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Article Summary: A spirited regiment of young Nebraska volunteers departed for the Philippines in 1898 as part of a U.S. intervention in Cuba. Their leader, John Stotsenburg, succeeded in transforming a poorly trained outfit into a fighting unit, but some soldiers complained that his discipline had been too rigorous.

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The Saga of the First Nebraska in the Philippines¹

By J. R. Johnson

ON April 20, 1898, President McKinley signed a joint resolution of Congress calling for intervention in Cuba. An act of Congress of April 25 declared that war with Spain had existed since April 21.² The country was in a mood for war. The build-up had been in the making for quite some time. Yet, except for the Navy, we were totally unprepared. Luckily, our enemy was in worse condition. The "yellow press" screamed for war. Preachers preached and prayed for war. Big Navy men thumped for war—wanted to try out their new battle-wagons. Sugar interests demanded action to stabilize conditions in Cuba. Women's clubs worried over the poor Cubans. The pitiful stories relating the atrocities of the bloodthirsty, cut-throat Spaniards pulled heavily at American heartstrings. We must go to the rescue of these helpless, downtrodden, next-door neighbors who were struggling for liberty. Humanitarianism demanded it. The Hearst Press demanded it. W. J. Bryan demanded it. "Remember the Maine" was the battle-cry. "Butcher" Weyler's bloody acts must be avenged. The Crusade was on.³

This is a narrative relating the exploits of a regiment of young Nebraska volunteers who participated in this Crusade, but, contrary to expectations, their travels carried them westward rather than to the "Pearl of the

¹John Reuben Johnson, "Nebraska in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection: A Study in Imperialism" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Nebraska Library), pp. 1-30, 49-128, 244, 268, is the principal source of this article.

²House Document No. 2, 55 Congress, 3rd Session, 258-259.

³Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People* (New York, 1940), pp. 494-510; Walter Millis, *The Martial Spirit* (Cambridge, 1931), pp. 1-145; Marcus M. Wilkerson, *Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War* (Baton Rouge, 1932).

Antilles." Destination Philippines, not Cuba, was cut out for them. This was a new generation, eager to emulate the heroics of the G. A. R. How often they had listened to the glorious accounts of the Civil War. The seamy side of that war was all but forgotten. We had beaten down the Cleveland depression and McKinley prosperity was on the way. The "Gay Nineties" had arrived. America was singing. "Ta Ra Ra Boom-De-Ay," "The Bowery," "Sidewalks of New York," "Just Because She Made them Goo Goo Eyes," "The Band Played On," "Sweet Rosie O'Grady," and "Mandy Lee," were hit tunes of the day. "A Hot Time in the Old Town" made its appearance in 1897 and was soon on everyone's lips and 1898 brought such sentimental favorites as "Just One Girl," "Just as the Sun Went Down," and "Good Bye, Little Girl, Good Bye." Few seemed to realize that a war would entail any extraordinary effort or sacrifice on our part. The diplomats had done a reasonably good job and seemed to be coming to an understanding with Spain. McKinley was no war monger but he could not stem the tide. The propagandists were doing their drum-beating effectively. The cry, "On to Cuba," would not be stilled. Nebraska, like all other sections, took up the chant.⁴

The Nebraska National Guard consisted of two regiments of infantry, one troop of cavalry and a battery of artillery. Sensing the probability of war, Governor Silas Holcomb called the principal officers of these units into a conference, April 6. Following this meeting he wired President McKinley offering the State's organized military forces on short notice. The answer came, April 23, placing Nebraska's quota at two regiments of infantry. The Governor immediately ordered the First and Second regiments to mobilize in Lincoln.⁵ The response in the

⁴*Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), April 27, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, March 26, 29, 30, April 1, 12, 13, 14, 18, 1898; *Omaha World Herald*, May 23, July 17, 1898; *McCook Republican*, March 25, April 1, 1898; *Woman's Weekly* (Omaha, Nebraska), March 26, April 2, 1898; John D. Hicks, *The American Nation* (Cambridge, 1941), pp. 307-313.

⁵*Report of the Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, pp. 5-8.

Guard towns was immediate and the home folks went "all out" in raising funds to give the boys send-off gifts. Patriotic meetings, banquets and farewell demonstrations, at which Civil War veterans held the limelight, were universal.⁶ The numerical quota was 2,114 and two regiments of about 65 men per company were insufficient. Also, 487 were discharged because of physical disability or on their own application. It was, therefore, necessary to recruit additional members to bring each company up to full war-time strength of 106.⁷ No difficulty was encountered in doing this and university students, especially, joined eagerly. The problem was not in securing enlistments but in preventing them until the proper time. Chancellor George E. MacLean of the University of Nebraska, arranged for the granting of degrees to enlisted seniors. Undergraduates were urged to wait until the close of school to enlist, but this advice was not always heeded. One university professor, Morey Hodgman, who in a chapel talk, condemned the war as "unchristian and unholy," was taken to task editorially and his ouster from the faculty demanded.⁸

It was an enthusiastic congregation that assembled in Lincoln and took up quarters at the Fair Grounds, a camp christened Camp Saunders in honor of Nebraska's Civil War governor. There was great activity here during the three week encampment. Visitors made life miserable for camp officers. An account in a Lincoln paper runs as follows:

The camp is simply overrun with visitors. They come in every way imaginable. The traction company is running cars every fifteen minutes. The roads are black with cyclists and all kinds of vehicles. The visitors drive their teams in every place, having no regard whatever for company streets unless guarded by a picket.⁹

⁶*Lincoln Evening News*, April 22, 23, 1898; *Nebraska State Journal*, April 26-28, 1898.

