

## Home Again

“When do we sail?” was the question uppermost in the mind of every man in the regiment, and preparations for the homeward voyage occupied much of the time after the return from the front to Manila. Guard duty was light, souvenir hunters scoured the city for presents to take home, officers squared their accounts, and considerable attention was paid to getting arms and equipment in first class condition. Gradually the sick began to return from the hospital.

Great was the rejoicing when news came that the Fifty-first would sail September 22nd on the transport *Senator*. Friday, the day of departure, dawned bright and clear. The forenoon was spent in saying farewell to friends in the city and in visiting with the boys who had decided to reënlist in the regular army. Personal baggage which each man wished to keep with him on board was collected, and quarters were swept and policed for the last time. Following an early dinner the regiment formed and marched to the wharf. Ferryboats conveyed the Iowans to the *Senator*, the hospital ship swung alongside with the last of the regiment, and as soon as the convalescents were carefully taken on board the ship weighed anchor and moved slowly down the Bay.

The distant mountain ranges and the spires and domes of Manila faded into the background; Cavite,

Dewey's fleet, and the walls of San Felipe were left behind. Darkness had fallen by the time the ship passed Corregidor and headed northward in a choppy sea toward Japan. That night the soldiers of the Fifty-first waged a more or less successful battle with the bedbugs that inhabited the bunks of the *Senator*.

At the harbor of Nagasaki, the ship dropped anchor for three days while Japanese laborers, men and women, coaled the vessel. Shore leave gave the Iowans an opportunity to visit the shops and temples of the city and the terraced hillsides roundabout.

During the trip from Nagasaki to Yokohama the weather was pleasant, and the passing panorama of innumerable islands in the inland sea made a picture almost fairylike in its beauty. Sailing past a fleet of fishing smacks and sampans, the *Senator* dropped anchor in the outer harbor of Yokohama. Many of the regiment visited Tokio as well as the parks, temples, and other points of interest in Yokohama. The ricksha men found ready customers in the Iowans.

A typhoon raging outside the harbor delayed the departure for a day, but on October 6th the storm abated somewhat and the *Senator* put to sea. A strong head wind and huge waves tossed the ship about so that it was necessary to "lay to" for twelve hours longer — a circumstance which gave rise to a rumor in the United States that the *Senator* was lost at sea. When the storm subsided, however, the

*Senator* steamed through pleasant seas under clear skies.

Days were spent on deck — reading, playing cards, relating incidents of the late campaign — but for all this the time passed, it seemed, with incredible slowness. On Friday, October 13th, the ship crossed the one hundred and eightieth meridian, the calendar was set back a day, and for once in their lives Iowans experienced two Fridays, both the thirteenth, in forty-eight hours.

When the morning of the last day of the journey dawned a heavy fog obscured the sea, but as the sun rose higher the fog melted away. The *Senator* ploughed through a sea as smooth as glass. The deck was lined with men eager to catch the first glimpse of land. Soon someone discerned the lighthouse and the white cliffs of the Farallones. Sea gulls circled about the vessel. Opposite the islands a pilot came aboard and the ship approached the Golden Gate. Fort Point and Fort Baker came into view, then Angel Island and Alcatraz. As the ship passed through the famed gateway to the Pacific “cheer after cheer, from hearts too full for any other utterance, swept across the bay and were swallowed up among the distant hills or re-echoed from their heights.”

Yonder was the Presidio. Slowly the ship steamed down San Francisco Bay and came to anchor off Angel Island to await quarantine inspection. Whistles and sirens ashore set up a raucous din. Yachts

and other small craft circled about the vessel. Two tug boats were seen to set out from shore and as they drew nearer familiar faces were recognized. Medical inspection was soon over and friends and relatives were allowed to come on deck. It was a joyous meeting, yet tears mingled with smiles for one soldier heard for the first time that his father in Iowa was dead, and a father who had journeyed to San Francisco to greet his boys learned that his younger son lay in a coffin on the upper deck.

As there was no vacant slip the ship could not dock that night, but arrangements were made to transfer the sick to the hospital at once. During the afternoon, mail which had been accumulating in San Francisco for weeks was brought aboard and distributed.

Early the next morning the ship moved alongside the pier, gang planks were lowered, and the debarkation began. Details were set to work getting the heavy baggage and guns out of the hold. Near noon the regiment was formed and, escorted by General W. R. Shafter and staff with a troop of cavalry and a battery of artillery, the Fifty-first once more marched through San Francisco streets. While passing down Van Ness Avenue the troops were thrown into company front and marched in review before General Shafter and Governor Shaw of Iowa.

When the regiment reached the Presidio it was assigned to tents already pitched, and invited by a Washington regiment to share its dinner. The

Fifty-first then settled down into comfortable quarters until mustered out on November 1, 1899. That afternoon found the companies in three special trains rolling eastward toward Iowa and home.

Two of the trains reached Council Bluffs on the morning of November 6th, but the third train, the one with the Council Bluffs company on board, did not arrive until night. All day long Iowa had awaited the return of its overseas soldiers and every town that had contributed to the personnel of the regiment had prepared to welcome its own. Everywhere the boys were overwhelmed with the warmth of their reception. And with the acclaim of all Iowa as a cherished memory, the Fifty-first marched into history.

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