

Under Fire

The regiment settled down at Cavite in comfortable barracks which had been built for Spanish troops, and Colonel Loper was placed in command of the post. But before the last troops were ashore the storm broke. Near midnight on February 4, 1899, word ran through the barracks that the insurgents had attacked the American outposts near Manila. From across the Bay the thunder of artillery and the rattle of rifle fire told that the long-expected conflict had begun. From the stone ramparts at Cavite the glare of fires, which were wiping out native dwellings around Manila, could be seen. It was thought that the natives might assail Cavite from San Roque, and so the men slept on their arms that night.

During the next morning the Iowans watched Dewey's fleet move over in front of Manila and begin a bombardment of the enemy's trenches beyond the city. At first a mist hung over the Bay and the ships appeared in dim outline, but as the sun climbed higher a wind cleared away the fog and a magnificent view unfolded. Manila was burning in a dozen places. From the guns of the ships would appear a puff of smoke, followed seconds later by a muffled roar, and then clouds of dust and debris would be thrown into the air where the shells exploded. Be-

tween salvos from the ships, the rumble of field artillery could be heard, and at intervals the rattle of rifle volleys.

Day and night for four days the Iowans expected to be called into action and chafed at the exacting round of guard duty without taking any part in the battle. But on Wednesday evening, February 8th, Admiral Dewey came to Cavite to confer with Colonel Loper in regard to making an attack on San Roque which was connected with Cavite by a narrow causeway about sixty feet wide and between three and four hundred yards long, and which was occupied by a large force of native soldiers.

As a result of the conference notice was served on the insurgents that, unless San Roque was surrendered by nine o'clock the next morning, a bombardment would begin. That night was an anxious time for the Iowa troops. When morning came Cavite was a hive of activity. Orderlies rushed back and forth with messages, ammunition wagons were unloaded at company headquarters, and members of the band were going through a litter drill with the hospital corps.

When nine o'clock came San Roque was in flames: the natives had fled and in leaving had applied the torch. Colonel Loper sent a detachment into the town to save the property. The Third Battalion of the Fifty-first under Major Moore — Company K in the van — crossed the causeway, followed by the California artillery under Major Rice. Then came

the Second Battalion under Major Hume and the Nevada cavalry unmounted. It was too late to save San Roque from the flames, however, so the troops moved rapidly through the burning town. Forming a skirmish line they swept the swampy and vine-entangled peninsula free from lurking insurrectos and advanced three or four miles to a second causeway which connected the San Roque peninsula with Old Cavite on the mainland.

At the San Roque end of this second causeway the Americans established a temporary fortification called Fort Rice. On February 11th the Second Battalion returned to Cavite, leaving the Third Battalion on duty at the new outpost. The returning Iowans brought back many souvenirs from the charred and ruined city of San Roque, and the quarters of the men were adorned with every conceivable article including jewelry, machetes, Spanish uniforms, knives, guns, and bedsteads.

Outpost duty for the Iowans of the Third Battalion tested the mettle of the troops, for Fort Rice was frequently fired upon by the insurgents across the causeway. On February 15th the enemy attempted to storm the Iowa lines but were driven back by artillery fire and volleys from Company I. Thereafter frequent clashes occurred in which the Filipinos failed to regain any ground.

The two battalions of the Fifty-first, doing guard duty at Cavite, regretted the fact that they were engaged in no aggressive action. On February 18th

orders came for a battalion of Iowa troops to move to Manila at once. The First Battalion composed of Companies H, D, F, and A under Major Duggan was assigned to this task.

At nightfall his command embarked on lighters which were towed across the Bay. Landing on the Luneta the battalion hurried by a forced march to Pasay four miles south of Manila and nearly a mile east of the Bay. The outfit encamped for the night near an old monastery. Heavy firing could be heard over to the left, and the troops were frequently aroused from their sleep by the "booming of field batteries, the rolling of machine guns, and the sound of volleys." During the next few days Iowans of the First Battalion became thoroughly familiar with the "song of the Mauser".