⁷*Report of the Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1896-1898*, pp. 5-8. 94; *Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899*, Report, Major General Commanding the Army, Part II, p. 364.

⁸*Lincoln Evening News*, April 23, May 7, 1898; *Nebraska State Journal*, April 29, May 6, 1898; *The Sombbrero* (Lincoln, 1900), V, 195-202, VI, 152; W. H. Hayward (Captain, Co. C, 2nd Nebr. Regt.), Letter, April 7, 1933, to the writer.

⁹*Nebraska State Journal*, April 26-28, 1898.

The commanding officer, Colonel John P. Bratt, was an ex-hardware merchant from Bennett, Nebraska. He was a soft-spoken and kindly gentleman but had few of the attributes of a professional soldier.¹⁰ The man destined to make the First Nebraska into a real fighting force was Major John F. Stotsenburg. A native of Indiana and a regular army officer, he had had much experience as an Indian fighter. At the outbreak of the war he was commandant of the university cadets.¹¹ A man with an established military reputation, he was disliked by many of the men during the earlier period of the regiment's service. The guardsmen, accustomed to having a hand in the selection of officer personnel, considered Stotsenburg a martinet who should have been assigned elsewhere. This dislike changed to deep respect at a later date when his real qualities as a leader became better known.

Probably the most colorful event at Camp Saunders was a big parade held Saturday afternoon, May 7, which included both regiments and the university cadets.

It is estimated that 25,000 people witnessed the dress parade in the evening and fully eight thousand people entered Lincoln on excursion trains. Streets of the city were crowded. Hotels and restaurants were virtually eaten out of provisions at noon . . . Streets of the city were impassable, owing to the crush. Carriages surrounded the outer edges and people filled the camp until the white tents and dark forms wedged in the streets alone could be seen from a distance. When the troops entered the parade grounds there was hardly room for the evolutions of the regiments. The amphitheatre was filled with spectators, the quarter stretch was packed. Carriages occupied the race course and the side of a hill where a good view was afforded.¹²

Governor Holcomb received a wire from the Secretary of War on May 8 stating that the first regiment to be fully equipped and ready was to be sent to Chicka-

¹⁰Interview, Frank D. Eager (Lieut. Col., 1st Nebr. Regt.), June 30, 1927; *Nebraska State Journal*, April 29, 1898.

¹¹*The Sombbrero*, V, 203; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1902-1913), III, 630, 631.

¹²*Nebraska State Journal*, May 8, 9, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, May 7, 1898; *Report of the Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, p. 48.

mauga Park, Georgia, and he replied that the First Regiment would be ready May 11. The next day brought another message saying that "owing to changed conditions the destination of troops your state changed to San Francisco."¹³ Holcomb wanted both units sent together and charges of favoritism were made that the First had pulled wires to get the initial call.¹⁴ Claims were also made that certain officers were transferred or rejected without sufficient reasons. Evidence seems to bear out the latter.¹⁵

Both regiments were formally mustered into the service of the United States, May 12; the First entrained for San Francisco, May 16,¹⁶ the Second for Chickamauga Park, May 19.¹⁷ Three trains carried the First and a rather pleasant journey was made westward. Noisy receptions were given it along the way, especially in Nebraska.

Everywhere along the line the boys were greeted with utmost enthusiasm. Farmers stopped their plowing and wildly waved, women and girls stood in farm doors and fluttered handkerchiefs and aprons, the country schools turned out to a kidlet and jubilantly demonstrated their patriotism. In all the towns along the way the people turned out and lined the track, waving flags and cheering with all their lung power, assisted by brass bands and drum corps.¹⁸

The Nebraskans were the first volunteers to cross the Rockies and the first to reach San Francisco. They came to boast that they were the first in a number of ways.¹⁹

A poor selection had been made in a camp site, a statement that may well be applied to most of the camps

¹³*Nebraska State Journal*, May 9, 10, 1898.

¹⁴Interviews: H. J. Paul (Adjutant General Nebr.), August 2, 1938; John F. Grau (2nd Lt., Co. E., 2nd Nebr. Regt.), October 17, 1932; Charles M. Sutherland (Clerk, Co. K, 2nd Nebr. Regt.), January 3, 1935; John P. Bratt (Col., 1st Nebr. Regt.), June 30, July 5, 1927; Frank D. Eager (Lt. Col., 1st Nebr. Regt.), June 30, 1927; *Nebraska State Journal*, May 16, 1898.

¹⁵Interview, C. F. Scharman (Major, 3rd Nebr. Regt.), October 17, 1932; Hayward Letter, loc. cit., April 7, 1933; *Report of the Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1899-1900*, p. 738 (Mulford Letter); *Nebraska State Journal*, May 12, June 25, 1898; *Lincoln Evening News*, May 12, 1898.

¹⁶*Nebraska State Journal*, May 11, 13, 15, 17, 1898.

¹⁷*Lincoln Evening News*, May 19, 1898.

¹⁸*Nebraska State Journal*, May 17, 18, 1898.

