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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our appreciation to the following people who have made special contributions to TAMPA BAY HISTORY.

PATRONS

Stephen M. Barbas, Esq.
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John M. Hamilton, M.D.
William R. Hough
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West B. Magnon, M.D.
Mark T. Orr
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Roland and Susan Rodriguez
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Marsha Rydberg
L. Gray Sanders
Dr. Jaime Torner
Virginia and Blake Whisenant
Wilbert Wichers

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Typography and composition by RAM
Printing by RALARD PRINTING, Dade City Florida.
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FROM THE EDITORS

One hundred years ago the Spanish-American War put Tampa on the map. The "splendid little war," as Secretary of State John Hay called it, held special meaning for Tampa and its 15,000 residents, especially Cuban immigrants who had pioneered the cigar industry in the 1880s. For years the cause of Cuba Libre had rallied Cuban patriots, but in 1898 they watched as their war against Spanish rule was transformed by the United States into the Spanish-America War. Following President William McKinley's call on April 11, 1898, for a U. S. declaration of war against Spain, the War Department selected Tampa as the port of embarkation for the invasion of Cuba.

In observance of the centennial of the Spanish-American War, this issue of Tampa Bay History is devoted to looking at the local impact of the war. As seen by outsiders, especially northern troops and journalists, Tampa seemed a southern wasteland, except for the Tampa Bay Hotel, today's University of Tampa, which one reporter described as "so enormous that the walk from the rotunda to the dining room helps one to an appetite." Someone else said it was "like a Turkish harem with the occupants left out." Notwithstanding the opulence of its biggest attraction, Tampa was dismissed by one reporter as a "city chiefly composed of derelict wooden houses drifting on an ocean of sand." This issue documents life in the Tampa Bay area during "the rocking-chair period of the war."

In the first article, James W. Covington describes the experiences of what became the most celebrated military unit to pass through the city. "The Rough Riders in Tampa" sketches the larger military context that brought a variety of units to Florida's West Coast, including Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders who remained only four days before departing for Cuba. Other units that set up camp in and around Tampa included African-American troops, some of whom were veterans of the Indian wars. In Tampa black soldiers encountered forms of discrimination that led to serious racial conflicts, described in the article "Black Troops in Florida" by Willard B. Gatewood. Some black units were also sent to Lakeland, and their experiences figure in the article by Hal Hubener, entitled "Army Life in Lakeland, Florida, during the Spanish-American War."

"The rocking-chair period of the war" was remarkably well documented by journalists, photographers, illustrators, and soldiers themselves. Two articles draw on these documents. In the first, "'Tampa Is a BUM Place,'" author Alicia Addeo uses the recently discovered letters of First Sergeant Henry A. Dobson to show the reactions of a young volunteer to conditions in Tampa during 1898. In another article, William A. Lorenzen IV brings together reports from the New York Times to examine "'The Rocking-Chair War: Views of Tampa in the New York Press during 1898." So many photographs remain from this period of the Spanish-American War that the editors have chosen to use more illustrations in each article and omit the usual photographic essay, but we hope you enjoy our effort to commemorate the centennial of the Spanish-American War.
THE ROUGH RIDERS IN TAMPA*
by James W. Covington

Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders made a lasting impression upon Tampa during their brief visit at the onset of the Spanish-American War. Tourists visiting the Tampa Bay Hotel, now the University of Tampa, want to know in which room Roosevelt stayed. Old timers relate the story of the “yellow rice brigade charge,” and Ybor citizens recall vividly Teddy Roosevelt and the names of his horse and dog. This account is the story of Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders in Tampa – a visit that lasted only four days.

When the newspapers began playing up a possible war with Spain, military planners in Washington projected the conflict as mostly a naval action. It was planned that the United States Army would protect the American coast and help the Navy seize and hold strategic bases in Cuba. Since the American coastal defenses were hopelessly inadequate, $29 million were allotted to the Navy and $15 million to the Corps of Engineers and Ordinance Department for coastal defense from a total appropriation of $50 million. Consequently little attention was paid to the organizing and equipping of an army for the invasion of Cuba. Still, some supplies were purchased and a joint Army-Navy Planning Board began studying railroads and harbors in the South during March and April, 1898, with the object of selecting an embarkation port for an army.

More substantial plans by the War Department began to develop during the spring of 1898. Since the American Navy would probably gain a victory over the Spanish Navy, a strike force of nearly 100,000 men composed of regulars would be needed to seize Cuban points. Some supporters of the National Guard defeated a plan to use only regular troops for the action in Cuba, leaving the National Guard for coastal defense. Finally, a board appointed by Secretary of War Russell A. Alger presented a plan calling for the mobilization of the regular troops. Volunteer regiments to complement the manpower of the regulars would be fused into larger units with the regulars.

On April 15th Secretary of War Alger selected Chickamauga, Georgia, as the assembly area for six of the cavalry and most of the artillery regiments and mobilization of twenty-two infantry regiments was planned at New Orleans, Mobile and Tampa. In addition to the cavalry, artillery and infantry regiments, Alger and his board saw the need for some specialized troops. Accordingly, provisions for the raising of three regiments of United States Volunteer Cavalry were made. Other specialist regiments to be raised included the engineers, immune infantry and signal corps. The commander of each of these units was to be appointed by the President and assigned a recruiting district. Acting under regular army supervision, the commander was given authority to appoint his officers who enlisted the lower ranks.¹

Tampa was selected as a port of embarkation for the expeditionary army to Cuba because of its apparent natural features. Forts were planned but not completed until 1902 at the entrance to Tampa Bay at Egmont and Mullet Keys. The long channel stretching more than ten miles into Tampa and Hillsborough Bays made the area reasonably safe from attack by the Spanish Navy.

Map from the *Tampa Daily Times* (June 21, 1898), showing the location of camps in and around Tampa (upper right) and Port Tampa (lower left) that were connected by the single rail line of the Plant System.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
Tampa was connected with the north by two railroads and it possessed a fine hotel which would serve as headquarters during the assembly of the strike force from all parts of the country. The deep water of Tampa Bay extended to Port Tampa where a depth of twenty-one feet was available. Henry Plant had constructed a single ten-mile line of railroad track from Tampa to Port Tampa where he erected the Port Tampa Inn and shipping facilities. Wharves at Port Tampa were able to accommodate as many as thirteen vessels. Still Port Tampa had been designed to handle at the most a thousand or more persons – not thirty thousand at one time.\(^2\)

The First United States Volunteer Cavalry, which became known consecutively as the Rocky Mountain Rustlers, Teddy’s Terrors and finally as the Rough Riders, included men mostly from New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma and Indian Territory but also a sprinkling from the Northeast. Although Secretary Alger offered Theodore Roosevelt command of the regiment, Roosevelt demurred in favor of Leonard Wood – thus Wood became Colonel and Roosevelt Lieutenant Colonel of the regiment. Leonard Wood, a graduate of Harvard Medical School, was the family doctor of Secretary of War Alger and a good friend of Roosevelt. The two leaders of the Rough Riders knew the right people and could get favored treatment. Before going to assembly headquarters at San Antonio, Roosevelt held a meeting in Washington where he recruited fifty persons from Virginia, Maryland and the northeastern states.\(^3\)

