

To the Philippines

The men of the Fifty-first Iowa Volunteer Infantry were awake early on the morning of November 3, 1898. The last day of their prolonged stay at San Francisco had arrived. At ten o'clock tents were furled, the plank flooring was piled up, and the camp policed. An hour later the companies were lined up in heavy marching equipment for inspection. Then, led by the band, the regiment moved out and marched down Van Ness Avenue toward the pier. All along the line of march people gave the Iowans an ovation that equaled the warmth of their welcome five months earlier. The government pier was reached about twelve-thirty, and there fully ten thousand people had assembled to wish the regiment *bon voyage*. The men went on board immediately, and spent the early part of the afternoon in stowing away their blankets and other equipment.

The transport *Pennsylvania* on which the Iowans were destined to spend the next ninety-four days was an old boat, formerly a trans-Atlantic liner, later an emigrant ship, and finally it had been sent to the Pacific to engage in the Klondike trade just at the outbreak of the war with Spain. On the trip around the Horn the ship had narrowly escaped capture at Montevideo where United States Consul Al Swalm of Oskaloosa — formerly the colonel of the Fifty-first

when it was the old Third Iowa — aided the captain in avoiding the Spanish torpedo boat, *Temerario*.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the *Pennsylvania* weighed anchor and moved slowly out of the Bay toward the Golden Gate. The men of the Fifty-first could see, over in the distant Presidio, the old camp site which had been their home so long. As the vessel passed the fortifications on Alcatraz Island and at Fort Point the artillerymen fired a salute which the ship answered by dipping her colors.

Outside the entrance to San Francisco Bay the ship struck rough water and a mist cut off a view of the Golden Gate from the sea. The *Pennsylvania* was a slow boat, with a speed of about eleven knots an hour, and she rolled badly. Her dipping and diving reminded one Iowan of a bucking broncho and another suggested that the old tub would roll even in a dry dock. By morning seasickness kept most of the regiment in their bunks. One soldier wrote: "During these antics your stomach is responding to every motion until it tires out. The ship rises on a swell; you go down with it but your unfortunate stomach seems to stay where it was."

As the days passed, however, the ocean calmed, and the Iowans gradually acquired their "sea legs" and began to enjoy the voyage. As the transport was taking a route off the course of trading vessels, only one boat, a returning troop-ship probably, was sighted on the trip between San Francisco and Honolulu. The *Pennsylvania* seemed to be alone on

the broad expanse of the Pacific. When the ship reached the warm belt, awnings were stretched by day and at night many of the men made their beds on the upper deck. Although the month was November it seemed like July corn-growing weather to the Iowans. The beauty of the tropical nights — the brilliance of the stars, and the dark velvet blue of the water — made a picture long remembered.

Late in the afternoon of the eleventh of November the distant mountain peaks of Hawaii were sighted on the horizon. As the *Pennsylvania* drew nearer to the island, the rays of the setting sun threw the coast line in bold relief and touched the edge of a cloud-bank in the west with molten gold. As it was too late to make port that night the ship sought safe anchorage in the outer harbor, but grounded suddenly on a reef. Hours of hard work, however, set the vessel free without any damage resulting. In the morning a pilot came out and guided the ship to port.

Honolulu received the Iowans most graciously. Colonel Loper allowed the men shore leave during the day and they used the opportunity to explore many points of interest in and about the city. A football game was arranged between the team of the Fifty-first and the Oahu College eleven which the Iowans won easily 22 to 0; but in baseball the Hawk-eyes were no match for the collegians.

Four days were spent in this "Paradise of the Pacific", and most of the men would have been will-

ing to serve the rest of their enlistment there. The arrival of the *Puebla*, however, with the Tennessee regiment on board, and the *Newport* with Brigadier General M. P. Miller and a regiment of regulars made it necessary for the *Pennsylvania* to depart in order to furnish docking space at the government pier. The ship was coaled, then thoroughly scrubbed and fumigated. On the night before departure the entire Fifty-first slept on the dock.

A huge crowd assembled the next morning to bid the soldiers Godspeed. The Honolulu band — a remnant of the famous Royal Hawaiian Band of World's Fair fame — arrived early and played national airs. The band of the Fifty-first alternated with the native musicians and the stirring strains of Sousa's marches shared honors with soft, plaintive Hawaiian tunes. Native girls hung leis of many colors around the hats of the Iowans as a token of friendship. That popular march, "The Blue and Gray Patrol", ended the concert, and the troops marched up the gang-planks into the hold of the ship.

Slowly the *Pennsylvania* swung about and headed for the open sea, passing and exchanging greetings with the United States Gunboat *Bennington* on the way out. By noon the ship was clear of the outer harbor, and plowing westward on the long journey to the Orient.

For five days good weather and quiet seas made the voyage uneventful. On the sixth day out the ship encountered a storm, and the waves ran high.

At times the vessel rolled and pitched so violently that waves washed athwart the deck and lines were stretched to assist the men and crew in moving about. Port holes had to be closed, which made the region below deck so hot and oppressive that sleep was almost impossible. Benches, tables, guns, and knapsacks were hurled about. At night sudden lurchings of the ship threw men out of their bunks, and the meals, too, with the daily appearance of "slum gullion", caused much discontent. Little wonder was it that few civil words were spoken and nearly everyone nursed a grouch.