¹⁹*Report of the Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897, 1898*, pp. 87-89.

of the Spanish-American War. This one had once been a race track with a pond in the center, now filled with sand. Major Stotsenburg wrote that "we are in a very sandy, disagreeable camp and the sand and dirt is quite a contrast to our Lincoln camp, and rain and cold weather still pursue us."²⁰ The place, nameless at first, was soon christened Camp Merritt for General Merritt who commanded the Army of the Pacific. It was located four miles west of the main part of the city, a mile east of the ocean and immediately north of Golden Gate Park. Other regiments came and the Third Provisional Brigade was formed, including the Tenth Pennsylvania, the First Colorado and the First Nebraska. Battalion drills were conducted on Presidio Hill. A heavy schedule was maintained but the men managed to find time to see the sights of San Francisco and make acquaintances there.²¹ Orders came to recruit the regiment to 106 men to the company but these "rookies" did not join the others until November 25, in Manila.²²

The men were already getting restless when an order came to break camp on June 14. The "Gallant First" was cheered lustily as it marched through the city. Bands played, whistles were blown and guns fired. It was a gala day in "Frisco." Delicacies were showered upon the men and the Red Cross served an elegant supper just as they boarded the *Senator*.²³ This vessel, built for coastal trade, had normal accommodations for 577 passengers. Changes were made to provide for 572 additional passengers and a crew of 69. There were now on board 1,023 officers and men together with the crew.²⁴ Needless to say the journey to the Far East proved to be a most uncomfortable voyage. Just before sailing Private Clay M.

²⁰*Nebraska State Journal* (Letter to governor's private secretary, Benton Maret), June 5, 1898.

²¹*Ibid.*, June 2, 5, 6, 1898.

²²*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, p. 94; *Nebraska State Journal*, June 14, 1898; *Annual Report of the War Department for 1898*, Part 2, p. 380.

²³*Nebraska State Journal*, June 20, 1898; *Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, pp. 97, 98.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 109; *Report, Secretary of War for 1898*, p. 174.

McCoy was tried by court-martial for disorderly conduct and striking an officer. He was convicted and dishonorably discharged.²⁶ However, he stowed away on the *Senator* but was put ashore at Honolulu. Only one desertion is on record in the First Nebraska, that of Private J. B. Kelley in San Francisco. Seven men were left in the hospital and Captain John G. Painter, Company M, resigned because of ill health.²⁶

General Greene was in command of the expedition, the second to leave for the Philippines. It was made up of four ships, the *China*, the *Zealandia*, the *Colon* and the *Senator*; and sailed without armed escort June 15. There were 158 officers and 3,428 enlisted men on board.²⁷ Seasickness soon caught up with many of them. G. E. Towl, who wrote for the *Nebraska State Journal*, had this comment: "Words fail to express in even slight degree the utter and abject horror of these two or three days of sickness when 1,000 men paid tribute to Neptune with wrenchings and travail which spoke of untold wretchedness." The first toll of the regiment came when, after six days, Sergeant George Geddes of Beatrice died of spinal meningitis. He was buried at sea with full military honors, a touching ceremony that made a lasting impression on the men.²⁸

The transports arrived in Honolulu about 10 P. M., June 20 and were serenaded by an official band playing popular American airs. Five days were spent in Hawaii, days long remembered. The first day ashore the troops were given a royal reception which, because of the "annexation spirit," was especially enthusiastic. A sumptuous

²⁵*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, pp. 95, 110; Interview, Colonel Bratt, July 6, 1927.

²⁶*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, p. 104.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 95; Interview, John W. Kelso (Pvt., Co. A, 1st Nebr. Regt.), June 22, 1927; Interview, Bratt, July 5, 1927; *House Document No. 2*, 55th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 269.

²⁸*Nebraska State Journal*, July 11, 12, 1898; *Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, 100, 101; Interview, O. W. Meier (Pvt., C. H, 1st Nebr. Regt.), June 22, 1927; Interview, P. James Cosgrave (Capt., Co. I, 1st Nebr. Regt.), June 30, 1927.

feast was served by the ladies of the city. Music was furnished by the former queen's band.

At 1 o'clock the whole expedition of over 3,000 men gathered in the beautiful grounds of the former queen's palace. Long tables under canvas awnings had been laid with the most sumptuous and appetizing dinner imaginable. All the natural wealth of this semi-tropical isle had been called to lend its fruits to the occasion. The tables were loaded with meats, breads and cakes, with bananas, oranges, mangroves, figs, dates, cocoanuts, pineapples and grapes. There were pies and cake, coffee, soda waters and ginger ale with cigars to top it all, but best and chiefest were the attentions and hospitalities of the ladies. They covered the boys with flowers and badges, with love words inscribed upon them. They welcomed them, bade them have good heart and fight well and hoped that one flag might soon float over all.²⁹

The remainder of the voyage was extremely unpleasant. Much of the fresh food spoiled, the refrigerating mechanism broke down and the condenser stopped functioning, necessitating a water allowance. Ocean water was used for bathing and laundering. It was very warm and the cramped quarters added to the misery. Short hair became a "must" for all and woe to the objector. Time was passed with card playing, "shooting craps" and reading. Wake Island was sighted the morning of July 4, a low, sandy place with scant vegetation and uninhabited. General Greene went ashore with a party, a flag pole was erected and the Stars and Stripes hoisted. At noon that day forty-five guns were fired by the *Colon*, one for each state in the Union. A patriotic program was held on the *Senator* in the afternoon. One soldier wrote home that it was the driest Fourth he had ever celebrated, yet it was wet all around. A few days later Guam came in view but no stop was made. The expedition was fortunate in two respects, no storms or Spanish ships were encountered.³⁰

²⁹*Nebraska State Journal* (Towl letter), July 12, 1898, (O. W. Meier letter), August 30, 1898.

³⁰Interviews, Bratt and Eager, June 30, 1927; Interview, Meier, June 22, 1927; *Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, pp. 106-112; Cecil Jack (Pvt., Co. M, 1st Nebr. Regt.), *Pocket Diary*. The writer has personally examined this diary. An excellent description of the voyage from Honolulu to Manila appears in the "Diary of a Soldier," *Nebraska State Journal*, August, 28, 1898. Also, Colonel Bratt's account in the same newspaper, September 29, 1898.

