

"In the Shadow of Glory"

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This excerpt is taken from Kyle Ward (2000). *In the Shadow of Glory: the 13th Minnesota in the Spanish American and Philippine American Wars, 1898-1899*. St. Cloud: Northstar Press, 141-145.

This is an account of the complex issues that faced the Minnesota volunteer soldiers who served in the Philippines.

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“Will Live in History”

As the sun rose on the morning of October 13, 1899, the men of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry found that they had returned to the normal, seemingly boring, lives they had tried to escape only a year and a half earlier. After eighteen months of service in the United States military and fighting two wars for their government, these mundane lives looked pretty good to them again.

Waking up that morning, many of the men probably reflected on what they had experienced since the day they enlisted to fight in the war against the Spaniards. For most, that spring of 1898 had held much promise. With their government and the newspapers telling them for weeks that a war with Spain would be a relatively quick and easy affair, many signed up so they could do their patriotic duty, prove their manhood and join in what was suppose to be the United States' last great adventure.

Reflecting on what they had happened to them since first enlisting, some undoubtedly had to be amazed at how much their feelings about the fighting in the Philippines, their own country's foreign policies, and even themselves had changed in the last eighteen months.

Enlisting in a frenzy of patriotic fervor, these soldiers, along with most of the nation, had found themselves heading into a war most did not understand. Believing they were going to go and save the Cubans and Filipinos from the Spaniards, the members of the Thirteenth Minnesota went to the Philippines with the understanding that they were off to fight a just and righteous war.

A year and one-half after signing up for this great cause, most soldiers remembered something quite different from their adventure in the Pacific. With political leaders in Washington and military commanders in Manila either waffling or constantly changing their policies toward the Philippines, those who were asked to fight these wars were made to enforce policies that many, at least by the time they left the Philippines, did not support. The men of the Thirteenth Minnesota believed they had signed up for a war to free the Filipinos by defeating their colonial masters, the Spanish. After a relatively easy victory over the Spanish and the signing of a peace treaty, which demanded that the Philippines become American territory, those who volunteered to fight found themselves forced to implement new and very different policies.

Minnesota's volunteer soldiers originally went along with this transformation of being an army of liberation to one of conquest, not because they agreed with what was happening, but because it was their duty and would give them the opportunity to further prove themselves. After listening to the Civil War generation question their patriotism and manhood for years, these men were not going to leave in the middle of a fight, thereby proving the older generation correct.

Reflecting on what they had accomplished in the Philippines, the veterans of the Thirteenth Minnesota believed they had not only earned their manhood but also had gained enough recognition to finally overshadow the Civil War veterans. They believed that after all they had endured, they too could put their names in the history books alongside those Minnesota units that had fought in the Civil War.

Agreeing with this notion, the editor of the *Red Wing Republican* wrote an article entitled "WILL LIVE IN HISTORY," published on October 12, 1899, the same day as the Thirteenth's return to the Twin Cities. The *Republican* told its readers that Minnesota was just as proud of the Thirteenth as they were of the most famous of all the Civil War units, the First Minnesota. The editor claimed that, "Minnesota's name has again been carried to the front of battle and another regiment bearing the name of the state shares the people's pride." Writing what the returning soldiers all wanted to hear, the *Republican* concluded by stating; ". . . they acquitted themselves with honor and glory and added new luster to the honored name of the state. . . ." For those who volunteered eighteen months before, this was not only a vindication of their manhood but a thank-you for the glory and honor they brought not only to themselves but to their state through their actions in the Philippines.¹

The stirring words of the *Red Wing Republican* proved unprophetic, however. For the men of the Thirteenth, the memory of what they had done all but vanished from the historical landscape by the end of that October. Once the volunteer returned to their everyday lives, Minnesota and the nation at large quickly forgot about them and what they had done.