Throughout the following weeks the four companies were shifted from place to place and each saw service both in the trenches and on outpost duty. Wherever they were engaged the Iowans displayed a coolness and steadiness under fire that won the commendation of their commanding officers, and on March 20th the four companies of the battalion were reunited and assigned to arduous service in the trenches near Pasay. Headquarters of the battalion were changed from Pasay to the vicinity of Culi Culi Church a mile east. Day and night the Filipino sharpshooters kept up a harassing fire on the American trenches: outpost duty was perilous. It was on a scouting expedition through the bamboo jungles in

front of the trenches that Private Fred Borduwine of Company H was wounded and cut off from the patrol by a hot fire from the insurgents. A relief party failed to recover him and thus the regiment suffered its first casualty in action.

In the meantime smallpox had broken out among the men of the regiment at Cavite and before it was checked three men were dead of this scourge. Otherwise the health of the men was good. Companies M and C were detailed to Manila for guard duty, much to their displeasure for they had hoped to be sent to the firing line. Later, companies E and H were dispatched to Manila for similar service while companies I and G were recalled from Fort Rice to assist in guarding Cavite. On April 11th companies B and K also returned to Cavite from San Roque.

In the campaign around Manila the American forces had steadily pushed the insurgents back from the city. A sweeping drive to the south on March 18th revealed the fact that the enemy was weak in this direction and that most of the Filipino troops had left that section of the country for the north where Malolos, the insurgent capital, was located. Thereupon an advance upon that stronghold was begun on March 24th.

The route followed the Manila and Dagupan Railroad which extended northward through the rice country and the insurgent towns of Caloocan, Malabon, Marilao, Polo, Caballeros, Guininto, Malolos,

Calumpit, and San Fernando. Throughout this distance the insurgents were well intrenched, and were prepared to offer stubborn resistance. But the Americans, with their skirmish line extending from the coast to the foothills, pushed forward steadily, notwithstanding the fact that "the days were scorching hot and the nights always rainy."

Both sides used the railroad — the retreating Filipinos to carry back men and supplies; the Americans to bring up ammunition, food, water, and hospital supplies from Manila. Attempts of the natives to tear up the track and to destroy bridges were futile, for American engineers soon repaired whatever damage was done. "Bull trains", consisting of native carts drawn by water buffalo, carried ammunition and provisions from the railroad to the skirmish line on either side. Besides these carts, army ambulances and provision wagons drawn by Missouri mules rumbled along behind the advancing column. When the troops halted for rest thousands of little fires were lighted, and tired men were soon brewing coffee in tin cups. Rations of hardtack and corned beef were sometimes augmented by native pigs and chickens foraged along the way.

Early in the morning buglers would awaken the soldiers for another weary day. The skirmish line would move forward with "support" troops about three hundred yards in the rear, and back of them the reserve. Across the rice paddies and through bamboo groves the Americans advanced. Suddenly

the air would be full of singing bullets from a distant trench or grove, the firing line would take shelter behind a rice ridge, and regular volleys would answer the rattling fire of the natives. Men hugged embankments and pulled in their legs as the Mauser and Remington bullets ripped past or struck the earth in front throwing clods in their faces. But when shells from guns of the American artillery began to burst among the insurgents, and a spray of bullets from a new gun, the Colt automatic, swept their lines they soon began another retreat.

On April 14th the Second Battalion of the Fifty-first was relieved from guard duty in Manila and sent by rail to Malolos already in the hands of the advancing Americans. The Third Battalion and Headquarters Staff followed the next day and, on April 16th, the First Battalion left their post near Culi Culi Church, marched to Manila, and entrained for Malolos. By nightfall the regiment was reunited again under command of Lieutenant Colonel M. Miller, Colonel Loper being ill in the hospital at Corregidor Island. The Iowans, brigaded with the Nebraska and South Dakota regiments under Brigadier General Irving Hale as a part of Major General Arthur MacArthur's division, went into a shelter-tent camp on the right of the firing line.