The battleship *Boston* met the transports two days out of Manila Bay which place was reached about 9 A. M., July 17. The scene that met the eye is aptly described in the diary of Colonel Bratt's orderly, Private Cecil Jack:

As we steam toward Cavite I can see broken boilers, sunk-en ships with masts protruding from water, and battered forts, all wrecked. Our (Dewey's) fleet salutes us. A few miles to the northeast can be discerned the foreign fleets of Germany, England and Japan and others, floating majestically just outside of Manila, which place looms up magnificently in the morning sun. A battle is in progress between the Insurgents and Spaniards which we are informed is a daily occurrence. The discharges of artillery can be seen and sound made thereby, distinctly heard.³¹

Dewey's fleet, which had won its smashing victory May 1, was leisurely awaiting the arrival of sufficient land forces before opening an assault on Manila. The Philippine Insurgents under Aguinaldo were encamped outside that city ready to wreak vengeance on the Spaniards at the first opportunity. The necessity of occupying the city and keeping out the Filipinos provided a ticklish situation for the American commanders. The Spaniards seemed to be in a mood to surrender after a "token resistance" to make it look better with the Madrid Government, but they feared an uncontrolled native force. The Filipinos were determined to have a hand in the occupation and were fast becoming angered at the Americans. They feared, with considerable justification, that their liberators would prove to be new masters.³²

The Nebraska regiment disembarked about four miles south of Manila at a place they named Camp Dewey but popularly known as the "Peanut Patch." It was a low area and the rainy season had just started. The "dog" tents afforded inadequate protection from the heat and rain. One soldier wrote: "Dust blown at Lincoln, frozen in San Francisco, scorched in Honolulu and half drowned

³¹Jack, *Diary*, p. 21.

³²R. A. Alger, *The Spanish-American War* (New York, 1901), pp. 326-333; *House Document No. 2*, 55th Congress, 3rd Session, pp. 47, 48.

before Manila, we begin to think that we have stood all the trials in the category." Almost a month was to pass before the general advance was to be made on Manila. In the meantime a certain amount of maneuvering and desultory fighting took place. There were ten casualties in the regiment, one man (Private William F. Lewis) was killed and nine others wounded.³³

On August 7, General Merritt, in charge of land forces, and Admiral Dewey notified the Spanish Captain-General that land and naval operations would begin any time after forty-eight hours. The harbor was cleared of foreign vessels and non-combatants began to leave the city. A formal demand for surrender was made and rejected August 9.³⁴ Plans now went forward for the attack. Firing was directed on the Spanish forts by Dewey at 9:30 A.M., August 13, followed shortly by a battery under General Arthur MacArthur. Forty-five minutes later Merritt ordered an advance.³⁵ The Nebraskans' position was along the beach where they marched in water from knee to neck deep. The sea wall lay between them and the rest of the advancing army. The water got deeper and deeper but shortly they found an opening in the wall that led to the English Club grounds. Turning right they came upon a road leading to the walled city. Here Colonel Bratt met General Greene and was ordered to concentrate the regiment, throw out an advance guard and proceed cautiously. They were under fire and it appeared that it would be necessary to fight their way in but soon a white flag was seen on the wall. Some firing continued, due to the "trigger-happy" Insurgents who persisted in taking a hand in the fracas. Colonel Bratt was next ordered to drive back a group of natives congregating on the Lunetta (a wide avenue encircling a part of the city) so he formed two companies who, with fixed bayonets, forced them to

³³*Nebraska State Journal* (Lewis S. Ryan letter), August 29, 1898; September 6, 1898; *Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, pp. 114-116; *House Document No. 3, 55th Congress, 3rd Session*, pp. 65, 66.

³⁴*House Document No. 2, 55th Congress, 3rd Session*, pp. 3-7.

³⁵Alger, *op. cit.*, pp. 336, 337.

retreat. One battalion of Nebraska men was left to stand guard while the other two crossed the Bridge of Spain, spanning the Pasig River, and entered the north part of the city known as New Manila and outside the wall.³⁶

General Greene had entered the city with a Spanish escort about one o'clock and his headquarters' flag was raised at the palace amid a great demonstration. It is claimed that the Nebraska troops were the first to enter the city, another claim to a "first." American casualties in the assault and capture of Manila were five killed and forty-three wounded. The First Nebraska came through without a loss and without firing a shot, though it was under fire most of the time.³⁷ This land and naval attack is one of the few instances in American military history that worked exactly as planned, due chiefly to the feeble resistance of the enemy and the presence of Dewey's guns. Credit, however, should be given to the "thorough reconnaissance that had been made" and the careful preparations for executing the plan.³⁸ Telephonic and telegraphic communication was established and maintained "not only between headquarters and the commanding general, and his detached commands and depots, but as the army moved forward the signal corps carried into advanced trenches its lines, and repaired them under fire, whereby communication was maintained throughout the campaign."³⁹

The surrender of Manila came just one day after the signing of an armistice with Spain, the news of which had not yet reached the combatants in the Philippines. The First Nebraska was assigned to garrison duty, guard-

³⁶Information relative to the entry of the First Nebraska is drawn largely from interviews with Colonel Bratt, June 30, July 5, 1927; Lieutenant Colonel Eager, June 30, 1927, October 10, 1932; and with Captain William B. Oury (Co. B, 1st Nebr. Regt.), November 10, 1932. A full account is found in *Nebraska State Journal*, September 28, 1898. Also, see correspondence of H. B. Taylor (Pvt., Co. L, 1st Nebr. Regt.), in *Omaha World Herald*, October 23, 30, 1898. Jack, *Diary*, pp. 45-53, gives an account.

³⁷Alger, *op. cit.*, p. 340; Interview, Bratt, June 30, 1927.

³⁸Matthew Forney Steele, *American Campaigns, War Document No. 324* (Washington, 1909), I, 626, 627.