The fading recognition was due in part to the war in the Philippines, which still raged. With the removal of the volunteers, the Regular Army remained in the islands trying to conclude the war, which had started in February 1899. This conflict, which officially continued until July 4, 1902 (when President Theodore Roosevelt finally declared it over), quickly turned into a cruel and brutal war waged between two sides that shared common misunderstandings and growing hatreds.² While the Minnesotans left at a time when animosities were still at a relatively low level, the war turned more violent as the years passed.

With soldiers returning home, supplemented by newspapers recalling the war's events, stories of the brutality developing in the Philippines were heard by all. With knowledge of the brutal acts committed by both sides, and with this war seeming to have no end, many Americans began to question why the United States was so set on the subjugation of the Filipinos.

The birth of groups such as the Anti-Imperialist League, coupled with a national election in 1900, intensified these questions around the nation. After much soul searching, many Americans could not find any reason for America to be in the Philippines except for the notion that the United States was trying to become an imperialist power. If this were true, was America not then just as guilty of being an oppressive nation as the Spaniards had been? This belief intensified when reports came back from the Philippines that

"WILL LIVE IN HISTORY"

THE THIRTEENTH REGIMENT UNDER FIRE MANY TIMES

The following is an Official List of Engagements the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry participated in.

Battle of Manila	(Regiment)	August 13, 1899.
Uprising and Attack by Insurgents	(Regiment)	February 14, 1899.
Riot in Tondo District	(Company C)	February 5, 1899.
Tondo District Uprising	(Cos. C, M, D, L)	February 22, 1899.
Tondo District Uprising	(Cos. C, M, G)	February 23, 1899.
Battle of Marquina Road	(Regiment)	March 25, 1899.
Skirmish on Marquina Road	(Regiment)	March 26, 1899.
Skirmish near Bocave	(Company D)	April 9, 1899.
Skirmish near Santa Maria	(Company C)	April 9, 1899.
The Attack on Railroad Track	(Regiment)	April 10-11, 1899.
Battle of Santa Maria	(Regiment)	April 12, 1899.
Skirmish near Quingua	(Company I)	April 14, 1899.
Skirmish near Guiguinto	(Cos. F, B, A, L, M)	April 14, 1899.
Skirmish near Quingua	(Company I)	April 16, 1889.
Battle of Guiguinto	(Cos. A, B, F)	April 20, 1899.
Battle of Quingua	(Cos. A, B, F, H)	April 21, 1899.
Skirmish near Quingua	(Company I)	April 25, 1899.

With General Lawton's Expedition—Cos. K, L, M, G, C, D, E and H.

Battle of Norzagaray	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	April 23-24, 1899.
Skirmish Near Angat	(Cos. C, D, E, H)	April 24, 1899.
Attack on Norzagaray	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	April 25, 1899.
Battle at Angat	(Cos. C, D, E, H)	April 25, 1899.
Battle of Marangco	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	April 27, 1899.
Capture of Polo and San Rafael	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	April 29, 1899.
Battle of San Rafael	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 1, 1899.
Battle of Baliatig	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 2, 1899.
Battle of Maasin	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 4, 1899.
Skirmish Near San Idefonso	(Company K)	May 8, 1899.
Capture of San Idefonso	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 12, 1899.
Capture of San Miguel	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 13, 1899.
Battle of Salacot	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 15, 1899.
Capture of Baluarte	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 16, 1899.
Capture of San Roque	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 16, 1899.
Battle of San Isidro	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 17, 1899.
Capture of Gapan	(Cos. C, D, E, H)	May 17, 1899.
Skirmish at San Antonio	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 20, 1899.
Skirmish Near Arayat	(Cos. C, D, E, H, K, L, M, G)	May 21, 1899.

E. G. FALK,
1st Lieut. and Adj't. 13th Minn. Vol. Inf'y.

By Order of **COLONEL AMES,**
Commanding.

A list of the battles in which the members of the Thirteenth served during their time in the Philippines.
(From the *Minneapolis Tribune*, October 8, 1899)

American soldiers were fighting the Filipinos—the very same people Americans had been told only a few months earlier that they had to free from the Spanish so that they could enjoy the same kind of democracy Americans enjoyed.