Since the assigned recruiting area was the Southwest, the bulk of the men in the First United States Volunteer Cavalry included Indians, Cowboys, former American and foreign army personnel, professional gamblers, Texas Rangers, miners and even some clergymen. According to Roosevelt, these men were “accustomed to the use of firearms, accustomed to taking care of themselves in the open, they were intelligent and self-reliant; they possessed hardihood and endurance and physical prowess.”\(^4\) Wood selected San Antonio as the assembly point for it was in the center of horse breeding country and was near an old army post and arsenal from which material could be secured. The Menger Hotel which is still standing and in use served as the headquarters.\(^5\)

After basic training and horse breaking at San Antonio, the regiment was ordered to proceed to Tampa. Leaving San Antonio on May 29, 1898, the caravan moved through the heart of the Southland to the cheers of an admiring populace. The four-day trip by train in seven sections was an eventful one with frequent stops for hay and water for the nearly twelve hundred mules and

\[\text{Colonel Theodore Roosevelt.} \]

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.
horses aboard. The men traveled in railroad coaches with adequate sleeping accommodations – not boxcars. In several places during a rest stop cheers turned to concern when some Rough Riders dashed to the nearest saloon, got drunk and became belligerent.6

Since the Rough Riders had been given only rations for two days when they entrained at San Antonio, they were forced to steal pigs, chickens and everything edible while en route when the trip was extended two more days. In fact, when news of their exploits spread ahead to Tampa, the citizens drew up a petition requesting that the Rough Riders be kept in camp and presented it to Colonel Wood after his regiment had arrived.7 Route of the train led through New Orleans, Mobile and Tallahassee, where state officials and capital city inhabitants entertained the troops during their overnight stay. Vegetables and coffee were given to a few hungry Rough Riders at Chaires.8

Since the military situation in Tampa represented “an appalling spectacle of congestion and confusion,” no one except Teddy and his men were surprised that there was no one to meet them or tell them where to camp when they arrived on June 3. The terminal point of the Florida Central and Peninsular was the Hillsborough River wharves and Jackson Street in the heart of present-day downtown Tampa. Since no food was available for the arriving and hungry men, the officers, from their own funds, purchased food for the Rough Riders. Somehow Roosevelt and his men were able to locate and seize control of some wagons to carry the baggage to the designated camping grounds. So far as can be determined, the camp of the Rough Riders was one
mile and a quarter due west of the Tampa Bay Hotel or near present day Armenia Avenue and Kennedy Boulevard. Camped nearby were the Second Cavalry Recruits, the Fifth Cavalry and the Third Cavalry.

Tampa in 1898 had approximately 14,000 people housed in a setting of ill-sorted residences, ranging from squalid to luxurious. Some of the buildings in the downtown area were frame structures, many unpainted and dilapidated but some brick buildings showed evidence of a rising prosperity engendered by a prosperous port and good railroad connections. Streets had recently been paved and concrete sidewalks and rain sewers constructed in the downtown area. In other areas, including Ybor City and West Tampa, industrial plants were to be found that were constructed of brick made in local brickyards. According to George Kennan, a most astute war correspondent, Tampa seemed to be a huddle of generally insignificant buildings standing in an arid desert of sand. Cuban and American flags were displayed in front of every restaurant, hotel and cigar shop and from many homes.9

Once in the campgrounds, the Rough Riders moved to establish order within a sea of pines, sand and palmettoes. By noon on the day of arrival, tents were erected stretching down long straight avenues with the officers’ quarters at one end and kitchens at the opposite end. Foot
drills were begun, and after the horses had been rested for thirty-six hours, mounted drills were commenced.10

The Fifth Corps commanded by Major General William R. Shafter had been assembled at Tampa for the original purpose of attacking Havana. According to General Orders issued on May 7th and May 16th, the Fifth Corps, composed mostly of regulars, was created and designated as the Cuban Strike Force. On April 29th Shafter had been ordered to assemble some 6,000 regulars at Tampa and to move by sea to Cape Tunas near Cienfuegos in Cuba where weapons would be given to the rebel general Maximo Gomez and return to the United States. When the Spanish fleet left for the West, plans for the Cuban expedition were postponed until the whereabouts of the Spanish fleet were ascertained.11 During the interval, Shafter continued to assemble troops and transports at Tampa. Most of the regular regiments plus the First Volunteer Cavalry and eight infantry regiments of volunteers were included with the Fifth Corps command. These various regiments were situated in various areas from Port Tampa to Ybor City with principal encampment being in the two hundred and fifty acres of pine forest specially designated military grounds at Tampa Heights. Other units at or near Tampa included the Eighteenth Infantry, Heavy Artillery, Second Georgia, First Florida, Thirty-Second Michigan, First Infantry, Ninth Infantry, Light Artillery, Fifty-Seventh Indiana, First Illinois and Sixth New York. General Joseph Wheeler noting that his men had been camped at Port Tampa where no shade trees were available was able to move the camp to West Tampa. Also encamped at West Tampa were
several hundred Cuban troops who would sail with the invasion fleet. Altogether four regiments were at Port Tampa, seventeen at Tampa and four at Lakeland. Horses and mules were kept in the Army corral located in the town of Fort Brooke near present day DeSoto Park. Some rustlers were able to steal part of the herd but the deputy United States Marshal located most of the livestock in Pasco County.12

When $175,000 was paid out to the soldiers on their first payday, various Tampa firms prospered from the increase in business. The military was forced to provide two hundred armed guards in the downtown area to stop fights and disputes that arose. Tampa was wide open at this time with gambling widespread and the worst dives located in the Fort Brooke section. Some robbers seemed to follow the troops, and residents began to report that their houses had been ransacked. Near the end of the troops’ stay, discipline had declined so much that a docked British ship was invaded by soldiers who stole bananas and coconuts laughing at the police as they looted.13 When the office of the Florida Brewery was robbed, an insignia of the 69th New York Regiment was found on the floor.

Although to many people living in Tampa, persons speaking Spanish seemed to be Cuban and friendly, the Latins knew very well the differences between the two groups. The Cubans knew the difference between one devoted to revolution and one who wanted Spanish rule and kept a close watch upon the Latin population of Tampa, reporting to American and Cuban Revolutionary authorities any suspicious activities. A plaque placed by Mirror Lake in St. Petersburg marks the spot where an alleged spy was detained while attempting to poison the water supply of the troops. Miss Mabel Bean of Port Tampa was employed by General Shafter to open the mail of suspected spies. Many Spaniards left Tampa when war was declared reducing the membership of the Centro Español by two-thirds. When the troops first arrived in Tampa, they searched the Central Español occupying it for some time. Finally after protests by Mayor Myron Guillet the soldiers were removed but the place remained closed for the duration of the war.14

Uniforms of the Rough Riders, dusty brown canvas topped by a dark grey broad brimmed soft hat, mingled with the dark blue of the regulars in Tampa’s streets. Still, little time was spent in places other than the campground for the Rough Riders were in Tamp, for a total of four days. Roosevelt and his men must have visited Ybor City for some time later he remarked how he liked Tampa-style Cuban bread. When the thousands of soldiers poured into Tampa, the inhabitants found interesting shows available in the camps scattered throughout the lower bay area. The Tampa citizens liked to talk with the soldiers from other areas, watch their poker games and listen to the band music. However, the show put on by foot soldiers was drab compared to the activities of the colorful Rough Riders and their horses. Soon the camp was surrounded by throngs of black and white youngsters with a few of them wearing makeshift cardboard spurs in imitation of the cavalrymen. It was the glamour of the Rough Riders with their cowboys, gunfighters, Indians and eastern blue bloods that attracted the crowds. Roosevelt’s mountain lion, dog and two horses – “Rain in the Face” and “Texas” – were indeed most unusual. Many young men from Florida tried to enlist in the unit but all of the places had been filled.