³⁹*House Document No. 2*, 55th Congress, 3rd Session, p. 878

ing the water front and some of the most valuable property in the Binondo district. The streets were dirty, the water supply had been shut off, food was becoming scarce and business houses had been closed for some time when the Americans took control. Within three days order was established and business resumed as usual.⁴⁰ The regiment remained in Manila until early December when it was removed to Santa Mesa, the most eastern suburb of the city. The change was made for sanitary reasons as many were suffering from various illnesses.⁴¹ The daily routine became tiresome and the complaints were numerous. Letters written home during this period would fill several volumes. All followed the same theme: "We want to go home!" The men felt that their mission had been accomplished and that garrison duty was for the regular army. The following jingle called the "New Version" is indicative of their feelings:

Our father who art in Washington
McKinley is thy name;
I wish you'd come with a fleet of ships
And take us home again.

We've done all we bargained for,
And are sure 'twould be a treat
To be taken back to old Nebraska,
Our loved ones there to greet.

The weather here is kind of hot,
And a trying on the brain,
And then, the way they've fed us
Would give any man a pain.

Hard-tack, rice and mule meat,
With salmon on the side,
Would drive most anyone to drink,
Or get a hobo's hide.

I guess I'll bring this to a close;
The thought drives me insane,
But I'll know enough to stay there
If I get home again.

⁴⁰*Nebraska State Journal* (Captain Herpolsheimer letter), October 3, 1898; (O. W. Meier letter), October 17, 1898; Interview, Kelso, *op. cit.*, June 22, 1927; Interviews, Bratt, Cosgrave and Eager.

⁴¹*Annual Report of the War Department*, 1899, Part 2, 93, 94; *Nebraska State Journal* (Surgeon General Snyder report), January 8, 1899.

We've done what we enlisted for—
Remembered well the Maine:
We freed the Filipinos
And whipped hell out of Spain.

Humanity I'll fight for still,
But keep it in your pate,
The fighting I do when I get home
Will be in my dear old State.⁴²

Colonel Bratt tendered his resignation September 27, apparently because of illness, and recommended Major Stotsenburg as his successor, jumping Lieutenant Colonel Colton who was next in line. Bratt declared Colton was not properly qualified. Lieutenant Colonel Eager states that "it was for the good of the regiment" that Bratt resigned for although he was a "fine gentleman, he was not possessed of the military knowledge that Stotsenburg had."⁴³ Two telegrams were sent to Governor Holcomb asking that the regiment be mustered out, one by Stotsenburg October 5 (in response to a query by Governor Holcomb), and another the next day by a group of officers. These stated: "Officers and men assuming war over want to go home. Military condition, good; health, poor" and "Regiment voted unanimously for muster-out. Health poor, sickness increasing." The best the Governor could do was secure the discharge of enough men to reduce each company to eighty men. These disabled soldiers left on the transport *Ohio*. It is claimed that some of these were "mentally disabled," let out for the good of the regiment. Judging from the thunder they made on their return the charges were not far wrong. Recruits, who sailed from San Francisco August 21, arrived in November and were assigned to the various companies.⁴⁴

The camp at Santa Mesa was a muddy place at first but soon became a model site. Situated on a knoll, surrounded by rice fields gently sloping toward the Pasig

⁴²*The Nebraska Independent*, March 2, 1899.

⁴³*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1897-1898*, p. 120; *Nebraska State Journal*, November 3, 1898.

⁴⁴*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1899-1900*, pp. 786-793, 889, 891-893; *Nebraska State Journal*, October 6, 7, 10, 14, December 11, 1898.

and San Juan rivers, it was really a pretty place. There was no crowding and sanitary conditions were the best obtainable.⁴⁵ Here the troops were put through rigid training which seemed unnecessary at the time, but the importance of which was soon to be apparent. Here they spent Christmas, and though the packages from home had not arrived, a rather enjoyable day was spent in eating, playing baseball and football and having an all-around good time. Stotsenburg's strict training was continued and the regiment developed into a strong organization.⁴⁶ Relations with the Insurgents grew more strained each day pending the making of a final peace with Spain. When the terms were made known and independence for the Filipinos was not included, an outbreak of the restless soldiers under Aguinaldo appeared imminent. The native troops had long been excluded from Manila and its suburbs. Reinforcements continued to arrive from the United States. General E. S. Otis succeeded General Merritt as military governor and two divisions were created October 14. The First Nebraska formed part of the Second Brigade of the Second Division. This division was commanded by General MacArthur and Brigadier General Irving Hale was in charge of the Second Brigade.⁴⁷

Armed Filipinos constantly irritated the Americans who found it increasingly difficult to hold their tempers and their fire. Strict orders had been given to avoid all contacts with the native soldiery.⁴⁸ The Filipinos were getting the idea that the Americans were cowards and afraid to fight. They would say: "Mericans heap eat, heap sleep, much hip, hip; no fightee."⁴⁹ Aguinaldo had trenches constructed around Manila. Efforts to make terms with

⁴⁵*The First Nebraska in Camp and Field* (Crete, Nebraska, n. d.). A popular account written by First Nebraska men.

⁴⁶*Omaha World Herald*, April 30, May 7, 1899; *Nebraska State Journal*, February 10, March 2, 16, 1899; Karl Irving Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines, Operations of the First Nebraska* (San Francisco, 1899), p. 12.

⁴⁷*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899*, Part 2, pp. 6-10, 20, 40-44.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 88, 92.

