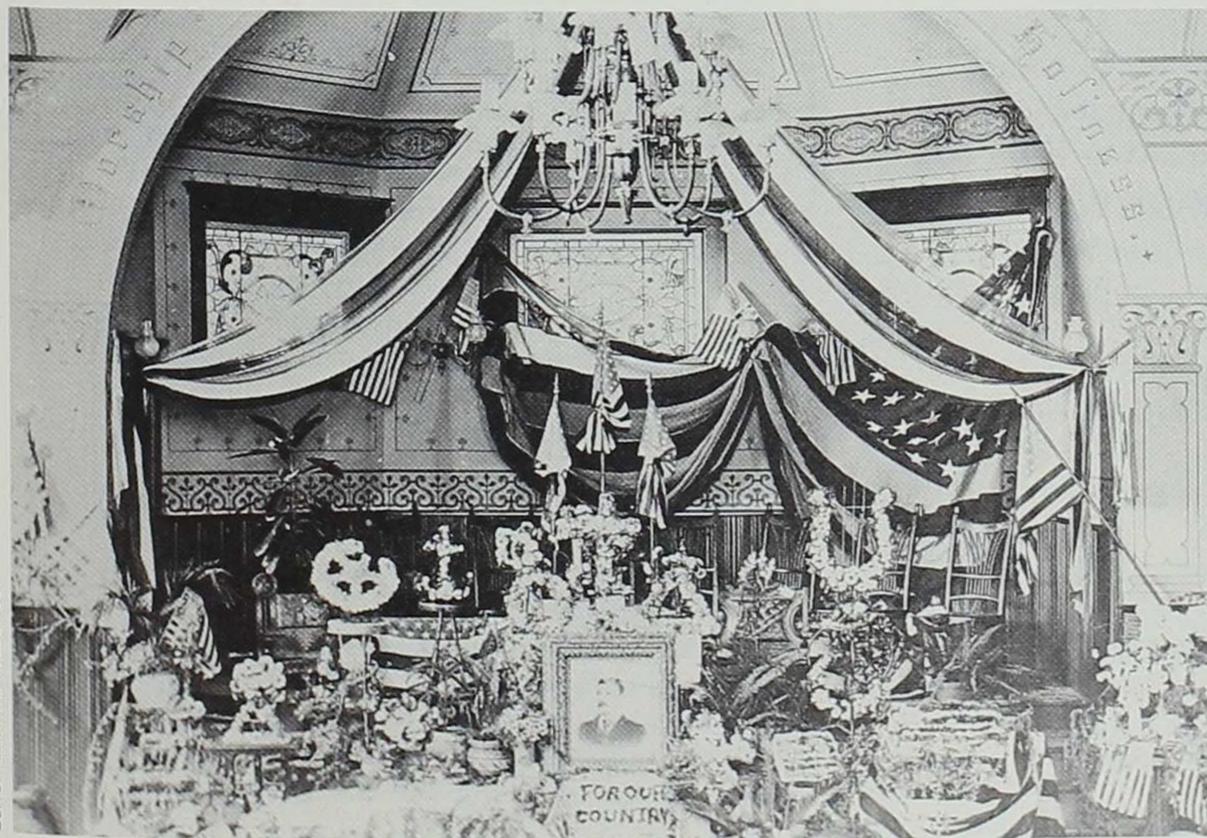
depot. The planned return march through town was forgotten as the boys quickly melted into the crowd.

During their thirty-day leave some continued to wear their uniforms, reportedly because the girls liked it. Most, however, quickly put on civilian clothes and began to get their lives back to normal, returning to jobs or college. A local merchant exhibited the mascot "Craps" and some of the alligators in his window. (Other alligators lived for a time in the fountain basin in the park before they met an unknown end.)

At the end of the leave Company D returned to Des Moines. There was some semblance of army life, but the men were really only marking time. The army gave them rigorous physicals, apparently to have complete medical discharge records on file to avoid future disability claims. Many of the men rented rooms in town rather than staying at the camp, with the promise of remaining orderly. They played games — football, skinny, or old sow.

Mustered out on November 30, the former Company D, now civilians, arrived home on December 1. That evening the Ladies' Aid Society gave yet another banquet. Everyone sensed that this would be their last time together. The speeches were convivial as man after man rose to tell stories and toast the good qualities of his comrades. A solemn tone

"For our country" reads a tribute to Ralph Conger at his funeral in Washington. Conger's death was a tragedy of the war Company D never fought.



descended at the memory of the three who had lost their lives to typhoid (Fred Crawford had died after arriving in Washington). The evening ended with music and dancing.

**T**HE MARTIAL SONS of Company D had spent their youth listening to the war stories of their martial sires. Sufficiently removed by time from the realities of the Civil War, the sires had made war seem like a romantic adventure, a defining element in their lives. Thus when war came again, the sons had eagerly gone off to fight their own glorious cause, to free the Cubans from their oppressive masters, and to act out their fathers' stories.

They came back from the war not heroes but survivors. Their experience in Florida had been one of frustration and boredom. When they had realized that they would not see active service, their enthusiasm had waned. Threatened by death from disease they had asked to be brought home. Almost defensively, Stanley Miller wrote that although they had not seen active service they had endured hardship nonetheless; surely the martial sires knew what the sons had done in the "war for humanity." Still, they regretted the lost opportunity to "prove more vividly to their fathers" that they could have met the test.

The martial sires could probably have told them what war was really like if they had chosen to, although it was not certain that the sons would have listened. In August Governor Shaw had written of the "transition from boyhood to manhood" and the "great school" they

had been in. The *Press* hoped if the young men had learned anything about war, that it was in breaking the "illusion," and that the "tape-worm of 'military glory'" had been "extracted from every one of them." The *Press* concluded that undoubtedly they were all "cured of the notion that soldiering is a 'glorious' thing."

The evidence would seem to suggest that they had been cured. The men of Company D quickly returned to the lives they had interrupted six months before. When a new Company D was organized the next year, only twenty-six of the veterans would re-enlist. Most would leave the National Guard within a year to pursue other interests.

Twenty years later, in 1919, some of them would gather to form the Albert M. Huff Post of the Veterans of the Spanish-American War. As veterans, they acknowledged that the war of twenty years before had brought more to the government in spoils than it had cost. Nevertheless, for the men of old Company D the proudest boast seemed to be that they had come home from the war and made good. □

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The sources for this article were letters written by members of Company D and published in Washington's four newspapers. Regular correspondents were Hugh McCleery (for the daily *Evening Journal*); Lisle Morehouse, Sam Kellogg, and Walter F. Wilson (*Gazette*); Smith Wildman Brookhart and Howard Wilson (*Washington Press*); and Stanley Miller (*Democrat*). These newspapers were all available on microfilm, which underscores for me the importance of the State Historical Society's preservation work through the Iowa Newspaper Project. For the use of photographs and artifacts, I am grateful to the Conger House in Washington, where Jacki and Tony Ross and Mike Zabs were very helpful.