The Tampa Bay Hotel with its silver minarets, wide porches and beautiful park served as command headquarters and residence for the correspondents, Cuban refugees and military
attachés. Plans had been made by Resident Manager D. P. Hathaway to close the hotel at the end of the season on April 1, 1898, and keep the doors shut until December. It remained closed for only several weeks for the hotel was selected as Army Headquarters and served in addition as residence for guests and others who were in some way connected with the war. During this “rocking chair” phase of the war, it seemed that the Tampa Bay Hotel was the place to meet old friends, listen to good music and learn the latest gossip concerning the place in Cuba where the force would land.

Not many of the Rough Riders found it convenient to visit the command headquarters. Teddy, however, was given special permission by his good friend Colonel Leonard Wood to spend every evening from dinner hour until breakfast the next day with Mrs. Roosevelt who was a guest at the hotel. Few of the military attaches or correspondents left the hotel to visit the nearby camps to learn how unhealthy they were or how poorly the war machine had been organized. To those keen observers who were able to make the trip to the camps, the uniforms were too heavy, the food was bad, and no one knew how to organize the various regiments to work together. A few people must have gone to Eleventh Street and Fifth Avenue in Ybor City where Tampa Gas Company was testing a military balloon to carry men to Cuba. It failed when the artificial gas proved to be too heavy to supply proper lifting power.
President William McKinley, working from a war room on the second floor of the White House which was complete with large scale maps and fifteen telephones, decided to shift the invasion point from Havana to eastern Cuba where the rebels held partial control of the coast line. It was time to move material and men aboard the waiting fleet in Tampa Bay and be ready to depart at a moment’s notice. On May 26th, guns, wagons, animals and supplies began moving from Tampa to the ships docked at Port Tampa. Since there was only one track leading from Tampa to Port Tampa, it took nearly two weeks to complete the loading. Wood and Roosevelt were notified that the regiment’s horses were to be left behind and only eight troops of seventy men each were to be taken to Cuba on the first sailing.

When Secretary of the Navy John D. Long became fearful that a Spanish fleet under Admiral Pasqual Cervera would sail from Santiago before the Americans landed in Cuba, President McKinley and Secretary of War Alger heeded his warnings and ordered an instant sailing of the entire expedition. What had taken two weeks to load the baggage now became a frantic twenty-four hour embarkation for the men. One the night of June 7 the Rough Riders were told that their expedition would depart at daybreak and any persons or units not aboard at that time would be left in Tampa. It was a case of move quickly or else be left behind. No one could rely upon support from Shafter for his Quartermaster Colonel Humphrey had bungled the entire operation.

Following orders, the Rough Riders moved to a railroad track to await a train at midnight which would carry them to Port Tampa. By three o’clock in the morning different orders were received transferring them to another track but no train appeared. Finally, acting in desperation at six o’clock, the men seized some coal cars and persuaded the conductor to take them to Port Tampa.

It was a long train that the Rough Riders had boarded. Somehow several flatcars had been attached – one holding a dynamite gun with two barrels and another the Colt machine gun purchased by Lieutenant Tiffany with his own funds. How and why the Rough Riders were carrying a two barrel artillery piece that could propel a dynamite bomb a distance up to a mile was not known. Teddy stood in the open door of a boxcar watching the progress of the train. As usual his khaki uniform looked like he had slept in it. Like all Rough Riders he wore a polka dot blue bandanna handkerchief around his neck. The trip through the Interbay Peninsula was uneventful for there were only three homes between Tampa and Port Tampa. Since the water depth at Ballast Point was fifteen feet, it was used for cattle shipments to Cuba and a few shacks and a dock were erected there.

Finally reaching Port Tampa, the coal train with its begrimed passengers moved past “Last Chance Village,” complete with bars and brothels, to the dock where more chaos awaited. “Last Chance Village” had been erected by some entrepreneurs in the area near the docks at Port Tampa. Along the one street of the village were scores of black women frying chicken on Cuban claystoves under large umbrellas stuck in the sand – last chance for fried chicken. Tents had been erected to serve as a saloon, and the bartenders stood behind a counter made of two planks laid across two empty beer or whiskey barrels. Here was the last chance to get a drink of whiskey or a cold beer. Some bought a one-two punch-whiskey first then a beer. Then there were the inevitable girls available in the bars and in one large frame building with the sign of restaurant about it.
The Rough Riders moved quickly past “Last Chance Village” for the trip to Cuba was foremost in their thoughts. No one knew which of the thirty-one transports had been assigned to the regiment. Finally Colonel Humphrey in charge of the loading operation was located and he assigned the *Yucatan* to the Rough Riders. While Wood was using a launch to board the ship anchored off the dock, Roosevelt discovered that the ship actually had been assigned to another volunteer regiment and a regular regiment. Moving quickly he marched his men aboard the ship which had been moved to the dock to load the men. Soon those troops who had been assigned to the ship arrived demanding their places. Roosevelt was able to bluff the lieutenant-colonel in charge of a regular regiment that he was acting under orders and to hold his position. Four companies of the Second Regular Infantry did manage to squeeze aboard but the regiment of volunteers had to find accommodations elsewhere. Although the *Yucatan* was filled to capacity, Roosevelt, catching sight of two movie cameramen who did not have places, made room for them aboard his ship so that the Rough Riders would be assured of good coverage.19

By midday June 8, most of the ships had been loaded with the seventeen thousand men destined for Cuba. Places had even been found for Roosevelt’s horses “Rain in the Face” and “Texas.” Perhaps the mountain lion and dog were left in Tampa. Since word had been received that Cervera and his fleet may have escaped from Santiago Bay, the armada remained for a week anchored in Tampa Bay. It was a rough week for the weather was hot, the food was bad and everything was terribly overcrowded.
The Rough Riders spent their time drilling themselves from a book of tactics. Separate classes were held both for officers and non-commissioned officers. When the classes were concluded, some men were able to enjoy themselves by swimming in Tampa Bay. Some regiments aboard other ships practiced landing drills on sandy islands in the bay. Perhaps the best show of all was the accidental burning of the tens and frame shacks in “Last Chance Village.”

Finally on June 14, 1898, the fleet set steam for Cuban and a place in history. The news came that Cervera’s fleet had been located in Santiago Bay and it was time to move to Cuba. A few horses and mules were loaded on the ships. A crowd gathered, the band played “Till We Meet Again” and the fleet headed out into Tampa Bay. In the convoy were thirty-five transports filled with 803 officers and 14,935 enlisted men. All of the regiments aboard were regular forces with the exception of the Rough Riders, Seventy-First New York and Second Massachusetts. It was a narrow and long passageway that the convoy moved through Tampa Bay marked by buoys and wooden frames. Finally Mullet Key and Egmont Key, occupied by units of the Tampa Naval Reserve, were reached and the fleet sailed into the Gulf of Mexico. In Cuba, the Rough Riders suffered losses of a third of the officers and one fifth of the men being killed or wounded. Tampa had played a most suitable place in history as the port of embarkation for these gallant men. Now, most of the country and the world knew where Tampa was located.