⁴⁹*Nebraska State Journal*, November 8, 1898.

him failed. A commission made up of both parties sat in Manila from January 9 to 25 without coming to an agreement. In the meantime Aguinaldo established a "capital" at Malolos just north of Manila where he was "proclaimed president, captain-general and everything else" according to the Manila papers. He had received much encouragement from abroad and believed the majority of the people of the United States sympathized with him. However, he wanted to withhold attack by his troops until he was better prepared and hoped that if hostilities began the Americans would strike first, thus branding them as aggressors.⁵⁰

He did not have long to wait. On the night of February 4 an insurgent approached an American picket, Private William Grayson of Beatrice, Nebraska, 150 yards within the American lines and refused to halt or answer when challenged. Grayson fired and the Philippine Insurrection was under way. The Filipinos opened fire on Camp Santa Mesa but mostly empty tents received the volleys since the regiment immediately took positions previously agreed upon. Early next morning the Nebraskans threw off another attack and then advanced, taking a powder magazine and the Deposito, a reservoir that supplied water from the Maraquina River, was taken by a force which included the First Nebraska. This position, five miles beyond the American lines, was a danger spot but a line of communication was kept open. Some of the pumping machinery had been hidden by the guerrillas but was found under a pile of coal and rapidly reassembled. Within two days Manila was receiving its regular water supply. In this early fighting Stotsenburg was placed largely on his own initiative. The telegraphic communication was practically worthless since the brigade was stretched out for three miles over bamboo thickets and rice fields.⁵¹ The Colonel sprained his knee in a buffalo pit

⁵⁰*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899, Part 2, pp. 77-83, 88-95.*

⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 45, 92, 97, 100-102, 424, 425, 452, 453, 462-467, 472; Alger, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-358.

but persisted in remaining in the thick of the fight. "Limping, crawling, leaning upon a soldier or an officer, he saw everything, planned and had the battle won while the men swore by their fighting colonel."⁵²

There was much unrest in Manila among the natives. Secret societies had plans to burn the more important business sections as soon as the troops left for the field. Attempts were made at least twice, with some success, but the military police soon had order restored.⁵³ The Filipinos found that the Americans operated differently than the Spaniards. The latter fought chiefly at night and from trenches, the former advanced by rushes and fought day and night through all kinds of weather.⁵⁴

The First Nebraska remained on duty in the water-works area through February and early March. They had several sharp clashes during this time. At the beginning of hostilities there were 37 officers and 866 men in the regiment. Of this number six were killed and 39 wounded. The unit was relieved March 14 and took up a position three miles northeast of Manila until the northern campaign started March 25. New troops arrived and a general reorganization took place. Three brigades were now attached to both divisions. The Nebraskans continued as part of the Second Brigade of the Second Division. The total number of men available for field operations was 11,780. The First Nebraska had 31 officers and 808 men ready for action. The army advanced along an eight-mile line, the Nebraskans on the extreme right wing. This relative position was kept during most of the campaign and since a circular movement was followed, the regiment was like a runner in the outside lane of a race track, travelling a greater distance than other units. The terrain over which they fought was covered with bamboo jungles

⁵²*Nebraska State Journal* (Towl letter), March 21, 1899; *The Nebraska Independent*, March 23, 1899.

⁵³*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899, Part 2*, pp. 93, 99, 110, 426.

⁵⁴Interview, Cosgrave, July 25, 1927.

⁵⁵*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899, Part 2*, pp. 110, 422, 426, 469-487; *Part 3*, pp. 441-481; Faust, op. cit., pp. 19-24.

and there were many other hazards.⁵⁶ General Hale made this observation at a later date:

This advance of the Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota regiments (especially Nebraska, which, on account of its position and orders travelled farther than the others) through swamps knee to waist deep and numerous stagnant, mud-bottomed esteros waist to neck deep, under oppressive heat and in the face of a galling fire, driving the enemy from entrenched positions, which would have been strong without these natural obstacles, and with them would have been impregnable if held by American troops, may fairly be considered the most remarkable exhibition of persevering pluck and endurance during the campaign.⁵⁷

The first objective was Malolos, the rebel capital twenty miles away, where strong opposition was expected. Severe fighting took place at the village of San Francisco del Monte where Captain Lee Forby and Sergeant Walter Poor were killed and fourteen others wounded. Another stubborn fight occurred at Meyauayan where part of the regiment went to the aid of the Dakotans. Farther ahead at Marilao a large force was routed and chased for two miles. It was during this engagement that General Hale remarked: "There go those Nebraskans again, and all hell couldn't stop them." Only feeble resistance was encountered at Malolos where the whole American line advanced, crescent-like, and enveloped the city. Aguinaldo had moved his capital to San Isidro, thirty miles to the northeast. The attempt of the fleeing guerrillas to burn and destroy met with little success due to the rapid advance against them. Stotsenburg reported from Malolos that the regiment's casualties were eight killed and eighty-two wounded during the campaign and sixty-five miles were covered in six days over difficult country.⁵⁸

The First Nebraska was in or near Malolos for twenty-two days. The next move was planned for April 24 but unforeseen developments advanced the date. A scouting

⁵⁶*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899, Part 3, pp. 377-379, 453-468.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 478.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 391-393, 453-468 (Reports of MacArthur, Hale and Stotsenburg).

party, April 23, found itself almost surrounded by a well organized force armed with Mauser rifles. Reenforcements, including a battalion of Nebraskans commanded by Captain Julius N. Kilian, were sent to the rescue. Colonel Stotsenburg was in Manila and Major Harry B. Mulford was temporarily in charge. After an advance was made General Hale ordered Mulford to withdraw his men so that the artillery might open fire. Mulford contends he followed his instructions but Stotsenburg arrived about this time and apparently not cognizant with Hale's plans, gave an order to advance. He believed someone had blundered in ordering a withdrawal. Leading his men in person a successful but costly charge was made. They met a withering fire resulting in four deaths, including Stotsenburg's, and thirty were wounded.⁵⁹ Major James F. Bell paid this tribute to the gallant colonel:

In justice to his memory, I wish to pay an especial tribute to this fearless, brave, gallant soldier, for, as soon as he arrived, he placed himself in front of his regiment and with hat in one hand and pistol in the other, led it against the trenches of the Insurgents, routing them completely. It was solely due to this gallant act that we won the fight so promptly after his arrival, for the Insurgents did not appear to have been shaken until our advance began.⁶⁰

This battle of Quingua forced the enemy across the river of the same name. It was probably the most stubborn fight the First Nebraska had during the Insurrection.