The fighting line around Malolos extended in the form of a horseshoe, the toe pointing north and resting on the railroad track. The Second and Third Battalions of the Fifty-first Iowa held the position

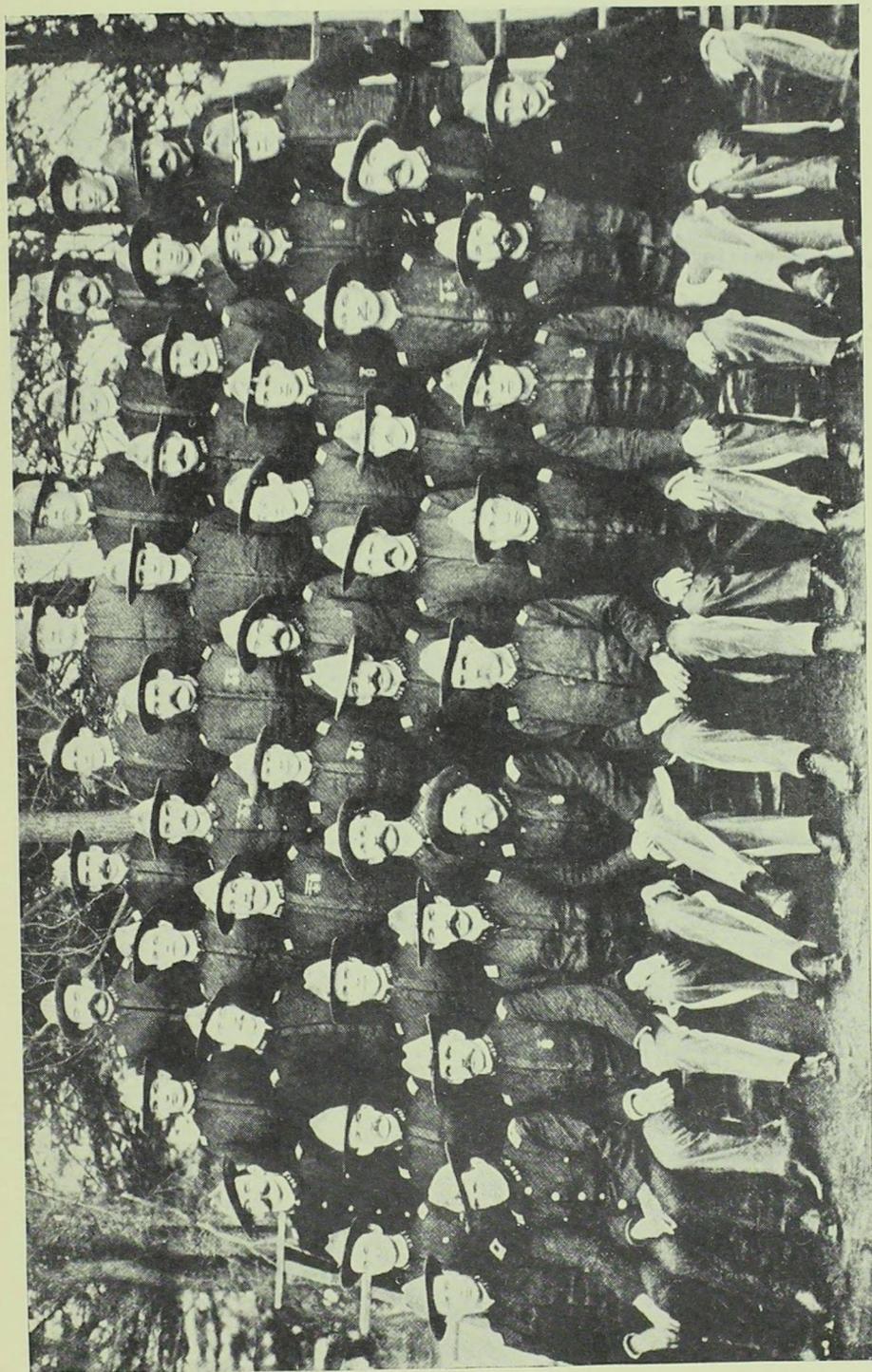
at the end of the right curve southeast of the former insurgent capital, awaiting orders to advance on Calumpit. Except for the occasional exchange of shots between outposts the scene was peaceful, ominous perhaps of the bitter campaign ahead.