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1 Graham A. Cosmas, An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish American War (Columbia, 1973), 82-83, 116, 131-34.
4 Ibid., 227.
5 Ibid., 219.
7 Tampa Morning Tribune, June 15, 1898.
9 George Kennan, Campaigning in Cuba (New York, 1899), 23.
10 Roosevelt, The Rough Riders, 55.
11 Cosmas, Army for Empire, 111.
12 Tampa Daily Times, June 21, 1940.
13 Tampa Morning Tribune, June 15, 1898.
The machine gun and dynamite gun were landed in Cuba but were of little use due to lack of transport by horses or mules.

The outbreak of the War with Spain in 1898 elicited a mixed reaction among African-Americans. Enthusiastic pro-war advocates viewed the conflict in terms of its benefits to blacks. Their argument maintained that the black man’s participation in the military effort would win respect from whites and therefore enhance his status at home. They also emphasized that the islands likely to come under American influence would open economic opportunities for black citizens. Opposing such views were the highly vocal anti-war, anti-imperialist elements within the black community. Though sympathetic with the plight of Cuba and especially with Afro-Cubans, these black Americans argued that the Spaniards, for all their cruelty, at least had not fastened upon the island a system of racial discrimination comparable to that in the United States. Many contended that only when the American government guaranteed its own black
citizens their full constitutional rights would it be in a position to undertake a crusade to free Cuba from Spanish tyranny. Confronted by lynching, disfranchisement, and segregation at home, African-Americans had little difficulty in appreciating the attitude of the black Iowan who declared: “I will not go to war. I have no country to fight for. I have not been given my rights here.”

The extreme positions of anti-war and pro-war spokesmen did not, however, represent the predominant sentiment among blacks. A majority of them seemed to consider participation in the military struggle an obligation of citizenship and manifested an intense pride in the black units of the regular army called to take up “the white man’s burden” in Cuba. Yet, they recognized the irony and incongruity of a policy to liberate a foreign people, especially “little brown brothers,” when so many “Americans of color” remained oppressed. Although African-Americans hoped that a display of patriotism would help dissipate prejudice against them, they were never free of misgivings about a war launched in the name of humanity by a nation so enamored of Anglo-Saxon supremacy. The experience of black soldiers stationed in Florida in 1898 only served to increase their doubts about the war blotting out prejudice against black Americans.

Black troops concentrated in the South during the Spanish-American War were of two types – regulars and volunteers. Although most volunteers did not enter federal service until mid-1898, the four black regiments of the regular army – Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry and Ninth and Tenth Cavalry – were among the first units dispatched to southern camps in preparation for the invasion of Cuba. Commanded by white officers and long stationed in the West, these regiments began to arrive at Chickamauga Park, Georgia, and at Key West, Florida, even before the official declaration of war. During the first two weeks in May 1898, all black units of the regular army, including the infantrymen originally sent to Key West, arrived at Tampa, Florida, the port selected as the one best suited for embarkation to Cuba.

During the next month of what the correspondent Richard Harding Davis called “the rocking chair period,” over 4,000 African-American troops were among the invasion army concentrated in the area around Tampa. Chaos and confusion prevailed in every quarter, and as one historian has noted, the “logistics snarl was too complicated” for the commander, General William R. Shafter, to unravel. At Tampa, as at Chickamauga, the black units continued to receive an influx of new recruits, because the war department had ordered all regiments to have three battalions of four companies, which meant an additional 750 men for each regiment. The arrival of so many raw recruits only compounded the confusion at the embarkation point. The black troops of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry pitched camp at Tampa Heights, and the Ninth Cavalry was located nearby. But when the Tenth Cavalry arrived, it could find no suitable camping-ground, and it was ordered to Lakeland along with several white cavalry units.

Scarcely had the first companies of black soldiers arrived in the Tampa area when white citizens began to lodge complaints against them. Undoubtedly, earlier reports from Key West that the black infantrymen had forced the release of one of their fellows from a local jail enhanced the existing antipathy toward black soldiers. Indicative of the atmosphere in Tampa was the hostile attitude of the local press. Within a few days after the arrival of the African-American troops, the Tampa Morning Tribune reported: “The colored troopers are splendid horsemen and show off to great advantage. The colored infantrymen stationed in Tampa and vicinity have made themselves very offensive to the people of the city. The men insist upon
being treated as white men are treated and the citizens will not make any distinction between the colored troops and the colored civilians.” While the Tribune treated the rowdiness of white soldiers with tolerance or levity, it viewed similar behavior by blacks as evidence of their immunity to military discipline. Almost daily, from the time they arrived until they departed for Cuba, the local press gave front-page coverage to every incident involving African-American troops. Sensational accounts of “rackets” and “riots” by “these black ruffians in uniform” appeared regularly in dailies throughout the South.

White citizens in Tampa, disturbed by “the insults and mendacity perpetrated by the colored troops,” demanded that the city provide them greater police protection against so many undisciplined black soldiers “with criminal proclivities.” Although the new recruits obviously did not display the same degree of discipline as the veterans, there was little inclination by whites to accord either a semblance of the tolerance shown the white soldiers. Black troops resented what they interpreted as deliberate attempts to malign them and to cast aspersions upon the distinguished record which they had compiled during the Indian wars in the West. In a letter to a friend, a black infantryman in Tampa declared: “Prejudice reigns supreme here against the colored troops. Every little thing that is done here is chronicled as Negro brazenness, outlawry, etc. An ordinary drunk brings forth scare headlines in the dailies. Some of our boys
were refused a drink at one of the crackers’ saloons...and they politely closed him up. That was put down as a ‘nigger riot’ and the commanding general was appealed to in the interest of the ‘respectable white citizens.’”11 From the beginning the black troops in the Tampa area made it clear that they had no intention of submitting to the discriminatory treatment accorded local black civilians.

The black soldiers in Lakeland, no less than those in Tampa, were convinced that they had been stationed in the midst of “a hotbed of rebels.” Within a few days after their arrival in Lakeland, the black cavalymen demonstrated their unwillingness to abide by local racial customs. Angered by the refusal of the proprietor of Forbes Drug Store to serve one of their comrades at the soda fountain, a large group of armed black soldiers returned to the store and to a barbershop next door. When the white barber yelled obscenities at a black trooper who requested a shave, they “shot up the barbershop.” Moving into the streets where a sizeable crowd had assembled, the soldiers began to fire indiscriminately and to threaten anyone who challenged them. Joab Collins, a white civilian in the crowd, was killed. Although Collins had been hurling insults at the troops, his death was apparently caused by a stray bullet. Several white officers of the Tenth Cavalry arrived on the scene and finally quieted the disturbance. After an investigation, they turned over two black cavalymen, James Johnson and John Young, to local authorities for trial.12 Although the incident gave the Tenth Cavalry a “bad name” and inspired numerous reports of misconduct by the black soldiers, Corporal John Lewis later explained that the shooting of “Collins, the white bully” was an “act of Providence” because it taught the white people of Lakeland to respect black men in uniform.13 But clearly whatever respect they displayed was based upon fear rather than upon any basic change in racial views.