Remembering the war from their unique vantage point, the Minnesota volunteers had mixed emotions about what continued to transpire in the Philippines. On the one hand, many believed the fighting against the Filipinos was wrong. They agreed with General Charles McC. Reeve that the war need not have been fought had it not been for mistakes made by both American military and political leaders. On the other hand, they had gone off and served their country valiantly, had defeated the Spaniards and, when asked, took up arms against the Filipinos. Although these soldiers may have questioned their role in the wars in the Philippines, none ever lost their sincere patriotism.

The men of the Thirteenth also never lost many of the beliefs they brought with them. Entering the islands with stereotypes and prejudices, many of the Minnesotans sincerely believed that people who did not look or act like them were naturally inferior. These beliefs intensified with the brutal killing of Private Jesse Cole. In the minds of many, this was justification that the natives were not only inferior but also treacherous, which, for many volunteers, gave them and the United States the right to control the islands.

With all the controversy swirling around what should have, or should not have, taken place in the Philippines, many Americans chose to forget completely what had transpired. While the Spanish-American War was always remembered as a “splendid little war,” the Philippine-American War would all but disappear from American history books. The Spanish-American War itself only became remembered through slogans that would have made the most ardent jingoist proud.

“Remember the Maine,” Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders, and the Battle of San Juan Hill are all that are usually recalled by most Americans.

Twenty years after the wars in the Philippines, with the conclusion of World War I, the memory of the War of 1898 and its aftermath was almost completely wiped from America’s conscience. With dreams of forever being remembered as brave and gallant soldiers fading, veterans of the Spanish-American War realized their campaign had lost its luster. For now, not only was their war sandwiched in the history books between the Civil War and World War I, but those two wars, in the minds of most Americans, were seen as righteous and justifiable wars, while the war against Spain and the Filipinos was of questionable motivation. Unlike the “glorious causes” of saving the union, freeing the slaves, or making the world safe for democracy, the fighting in 1898 and 1899 was seen by many as the United States forcing its will upon weaker nations such as the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Fearful of how he felt people would remember those Minnesotans who served during this time, General Charles Reeve later wrote, “[H]istory will record Minnesota’s part in the struggle with Spain, whatever of praise or blame should attach to her sons in southern camps and on tropical field, posterity shall judge.”³

Reeve understood that the controversies that followed the wars in the Philippines might besmirch the good name of the volunteers who had fought in the far-off islands. Reeve and his men wanted it remembered that they had served in an unpopular war, but that when their country called on them they were ready to serve.

Doing their duty by enlisting to fight for their country, the soldiers later believed they were doing their duty when they began to question America’s policies toward the Philippines. As Governor Lind

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had stated in his speech of October 12, 1899, the volunteer soldier not only carried a gun but a conscience as well.

By questioning Washington’s policies, these Minnesotans, along with other state’s volunteers, were able to force many American citizens, as well as military and political leaders, to look at what was going on in the Philippines. Putting the spotlight on America’s new imperialistic policies, these volunteers forced the United States to take a serious look at itself before it completely entered the arena of international affairs.

By questioning their own and their country’s role in the Philippines, these Minnesotans can be given the title of “reluctant heroes.” Their unquestionable service to their country and bravery on the battlefields helped many to find the necessary emotions to make themselves feel proud of who they were. For others, it was their open questioning of America’s imperialistic policies that they felt truly gave them the title of heroes. In the end, it was a combination of the two that made the members of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteers heroes. Unfortunately for those men who served, they became heroes that history books have all but forgotten.

NOTES

¹*Red Wing Republican*, October 12, 1899, p. 7.

²Although officially declared over, battles were still fought between the Americans and Filipino’s until 1913, which would make this one of America’s longest wars ever fought.

³William Fitch and General McC. Reeve, *13th Minnesota Vols.: Historical Record in the War with Spain* (Minneapolis: Price Bros. Printing Co., 1900), p. 11.