The advance on Calumpit was planned to begin on April 24th but an unexpected clash precipitated the fighting a day earlier. A scouting party of the Fourth Cavalry under Major James F. Bell found themselves almost surrounded and greatly outnumbered by a force of insurgents near Quingua six miles northeast of Malolos. A battalion of the Fifty-first — companies E, L, G, and I — under Major Hume, together with the Nebraska regiment, hurried to the support of the scouts. "The day was intensely hot and in the open rice fields the men suffered greatly". Lieutenant Colonel Miller brought up companies M, K, and B and joined in the fight. Under a heavy fusilade of Mauser bullets the boys routed the insurgents, and by mid-afternoon Quingua was captured. It was in this engagement that Colonel John M. Stotsenberg of the Nebraskans was killed in action, and Lieutenant Colonel Miller won the esteem of his men by his courage and leadership under fire. Seven men of the Fifty-first were wounded. That night the regiment, reunited on the outskirts of Quingua, encamped supperless for the supply wagons had been unable to keep up.

On a breakfast of hardtack and "antique canned beef" the regiment joined in the pursuit of the

enemy. Beyond Quingua the Iowans reached a bluff overlooking the Bagbag River. Below them "a broad clear stream wound in graceful curves until lost in the blue distance, its banks fringed with a fleecy border of bamboos, the foliage of which seemed like green lace. Royal palms grew to the edge of a yellow sandy beach on which were lined the Nebraska and Dakota regiments. The latter had their guidon and the national colors floating in the breeze. Four guns of the Utah battery, drawn by mules, were just leaving the river ford." Some soldiers were crossing the river over a bamboo bridge, while others were enjoying a bath.

After crossing the river, Hale's brigade moved forward parallel with the right bank of the stream toward Calumpit. The firing line, two or three miles in length, with the Iowans on the extreme right, swept the country clean of insurgents as it advanced under a boiling hot sun, fighting its way through mile after mile of rice paddies, jungles, and swamp land. Near the town of Pulilan the Iowans encountered a strong force, but after a brisk engagement the enemy was routed, leaving eighty dead in one trench. Toward evening the First Battalion joined in a charge in which Major Duggan was wounded, though he continued to lead his command. That night the Iowans sank down to rest "too tired and worn from heat and hunger to care for anything". The regiment had suffered six casualties during the day's fighting.



OFFICERS OF THE FIFTY-FIRST IOWA INFANTRY

The wagon train with rations came up early the next morning, and the soldiers grabbed a hasty breakfast before another gruelling day began. Pressing forward over swamp land heavy with a thick growth of wild grasses and bamboo, Hale's brigade approached the formidable defenses of Calumpit to which the insurgents, beaten and out-flanked, had withdrawn. Meantime, Brigadier General Lloyd Wheaton's brigade which had approached along the railroad joined in the attack. The artillery of both brigades opened on the enemy's defenses, and the infantry poured volley after volley of rifle fire into their works. The Iowans, from their position at the bend of a river, were able to make an effective enfilading attack. By mid-afternoon the enemy fell back on Calumpit with severe losses and on April 27th abandoned the town. The Fifty-first had three men wounded in this engagement.

After a week of scouting and escort work, the advance on San Fernando began with Wheaton's brigade following the railroad track and Hale's brigade advancing along an adjoining wagon road a mile or more distant. The Third Battalion of the Fifty-first remained to guard the important railway bridge across the Rio Grande de Pampanga, while the First and Second Battalions, deployed as skirmishers, led the advance of Hale's brigade. The Iowans, sweltering in the tropical heat, waded through the swamps skirting the wagon road, ploughed through mud knee deep, splashed across

water holes, and joked about the bullets that splashed mud in their faces. Canteens were drained and ammunition ran low. By nightfall the Americans had driven the enemy in full retreat beyond the town of Santo Tomas. There the troops bivouacked, and at ten-thirty devoured the first food they had had since three-thirty that morning. Strange to relate in that long day of difficult fighting only three men of the regiment were wounded and none killed. When General MacArthur, the division commander, heard of this he remarked, "Why, those men must be bullet-proof!"