Accurate information about clashes involving African-American troops in the Florida camps was all the more difficult to obtain because of the rigorous censorship exercised by the War Department over all telegraphic news involving military personnel. It appears, however, that such clashes usually resulted either from insults by whites or from attempts by black soldiers to break segregation barriers. The mere sight of smartly dressed, precision drilled black soldiers was sufficient, it seemed, to arouse envy and hostility among some whites. But animosity toward black troops was even more evident whenever they were placed in positions to exercise authority over white soldiers. White citizens protested loudly, for example, when African-Americans on military patrol duty arrested white soldiers.14 Regularly taunted by epithets such as “all niggers look alike to me,” the black soldiers quickly concluded that nowhere was anti-black prejudice more virulent than in Florida. In time they also came to understand that such prejudice was by no means confined to whites from the South. A committee of city officials from Philadelphia, in Tampa to inspect Pennsylvania volunteers, publicly expressed concern about the “continual fighting” between white and black soldiers which they blamed upon “the insolence of the Negroes” who were trying “to run Tampa.”15 In the opinion of black soldiers, racism even pervaded the gospel dispensed to the troops by Dwight L. Moody and other northern evangelists. “Dwight Moody is here galore,” a black soldier wrote home, “but the colored boys care nothing for his color prejudiced religion.”16

Those black troops unaccustomed to the racial mores of the South were appalled at the humiliating treatment to which all African-Americans were subjected. Some expressed utter dismay at learning that many mercantile and business establishments in Tampa refused to allow
blacks to make purchases across the same counters as whites. Saloons and cafes which insisted upon maintaining the color line became the special targets of the black soldiers’ ire, and several were forced to close “to prevent bloodshed.”17 John Bigalow, white captain of a black cavalry unit, claimed that the white Floridians’ lack of subtlety in race relations was the principal cause of friction with the black troops. He insisted that if whites treated colored soldiers with civility, “however much they might discriminate against them,” there would be little trouble. Whether or not his analysis was correct, there seems to have been little inclination for white merchants to accept his substitute, “we don’t deal with colored people,” for their more customary, “we don’t sell to damned niggers.”18 Regular encounters with such prejudice solidified the determination of black troops to force whites to respect them as soldiers and as men. A black soldier in Tampa wrote a friend: “Our fellows think it is h– – to have a fight in defense of people who are so prejudiced. They are determined to make these crackers ‘walk Spanish’ while here or else be treated as men.”19

The black troops were obviously in a more favorable position than others of their race to insist upon equitable treatment. They not only possessed arms and whatever legal protection was inherent in their uniforms but also existed in sufficient numbers to risk forceful action against their detractors. Yet their display of restraint was perhaps more remarkable than their occasional use of force to combat discrimination and to retaliate against insults. At least one factor which helped prevent more frequent and violent reactions on their part was their feeling of being on trial and the conviction that their actions had consequences for all black Americans.20 Because of
this belief, African-American soldiers were all the more resentful of what they considered the sensational and distorted publicity lavished upon “every little thing” done by them.

For the black troops nothing so clearly dramatized the paradox and incongruity bred by racial prejudice as the experience of the men of the Twenty-fourth Infantry in charge of Spanish prisoners during their transfer from Tampa to Fort McPherson, Georgia. In several towns along the route crowds of whites gathered presumably to view the Spaniards, but what attracted their attention and became the target of their insults and taunts were the black soldiers. A Catholic priest from Atlanta, who was granted permission to minister to the Spaniards at Fort McPherson, concisely expressed the sentiments of those disturbed by the appearance of black soldiers in a position of authority over white men, even though such men were prisoners of war. “It is an outrage,” the priest declared, “that white men [Spaniards] have been subjected to the humiliation of having negro guards over them.” Such venting of prejudice by white Americans, according to Chaplain George W. Proileau of the Ninth Cavalry, served to emphasize the hypocrisy involved in the American crusade in behalf of Cuba, a nation whose population was “predominantly colored.” “Talk about fighting and freeing poor Cuba and of Spain’s brutality . . .,” the black chaplain observed, “is America any better than Spain?” The recognition of such hypocrisy, which became evident in the expressions by black soldiers in Florida, clearly had a psychological impact. The restraint of these troops in the face of continued discrimination and insults wore increasingly thin.

On the eve of the army’s embarkation for Cuba, Tampa was the scene of the most serious racial clash that occurred in a military encampment during the Spanish-American War. Known as the Tampa riot, this disturbance on the night of June 6, 1898, came as a climax to the tension that had been steadily mounting for over a month. The arrival in the city of large contingents of freewheeling white volunteer regiments only served to worsen the situation. Although the war department’s heavy handed censorship of military news made it difficult to ascertain the details of the riot, the story ultimately seeped through the censor and appeared in the press throughout the nation. Letters from black soldiers in Tampa published in African-American newspapers presented their version of the affair. The riot was apparently triggered by a group of intoxicated white volunteers from Ohio who “decided to have some fun” with a two-year-old African-American boy. The child was snatched from his mother by a white soldier who entertained his comrades by holding him in one hand and spanking him with the other. Then, held at arm’s length with his head down, the child served as a target for several soldiers to demonstrate their marksmanship. Presumably, the winner was the soldier who sent a bullet through the sleeve of the boy’s shirt. Having had their “fun,” the soldiers returned the dazed child to his hysterical mother. Already angered by an accumulation of “outrages,” the black troops of the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry regiments viewed the behavior of the Ohio volunteers as anything but sporting. In fact, the incident set them off on a wild destructive rampage. They stormed into the streets firing their pistols indiscriminately, wrecking saloons and cafes which had refused to serve them, and forcing their way into white brothels. Apparently they clashed not only with white civilians but also with white soldiers. The reaction of the Tampa Morning Tribune to reports that black soldiers had “outraged” white prostitutes was ironic in view of its disregard for the legal rights of African-Americans. “While these women are of the lowest type,” the Tribune editorialized, “the law gives them protection.”
The provost guards and the Tampa police tried in vain to restrain the rioters. Finally, troops from the Second Georgia Volunteer Infantry, a white regiment, were assigned the job of restoring order. The relish with which the Georgia soldiers performed the task was equaled only by their deadly efficiency. Near daybreak on the morning of June 7 the riot was quelled. The Tampa paper which published the highlights of the disturbance came to regret the publicity given the affair, apparently out of fear that it would reflect adversely upon the city. The newspaper later denied that there had been any riot and classified as “sheer rot” reports that the streets of Tampa “ran red with negro blood.” Yet, twenty-seven black troops and several white Georgia volunteers from Tampa, all with serious wounds, were transferred to Fort McPherson near Atlanta, corroborating rumors of a bloody race riot.