It seems proper, at this point, to relate some developments at home revolving around Colonel Stotsenburg.⁶¹ While the various units of guardsmen were doing their part on the several "fronts," the people back in Nebraska were following events with considerable interest. There appeared to be a widespread feeling that the "boys" were being mistreated. One of the most publicized incidents was the "Stotsenburg Case." This gentleman of proved

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 398-400, 468-473, 580-582; Faust, *op. cit.*, p. 32; *First Nebraska in Camp and Field*, p. 132.

⁶⁰*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899*, Part 3, p. 582.

⁶¹Full accounts of Stotsenburg's career are given in the *Omaha World Herald* and the *Nebraska State Journal*, April 24, 1899.

military ability came in for abuse right from the start, especially for his insistence on discipline.⁶² Even while a major he was charged with having undue influence over Colonel Bratt. A series of charges developed against him, ridiculously trivial when taken separately; but in the aggregate they made Stotsenburg appear to be a vicious and brutal officer.⁶³ There was no censorship and the men, in their letters home, wasted few words in pouring out their feelings until the charges loomed large in the public's eyes. It was not, however, until Stotsenburg was made colonel that the full wrath of public opinion crystallized. It was really a "tempest in a teapot." The crux of the matter was that he used strong, disciplinary measures to whip a poorly trained outfit into a fighting unit. This was in too sharp a contrast to earlier procedures. He had, perhaps, been a bit overzealous, but the results could not be denied.

The first outburst came when friends of Company L (Thurston Rifles) of Omaha held a meeting and drew up a series of charges. These were published and copies sent to the legislature, then in session. They demanded action against this "tyrannical" officer. The legislature proceeded, forthwith, to debate the matter and after some delay voted resolutions calling for an investigation by the War Department.⁶⁴ This agency, in response to the request, carried out an investigation but with considerable difficulty, for by this time the Insurrection had broken out and the men were in the field. The seventeen charges all fell flat, and many who had condemned Stotsenburg earlier, now saw that his methods were responsible for the high degree of efficiency of the regiment as well as for re-

⁶²Louise Pound, ed., *The University of Nebraska, 1869-1919. Semi-Centennial Anniversary Book* (Lincoln, 1919), p. 55.

⁶³*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1899-1900*, pp. 703, 710-715; *Nebraska State Journal*, January 8, 1899.

⁶⁴*Nebraska House Journal, 1899*, pp. 267, 268, 276-279; *Nebraska Senate Journal, 1899*, pp. 220, 233, 234, 239, 240; *Omaha World Herald*, January 14, 24, February 4, 1899; *Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1899-1900*, pp. 785-793; *Nebraska State Journal*, February 4, 1899.

ducing battle casualties.⁶⁵ The upshot of the whole imbroglio was an attempt to right wrongs and "take back" the charges. The legislature "rescinded" and "expunged" from the records the premature resolutions but only after two previous efforts had failed.⁶⁶ Close on the heels of this action word came of the Colonel's heroic death on the battlefield. His body was returned to Lincoln and after an elaborate funeral procession it lay in state at the Capitol. Services were then held at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. The remains were finally laid to rest in Arlington Cemetery.⁶⁷ The "Stotsenburg Case" reveals, most vividly, difficulties faced by the military men of the time.

Lieutenant Colonel George P. Colton was offered the colonelcy following Stotsenburg's death but rejected it since he was detached from the regiment and in charge of Philippine customs. Major Mulford, next in line, accepted the appointment made by Governor Poynter, the new Populist state executive.⁶⁸ The next advance in the campaign was in a northwesterly direction toward Puli-lan and this straggling village was reached about noon, April 24. After a three hour rest the march was resumed. Shortly, the enemy was encountered and dislodged at a place called Legundi where the troops continued westward, fording the forks of the Quingua and Calumpit rivers and coming out on the west side of the latter stream. The Insurgents were next driven north through Calumpit which place they burned before retreating.⁶⁹ The troops rested here for eight days, April 26 to May 3, before making another advance. The brigade, made up of Iowa, South Dakota and Nebraska men, moved out, May 3, to

⁶⁵*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1899-1900*, pp. 714-786; Interview, Eager, June 30, 1927.

⁶⁶*Nebraska Senate Journal, 1899*, pp. 820, 836, 837, 989, 990; *Nebraska House Journal, 1899*, pp. 1198, 1199.

⁶⁷*Nebraska State Journal*, April 24, May 28, 1899.

⁶⁸*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1899-1900*, pp. 931, 932; *Nebraska State Journal*, April 26, 1899; *Omaha World Herald*, April 27, 1899.

⁶⁹*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899, Part 3*, pp. 469-476.