Thanksgiving Day, though, was enjoyed by some of the men. The roughness of the sea abated, and the opening of sealed tins, which had been presented by San Francisco friends for this occasion, revealed food delicacies most welcome to jaded appetites. During the day, too, the *Puebla* overtook and passed the *Pennsylvania*. The smoke of the approaching vessel was sighted early in the morning and by evening she was within hailing distance. From across the water came the old familiar yell:

Who are we? Who are we?

Ioway and Tennessee.

The *Puebla* pulled away from the slower going *Pennsylvania* and by midnight her lights had disappeared in the distance.

During the next week time hung heavy on the hands of the soldiers: their tasks were light. Two companies were on duty each day — one as a guard

and the other as a fatigue detail to wash down the deck three times daily with hose, brooms, and scrapers, to sweep the quarters, and to scrub the hatchways. The soldiers took great enjoyment in the shower baths on deck where morning and evening they lined up to await their turn under the salt spray. Card playing and reading were favorite diversions, while the evening concerts by the band helped to keep up the morale of the men. Beards were allowed to grow and the regiment, according to one of the boys, resembled a gathering of "weary willies". Due to careful sanitary precautions and the watchfulness of the regimental surgeons, little sickness developed.

On Monday, December 5th, one of the northern islands of the Philippine group was sighted. During the night the ship skirted the northern shore of Luzon, and by the following day was well along its way down the west coast of that island toward Manila. This part of the trip was a continuous panorama, as the vessel sailed through a cobalt sea with a blue sky overhead and a green-clad, mountainous coastline slipping past on the port side of the vessel.

On Wednesday morning the *Pennsylvania* passed Subig Bay, rounded Corregidor Island, and steamed slowly through the narrow entrance into the wide expanse of Manila Bay. The ship nosed its way past an English cruiser and a Chinese junk near the harbor entrance. In the distance the gray hulls and

masts of Dewey's fleet riding at anchor were clearly visible. Between the fleet and the city were the blackened, twisted hulks of two Spanish cruisers projecting from the water, grim reminders of the victory of the first of May. The *Pennsylvania* steamed on past Cavite and came to anchor in front of Manila among several other transports. Not far distant were the *Puebla* and *Newport* which had arrived a day earlier. Apparently the Fifty-first had reached its destination, but two months were to pass before the men disembarked from the *Pennsylvania*.

At this time the situation at Manila was that of an enforced calm. The attitude of the insurgents was ominous, however, and many predicted that the storm would soon break. At Iloilo, the second largest city of the islands, the Spanish forces were hard pressed by the natives and the advisability of sending an American expedition to take over the city was discussed. Weeks passed before the official decision to send a brigade to Iloilo was issued, and meantime the Fifty-first remained quartered on board ship with only occasional shore leave for the men. Christmas day was an enjoyable occasion, however, for the steamship *St. Paul* had arrived four days before with mail and Christmas boxes from home.

At last on the evening of December 26th, an expedition consisting of the Fifty-first Iowa, the Eighteenth Regular Infantry, and Battery G of the Sixth

Artillery — all under the command of Brigadier General Miller — set out in the transports, *Pennsylvania*, *Arizona*, and *Newport*, on the three-hundred-mile trip to Iloilo. The cruiser *Baltimore*, a small dispatch boat, and a pilot boat also accompanied the expedition. On the way south the flotilla met a coastwise steamer coming from Iloilo which brought the disquieting news that the city had already fallen into the hands of the insurgents and that the Spanish garrison had fled. Would this mean a brush with the natives? The men looked forward to some excitement.

The expedition arrived at the harbor of Iloilo on December 28th. The *Arizona* and *Pennsylvania* lay to in a cove outside the harbor while the *Newport* and the *Baltimore* went up to the dock. General Miller held a conference with the insurgent leaders but they positively refused to give up the city. Thereupon preparations were made to take the place by force. Arms and equipment were inspected and two hundred rounds of ammunition were issued to each man. From the decks of the transports, the insurgents could be seen digging trenches and piling bags of sand in front for breastworks. Another fruitless conference was held with the Filipinos. General Miller sent to Manila for the gunboat *Petrel* which was small enough to proceed up the river adjoining the city and shell the insurgents' flank in case an attack should be undertaken. Meanwhile, the men practiced landing drills, and a detail from

the Fifty-first was ordered to man the *Samar*, a captured Spanish gunboat.

With the arrival of the *Petrel*, word was brought from General Otis not to attack until further notice. Aguinaldo was threatening the American outposts at Manila and it was felt that to take Iloilo would precipitate a general insurrection against the United States. A month passed and the expedition still remained at the harbor of Iloilo. Only unarmed officers were given shore leave and the men grew restless and discontented. The Fifty-first had been on shipboard since November 3rd, and there was a pervading fear that an epidemic might break out at any time.

On January 26th orders were received for the *Pennsylvania* to return to Manila — welcome news for the Fifty-first, for the desire to get ashore was strong. Again the ship steamed into Manila Bay and dropped anchor in the midst of Dewey's fleet. Debarkation began on February 2nd, and by February 5th — ninety-four days after embarking at San Francisco — the last company of the Fifty-first went ashore. Their long sojourn on the *Pennsylvania* led Admiral Dewey to speak of the regiment as the marine corps, while foreign military attachés considered the record marvelous and so reported to their home governments. Only two men of the regiment were in the hospital at the time and they were able to walk.

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