Despite the sketchy nature of the news reports, the disturbance in Tampa played into the hands of whites who objected to the use of black troops in the war with Spain. White Southerners, as well as other Americans, contended that the decision to mobilize black troops was a serious error because it made the African-American “forget his place” and presume “that he was changed or benefitted his social condition by wearing a blue coat and carrying a gun.” The Atlanta Constitution argued that the Tampa affair clearly demonstrated that “army discipline has no effect on the negro.” “There was no need to send negro troops to Cuba,” the Constitution concluded, “and now to send them after this event, is criminal.” Other white Southerners who
objected to the use of black soldiers were nevertheless uneasy about sending only whites off to war lest the blacks at home seize the opportunity to stage a mass uprising in their absence.\textsuperscript{29} A white West Virginian resolved the dilemma by suggesting that “all niggers ought to be sent to Cuba where they will be killed.”\textsuperscript{30}

If the Tampa riot allowed whites to vent their prejudice against black troops, it also served to magnify misgivings about the war among African-Americans, especially those whose support of the military effort had rested upon the conviction that black citizens would benefit by participating in it. The black press generally accepted without question reports that the streets of Tampa “ran red with Negro blood” and that “many Afro-Americans were killed and scores wounded.” Convinced that the white press had unjustly blamed black troops for precipitating the disturbance, black newspapers hastened to point out that the unbelievably crude behavior of white volunteers had been the source of trouble and condemned the “slaughter of black troops” by the Georgia regiment as “inhuman and uncalled for.”\textsuperscript{31} “Spaniards have done about as badly at times with Cubans,” a black editor in Cleveland observed, “and the country is waging war with the former because of it. Our door sill seems to be equally as bloody, at least the Southern half.”\textsuperscript{32} Other African-Americans who speculated about the meaning of the Tampa riot were no less concerned about the display of prejudice by northern white soldiers than about the “slaughter” perpetrated by the Georgia troops. They were particularly disturbed by the fact that white volunteers from Ohio had caused the fracas and that white soldiers from Michigan had openly expressed disappointment that a Georgia unit, rather than themselves, had been chosen “to get the niggers.”\textsuperscript{33} Increasingly, blacks came to agree with the view expressed by a black editor in Norfolk, Virginia, who insisted that “the closer the North and South get together by this war,” the harder African-Americans “will have to fight to maintain a footing.”\textsuperscript{34}

Within a week after the riot, the troops in Tampa embarked for Cuba. With the exception of a few units of new recruits which remained in Florida, the black regiments formed a part of the invasion force. Despite the confusion which attended the departure from Tampa, the color line was rigidly maintained. A white officer of the Tenth Cavalry tried in vain to make arrangements for his men to secure meals in local restaurants prior to sailing for Cuba. The typical response to these enquiries was voiced by a lady proprietor who refused on the grounds that “to have colored men eat in her dining room would ruin her business.”\textsuperscript{35} Even on board the transports, arrangements were made for the segregation of the black soldiers, who were invariably assigned to the lowest decks. On at least one vessel the color line was maintained by placing white troops on the port side and the men of the Twenty-fifth Infantry on the starboard side.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite such conditions, or perhaps because of them, African-American troops distinguished themselves in combat during the Santiago campaign. Their performance, according to Professor Rayford W. Logan, “not only gave to Negroes a much needed feeling of pride” but also gained from “some other Americans a respect for Negroes that was rarely manifested.”\textsuperscript{37} Few black Americans, however, were misled by the momentary praise heaped upon the black troops for their part in the Santiago campaign and insisted that words of commendation would have meaning only if followed by promotions and rewards. Convinced that black soldiers failed to receive recognition commensurate with their combat record, many African-Americans despaired that patriotism and valor counted for so little in improving the plight of the race.\textsuperscript{38} In fact, a black Georgian insisted that the bravery of African-American soldiers in the war had intensified, rather
than lessened, prejudice against black people. To support his contention he had only to call attention to the situation in Florida at the time of the black soldiers’ return from Cuba. White volunteers stationed in Jacksonville, Miami, and other cities in the state, who were disappointed at being denied opportunities to share in the glory of combat, seemed to take out their frustrations upon black civilians. A black paper in Jacksonville, noted that “the cry of ‘lynch him’ is heard often here issuing from the throats of certain U. S. volunteer soldiers in this city.”

White volunteers in Miami virtually terrorized the black population of the city. Reports claimed that they “had shot down Negroes like dogs and driven others from their homes.”

Under the circumstances it was hardly to be expected that the black veterans of the Cuban campaign would receive a heroes’ welcome in Florida. During August 1898, when these troops returned to Tampa and Lakeland prior to permanent assignment elsewhere, they were involved in racial incidents, almost daily. The attitudes of both white civilians and black soldiers seemed to have undergone changes that made such clashes inevitable: the determination of whites to keep black troops “in their place” obviously had become more pronounced, while the soldiers displayed more aggressiveness in combating what they considered racial injustices. The local white press, less restrained in its treatment of black soldiers, described them as “ruffians” and as “black brutes dressed in the uniform of United States soldiers.” Such rhetoric scarcely improved the relationship between local whites and the black troops. A black cavalryman wrote: “It is hard to submit to all that is published about us, not one word of which is contradicted, yet our [white] officers know it is not so.”

Captain John Bigalow of the Tenth Cavalry claimed that
the gallantry of the black troops had enhanced “the self-respect and stimulated the aspirations” of
colored people in general and of black soldiers in particular.44

At any rate, black soldiers were obviously in no mood to tolerate abuses of themselves or of
black civilians. With greater regularity than earlier, they defied Jim Crow restrictions on public
transportation and in cafes, saloons, and similar establishments. Their activities assumed even
more serious proportions in the view of white Floridians when they involved the defense and
protection of African-American civilians. For example, a group of men from the Tenth Cavalry
in Lakeland became concerned about the fate of a black arrested for violating the liquor laws.
While he was in the company of Sheriff J. D. Tillis on a train bound for Bartow, the soldiers
came aboard and restrained the sheriff so that the prisoner was allowed to escape.45 At about the
same time in Tampa, the arrest and imprisonment of a member of the Ninth Cavalry for carrying
a concealed weapon created much excitement within the regiment. The consensus was that he
had been arrested on a trumped-up charge. Succinctly expressing the sentiment of his comrades,
a black soldier declared: “He is black [and] that is enough to convict him.”46 On the eve of their
depture for Montauk Point, New York, the cavalrmen stormed the county jail and rescued
their comrade. A large crowd of white citizens and policemen who arrived at the jail thought
better of attacking “five companies of well-armed Negroes.” Reports that the Tenth Cavalry in
Lakeland planned to stage a similar rescue in the Polk County jail prompted Circuit Court Judge
Barron Phillips to order the prisoner’s transfer to an undisclosed location. Some whites objected
to the court order on the grounds that it indicated “to the negro soldiers that they are feared.”47
Disclaiming any intention of condoning “lawless action” of any kind by black or white soldiers,
a black clergyman in Baltimore noted with regret that the incidents in Tampa and Lakeland only
proved “how well colored men have learnt the oft-repeated lesson taught them by brutal and
course white men of the South who have made a ‘fine art’ of the mob business.”48