Early the next morning the First and Second Battalions without support and with the aid of a single Hotchkiss machine gun advanced on San Fernando. Crossing the Santo Tomas River by wading and making a wide detour so as to approach the erstwhile insurgent capital from the rear, the Iowans took the defenders of the city by surprise and sent them scurrying across the adjoining rice fields. Only one American was wounded in this encounter.

Sickness, though, developed by the hot days and rainy nights, was taking its toll of the regiment. The Third Battalion was brought up and the Fifty-first went into camp at San Fernando for a well-earned rest. Arduous outpost and guard duty, however, occupied much of the time and night attacks were frequent. Weeks passed, and the unvaried life grew monotonous. During skirmishes late in May four men of the Fifty-first were

wounded. The "miasmas of the flooded region about the sweltering town" brought malaria and other disorders in its wake.

The sporadic aggressiveness of the insurgents throughout this period culminated in a general attack on the American forces about San Fernando. Early on the morning of June 16th an insurgent force made an effort to cut off Company D which was on guard duty near an old sugar mill. Sergeant Fred P. Woodruff, who was in command of the outpost, refused to give way, and soon companies from the First and Second Battalions hurried up to help repulse the attack. Colonel Loper, who had rejoined the regiment some days earlier, assumed command during the morning's engagement. The attack failed, but it cost the regiment five more wounded.

Frequently during the latter part of June night attacks were made on the outposts, and often the men were routed from their sleep to take positions in rain-soaked trenches. Near the end of June thirty-six men of the regiment were discharged to reënlist in the United States Veteran Volunteers, and a month later forty more were relieved for the same purpose.

August came and most of the volunteer regiments were relieved from the line but the Fifty-first remained. On the ninth of August an advance northward from San Fernando began. The Fifty-first, a part of General Wheaton's brigade, again ploughed

through muddy cane and rice fields, waded streams, and plunged through water holes. By noon the cane would be dry and crisp and the leaves cut like knives. Six Iowans were wounded in the fighting between San Fernando and Calulut, and by the time the objective was reached sickness and disease had so reduced the regiment that only two hundred and thirty-six men were available for line duty. From August 17th to September 4th the Iowans guarded the railroad between Calulut and the nearby village of Sindalan.

At last the Fifty-first was relieved. Railroad accommodations were so limited, wrote one of the boys, "that we were compelled to stand up in the box cars coming in, but so well satisfied were we with our release that we raised no objections whatever. On reaching San Fernando we clambered out of the cars, officers formed the remnants of their companies and marched them down to quarters. We were rather a tired, worn-out and seedy looking set when we reached the old company barracks, but the boys there received us with open arms". General Wheaton expressed to Colonel Loper his warmest praise for the Fifty-first wherever or whenever it had been put to the test.

The two days at San Fernando were busy ones. Baggage had to be packed and quarters put in order. On the morning of the sixth following an early dinner, assembly sounded, the battalions were formed, and to the martial music of the band, the Iowans

marched down the "calle" and came to a halt in front of the headquarters of General MacArthur. Three rousing cheers were given for the General who was a universal favorite. In reply he said, "God bless the Iowa boys; and may you have a safe voyage home. We will endeavor to complete the work which you have so well begun."

Jammed into smelly box cars, the men forgot their discomforts on the ride to Manila in the joy of being headed for home. The train rumbled along past the Santo Tomas swamp, through Apalit and Calumpit, and across the Bagbag River which the regiment had forded weeks earlier. On either side of the road, natives were cultivating fields and only the deserted trenches were a reminder of the recent campaign. At Malolos the site occupied by the Fifty-first was a miry swamp. Caloocan was reached just as the evening shadows half obscured the softened outlines of bamboo groves and nipa huts. At last the train pulled into Manila, the men clambered out of the cars, details were left to guard the baggage, and the rest of the regiment, headed by the band, marched through the streets to their quarters. The thinned ranks were eloquent testimony of the hard service through which the Fifty-first had passed since it left the city four months before.

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