Apalit and thence over a so-called wagon road toward Santo Tomas and San Fernando. This forward movement was made under most trying circumstances through swamps and across streams against constant enemy fire. It took four days to make the twelve-mile distance.⁷⁰

San Fernando marked the end of the trail for the First Nebraska. Thirteen days were spent here doing outpost duty, resting up and speculating on the next move. The regiment, now reduced to about 300 through sickness, heat exhaustion and casualties, received orders to return to Calumpit. It was a welcome assignment even though they had to march, heavily loaded, through the hot sun. Here they boarded a train for what they thought would be Manila, but were sidetracked three miles short of that city. Shortly, the men were quartered in bamboo barracks at Malate about four miles from Manila. Some outpost duty was done, the companies alternating in this work.⁷¹ Orders came, June 16, relieving the First Nebraska from service in the Philippines. G. E. Towl writes in this connection:

The welcome orders came in providential season. It would have been suicidal to have kept the men with health and strength undermined through the rainy season. Once the excitement of the campaign was over, a dangerous relaxation followed. The sick report increased appallingly, doctors were in despair. Nearly every man in the regiment was afflicted. Malaria, dysentery, typhoid, acute indigestion, adobe itch, tropical ulcers, plant poisoning, added their burden to spirits on the ebb, and constitutions run down. Doctors, when they dared speak, charged the deplorable conditions to weeks of campaigning with no change of clothes, overwork, bad food and no food. In the advance upon Malolos and San Fernando the men fought, slept, swam rivers and struggled through swamps in one suit which they wore upon their backs . . . At last a cure came, the tonic of tonics, the order to leave. The authorities did not care to have a dead regiment on their hands.⁷²

There were many, however, who would not return home for the losses were heavy. More men were killed

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 407, 409, 477-481 (Reports of MacArthur, Hale and Mulford).

⁷¹Interview, Cosgrave, July 19, 1927.

⁷²*Omaha World Herald*, July 23, 1899; *Nebraska Independent*, July 27, 1899.

and wounded in the First Nebraska than in any other regiment, regular army or volunteer, during the entire period of the Spanish-American and Philippine wars, including both the Cuban and Porto Rican campaigns. Between August 2 and 13, 1898 one was killed and nine wounded. From February 4 to June 30, 1899, twenty were killed in action and 168 wounded making a total of 198 casualties.⁷³ Fourteen of the wounded died and twenty-nine succumbed from disease and other causes putting the total number of deaths from all causes at sixty-four, three officers and sixty-one enlisted men.⁷⁴

It was a happy group, the forty-two officers and 812 enlisted men, who, together with a Utah organization, sailed out of Manila Bay aboard the *Hancock*, July 1. This ship was a commodious vessel equipped with the latest conveniences in marked contrast to the *Senator* on which they had come.⁷⁵ Sailing via Formosa to Japan, they reached Nagasaki harbor July 5, having spent another Fourth of July at sea. Five days were spent here, two more than planned because of a severe storm. Passing through the Inland Sea, past Kobe and into the Pacific, they reached Yokohama, July 13. A two-day stop was made and many took the hour's ride by rail to Tokyo. They weighed anchor, July 15, and proceeded across the Pacific by the northern route. A storm caused some discomfort, but otherwise nothing particularly eventful happened on the voyage. The lights of the Golden Gate appeared the evening of July 30, a sight never to be forgotten. The regiment disembarked, August 1, and marched through the city to a camp near the Presidio. The welcome by the crowds was even warmer than when they left more than a year before. Governor Poynter, Congressman W. T. Stark and

⁷³*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899, Part 1, pp. 386, 387.*

⁷⁴*Proceeding of the United States Spanish-American War Veterans, 1925, p. 55* (Furnished by Adjutant General of the United States and compiled by O. W. Meier); *Descriptive Book of the First Nebraska* (Colonel Mulford's Report), in Office of the Adjutant General of Nebraska.

⁷⁵*Annual Reports of the War Department, 1899, Part 1, p. 382; Part 2, pp. 171, 215.*

Adjutant General P. H. Barry were on hand to greet them.⁷⁶

Twenty-three days were spent in camp before the men were mustered out of service. This stay was rather pleasant since military discipline was greatly relaxed, but, even so, camp life had grown tiresome and they were glad to be free of it. In addition to his pay, clothing allowance, and travel money to the place of enlistment, each man received two months' extra pay when mustered out. The regiment assembled at Oakland, August 25, and boarded special trains provided by the generosity of the people of Nebraska. Colonel Mulford joined the Thirty-Ninth United States Infantry regiment as a major and remained in San Francisco. Lieutenant Colonel Frank D. Eager had charge of the First Nebraska on its return to Lincoln and that city was reached, August 30, in a "blaze of glory" according to the press.⁷⁷ Several companies had left en route and only about half the personnel were present for the reception.

It was a gala day in Lincoln, a second Fourth of July. Whichever way one looked down town he beheld a broad vista of street and rows of buildings in holiday attire . . . From early in the morning the sidewalks were alive with people. Country people and city, all were out in their best, and all were expectant and all were eager and all were walking. It seemed impossible for them to be idle. . . . Lincoln had never turned out with such enthusiasm.⁷⁸

Omaha was in its second year of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition and was anxious to accord the men a "welcome home." The soldiers were offered the "key" to the city and their fares paid if they would come to Omaha. Some accepted, but most of these veterans of the Philippines were more anxious to return home to loved ones than attend receptions and accept free entertainment.⁷⁹

⁷⁶*Report of Adjutant General of Nebraska, 1899-1900*, pp. 4-7; *The Valley (Nebraska) Advocate*, August 4, 1899; Interview, Cosgrave, July 14, 1927.

⁷⁷*Omaha World Herald and Omaha Bee*, August 1-25, 1899; *Nebraska State Journal*, August 1-31, 1899.

⁷⁸*Idem.*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, August 31, 1899.

The travels of the "Fighting First" were ended. The "boys" had come home. A new chapter was added to the history of the state.