The bold activities of the black troops prompted the white citizens to begin in earnest a search
for means of maintaining “law and order.” In the vanguard of this movement was the Tampa
Morning Tribune which warned that “the citizens of Hillsborough and Polk counties are getting
tired of the lawless manner in which the negro soldiers are acting and another attempt to rescue a
prisoner from a county or city jail will result in the shooting of one or more of the rescuing
party.”49 Groups as well as individuals appealed in vain to Governor William D Bloxham, the
War Department, and the white officers of the African-American units. Finally, on August 12,
1898, the white citizens of the Tampa area held an “indignation meeting.” A succession of
speakers who indulged in a great deal of inflammatory rhetoric made ominous threats against the
black soldiers and bitterly denounced Governor Bloxham for his failure to take effective action
against their “lawlessness.” Florida Congressman Stephen M. Sparkman who presided at the
gathering promised to lay the matter before the War Department in person and if necessary to
seek relief from Congress.50 But the departure of the black troops for Montauk Point on August
17, 1898, five days after the mass meeting, relieved Sparkman of the necessity of taking up the
matter in Washington. Whether their transfer to New York was a source of greater satisfaction to
the black soldiers or to white Floridians is difficult to determine. From Montauk Point, a black
cavalryman wrote of his pleasure at having finally escaped the repressive environment of
Florida. “On every side,” he declared, “you hear Cuba in preference to the South as the boys all
dread that section of Uncle Sam’s domain.”51
The presence of black troops in Florida during the Spanish-American War had a significant impact upon the attitudes of both black and white Americans. The Jim Crowism which the troops encountered especially after their return from Cuba tended to undermine the optimism of African-Americans who had predicted that the war would emphasize their “title to all the privileges of citizenship.” Even the usually cautious Booker T. Washington expressed doubts that the African-American’s contribution to the war effort had made any headway “in blotting out racial prejudice.” Other prominent blacks, particularly those who had never been enthusiastic about the policy of imperialism, maintained that the treatment of the black soldiers in Florida was but a sample of what the colored populations of Cuba and the Philippines could expect under American rule. In the words of a black chaplain, who had experienced the discrimination against black soldiers, the Afro-Cuban faced the “glorious dilemma” of being relieved of Spanish tyranny in order to be pushed “into the condition of the American Negro.”

If the treatment of black soldiers affected the view of African-Americans toward the war and imperialism, their presence in Florida contributed to the final capitulation of the white South to extreme racism. Restraints against blatant racism had deteriorated throughout the decade prior to 1898. During the war the nation’s commitment to the white man’s burden marked the end of any external restraints and the presence of so large a contingent of black soldiers in the South.
hastened the collapse of whatever remained of internal resistance to racism.\textsuperscript{54} The tendency of the black troops to resist discrimination and to defy regional customs regarding race conjured up frightful prospects in the minds of white Southerners. The notion that the behavior of the black soldiers had disturbed “the peaceful race relations” of the region won widespread acceptance and was used to justify lynchings and other crimes against blacks.\textsuperscript{55} In mid-1898 a black editor in Virginia scarcely exaggerated when he declared: “Negrophobia is getting as prevalent here as is the yellow fever in Cuba.”\textsuperscript{56} In such an atmosphere racist demagogues throughout the South came into their own.

\textsuperscript{1} Topeka \textit{Colored Citizen}, February 24, March 3, 1898; Indianapolis \textit{Freeman}, February 26, 1898; Washington \textit{Colored American}, March 19, April 30, 1898; Richmond \textit{Planet}, March 26, April 2, 23, 1898; Washington \textit{Bee}, March 5, 29, 1898; Springfield \textit{Illinois Record}, March 12, April 23, 1898.

\textsuperscript{2} Des Moines \textit{Iowa State Bystander}, May 20, 1898.


\textsuperscript{4} Regimental Records, Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiments, “Record of Events,” April-June, 1898, National Archive, Record Group 94. For a description of Tampa during the Spanish-American War, see Karl H. Grismer, \textit{Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida} (St. Petersburg, 1950), 206-11.

\textsuperscript{5} Richard Harding Davis, \textit{The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaigns} (New York, 1962), 4


\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Tampa Morning Tribune}, May 5, 1898.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., May 7, 10, 12, 1898

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., May 10, 12, 18, 1898; Jacksonville \textit{Florida Times-Union and Citizen}, May 13, 1898.

\textsuperscript{11} Quoted in Baltimore \textit{Ledger}, June 4, 1898.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Tampa Morning Tribune}, May 18, 19, 21, 20, 1898; Springfield \textit{Illinois Record}, June 11, 25, 1898; Bigalow, \textit{Reminiscences}, 36-37.

\textsuperscript{13} Corporal John E. Lewis to editor, Springfield \textit{Illinois Record}, June 25, 1898.

\textsuperscript{14} Fletcher, “The Negro Soldier and the United States Army,” 191; Jacksonville \textit{Florida Times-Union and Citizen}, May 31, 1898.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, June 13, 1898.

\textsuperscript{16} “Letter from Tampa,” Baltimore \textit{Ledger}, June 4, 1898.

\textsuperscript{17} Chaplain George Prioleau, Ninth Cavalry, to the editor (May 13, 1898), Cleveland \textit{Gazette}, May 21, 1898; \textit{Tampa Morning Tribune}, May 12, 1898; Jacksonville \textit{Florida Times-Union and Citizen}, May 13, 1898. On August 20,
1898, Washington Colored American declared: “The trouble between the Negroes and whites at Tampa . . . is due almost without exception to the fact that narrow-minded cads and short-sighted shopkeepers insisted upon making a difference in the treatment of U.S. soldiers when the law did not recognize any. The black boys stood upon their rights, and the blame for the disorder rests wholly upon those who denied them what was legally theirs.”

18 Bigalow, Reminiscences. 36-37.

19 “Letter from Tampa,” Baltimore Ledger, June 4, 1898.

20 The Negro editor of the Savannah Tribune concisely expressed a view common among Negroes when he wrote: “Our colored soldiers must be very careful of their actions. They must keep in mind that they are on trial and more is expected of them than any other class.” Savannah Tribune, December 3, 1898.

21 Quoted in Savannah Tribune, May 21,1898; see also Omaha Afro-American Sentinel, May 7 1898.

22 Chaplain George W. Prioleau, Ninth Cavalry, to editor, May 13, 1898, Cleveland Gazette, May 21, 1898.

23 For several somewhat different versions of the Tampa riot, see Atlanta Constitution, June 12, 13, 1898; Augusta Chronicle, June 11, 1898; Tampa Morning Tribune, June 8, 1898; Cleveland Gazette, June 25, July 2, 1898; Richmond Planet June 18, 1898.

24 Tampa Morning Tribune, June 8, 1898. Actually, the account of the riot in the Tribune was not totally biased against the black soldiers. A front page story, entitled “Inhuman Brutes,” told how the Ohio volunteers amused themselves by shooting at the child. An editorial criticized the behavior of the volunteers as compared to regular army units; nothing was said about race. The story on the race riot appeared on page four of the paper, and the headline referred both to Negro and white soldiers as participants.

25 Ibid., June 8, 25, 1898; Atlanta Constitution, June 11, 1898

26 Atlanta Constitution, June 11, 1899.

27 Memphis Commercial Appeal quoted in The Voice of Missions, 7 (January 1899), 1.

28 Atlanta Constitution, June 12, 1898. The Constitution, June 14, 1898, urged that in view of the “wild and demoniac conduct of the negro regulars at Tampa,” they should be ordered back to the Indian reservations, lest they “assault white Cubans.”

29 New Orleans Daily Picayune, June 11, 1898; Savannah Tribune, April 30, August 20, 1898.

30 Martinsburg (West Virginia) Pioneer Press quoted in Cleveland Gazette, September 17, 1898.

31 Ibid., June 25, July 2, 1898; Savannah Tribune, July 2, 1898; Richmond Planet, June 18, 1898; Parsons (Kansas) Weekly Blade, August 23, 1898.

32 Cleveland Gazette, July 2, 1898

33 Augusta Chronicle, June 11, 1891.

34 Quoted in Cleveland Gazette, August 13, 1898. See also Richmond Planet, July 9, 1898.

35 Bigalow, Reminiscences, 50


39 *Savannah Tribune*, March 18, 1899.

40 *Florida Evangelist* quoted in *Cleveland Gazette*, August 27, 1898.


42 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 7, 1898.


45 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 10, 1898. As it turned out, Sheriff Tillis had also arrested a white man on a similar liquor charge that same day.


47 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 7, 12, 1898; *Atlanta Journal*, August 8, 1898.

48 *Baltimore Ledger*, August 20, 1898.

49 *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 12, 1898.

50 Ibid., August 13, 1898.

51 Quoted in *Illinois Record*, October 8, 1898.

52 Ibid., October 22, 1898.

53 Chaplain T. G. Steward of the Twenty-fifth Infantry quoted in *The Nation*, 66 (May 5, 1898), 335.


55 *Washington Bee*, March 25, 1899; *Savannah Tribune*, April 1, 1899; Des Moines *Iowa State Bystander*, March 24, 1899.

56 *Richmond Planet*, June 18, 1898.
ARMY LIFE IN LAKELAND, FLORIDA, DURING THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR
by Hal Hubener

Florida had a major role in the Spanish-American War. Both Tampa and Key West were embarkation points for the campaigns in Cuba and Puerto Rico, and troops were stationed in other Florida cities, including Lakeland. With a population of around 1,000, Lakeland was only half the size of Bartow, the county seat of Polk County, but Lakeland had one advantage over its rival – it was one of the most important railroad towns in the Plant system. Promotional literature cited Lakeland’s cosmopolitan population, absence of extremes in wealth and poverty, and abundant lakes with fresh water. Located forty miles east of Tampa, Lakeland had a sense of self, demonstrated in its community picnics, town baseball team, and active social clubs. Like the rest of Polk County, Lakeland was emerging from an era in which the only major industries had been citrus and cattle, and even citrus had suffered devastating freezes in 1894 and 1895. Because of those disastrous years, agricultural diversification became necessary. By the end of the century, Lakeland had become one of the most important strawberry export centers in the state and a leader in turpentine, tobacco, vegetables, and peaches. The area also witnessed a burgeoning new industry in pebble phosphate that reportedly existed in “practically inexhaustible” supply with a potential value that was “beyond computation.”

In May 1898, Lakeland was selected for several reasons as a site to quarter troops. First, the sheer number of soldiers already in Tampa – 64,000 – had created an abundance of problems, including insufficient water supply and lack of proper sanitation and hospital space. By several accounts Tampa also experienced hotter temperatures than inland cities. Moreover, fear that Spanish gunboats were prowling the west coast of the state led commanding officers to avoid concentrating troops in one location. As a result, the following units camped in Lakeland: Tenth United States Cavalry; Second Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers; First U.S. Cavalry; Seventy-First New York Volunteers; and the First Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. In addition, ill and wounded soldiers from the Third U.S. Cavalry recuperated in Lakeland. Yet another regiment, the Ninth Cavalry under Lieutenant Hickcock, considered the city as a camp site. Hickcock actually scouted land near Lake Parker, but the Ninth was directed elsewhere. Estimates vary on numbers, but between May and August 1898 perhaps 9,000 soldiers, along with horses, mules, and wagons swamped the Polk County hamlet, which one soldier described as “slower than the resurrection.” Those encampments created a unique chapter in Lakeland history, and the experiences of each military unit provide insight into that hectic period.

TENTH UNITED STATES CAVALRY

Composed of African-American troops, the Tenth U.S. Cavalry was created by an act of Congress in 1866. Designed to increase and fix the military peace establishment of the United States, the law provided for four new regiments, two of which were “composed of colored men.” These two units included the Ninth and Tenth Regiments, whose black troops were commanded by white officers. By 1898 the Tenth had earned recognition for its bravery during the Indian Wars and its members were called “Buffalo Soldiers” by Native Americans against whom they fought.
Reaching Lakeland over a three-day period from May 14 to 16, the Tenth camped in the area where Lakeland Middle Academy (formerly Lakeland High School) stands today. John J. Pershing, later head of the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I, was a twenty-seven-year-old first lieutenant with Troop D, Tenth Cavalry, in Lakeland. He arrived from Chickamauga Park, Georgia, on May 16 and departed June 7. Even though he had been associated with the Tenth for a short time only, he had already acquired the name which followed him throughout his illustrious career – “Black Jack” Pershing.5

Historians of the Tenth in Florida have focused on the friction between the black soldiers and white citizens, particularly in Tampa and Key West.6 In Lakeland conflict also erupted, resulting in the loss of life in one instance. After arriving in Lakeland on May 16, several members of the Tenth went to town and were refused service at Dr. Forbes’s drug store. They became abusive and left but later returned, entering the barber shop next door and requesting a shave. Refused service again, they went outside and shot out the windows of the barber shop. Several local citizens emerged from homes and stores to ascertain the cause of the shooting. One of them, Joab Collins, was struck by a stray bullet and died shortly thereafter. Two Buffalo Soldiers, James Johnson and John Young, were arrested and taken into custody by Polk County Sheriff Tillis. The sources of such clashes included racism, segregation, and resentment by black soldiers at serving their country while being denied service by their countrymen. For many whites in

Soldiers in Lakeland at the corner of Main Street and Kentucky Avenue.

Photograph courtesy of Lakeland Public Library Special Collections.
Moreover, in many instances the races worked well together. Black teamsters often taught white soldiers the complicated task of hauling baggage with a jerk-line team of mules, and in the kitchens, black cooks supervised white soldiers generally without incident. There were also examples of fraternizing between the races. In his war memoirs, one white soldier told of learning gambling games from black soldiers. Already familiar with poker, he learned “craps” from members of the Tenth. He also watched with fascination as black teamsters played a skillful but dangerous game in which they circled one another cracking whips at each other’s feet. Musical entertainment and sports also provided common ground. The Tenth Cavalry band performed “delightful concerts” for the Seventy-First New York, and white soldiers watched baseball games played between black teams. White soldiers also interacted with black townspeople. The Massachusetts Regiment attended Sunday services at an African-American church, and black women prepared meals for white troops. One Ohio soldier recalled going to an old “colored lady’s shack” on Sunday mornings. “She would bake us some of the finest ‘hot cakes’ I ever tasted,” he recalled, “with ‘lasses’ and coffee. The price was 20 cents.”

SECOND REGIMENT OF MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEERS

The Second Regiment of Massachusetts Infantry Volunteers arrived in Lakeland at 8:30 p.m. on May 16. Their journey to Florida had begun at Camp Dewey, Massachusetts. From there they traveled by train to Newport, Rhode Island, where a steamer conveyed them to New York City. Their original destination was Tampa but orders were changed. Instead the Volunteers found themselves arriving by train in Lakeland after a 100-hour trip. The morning after their arrival the troops left the depot and marched to the north side of Lake Morton, where the Lakeland Area Chamber of Commerce (formerly the Lakeland Public Library) is located today. Newspapers and books referred to the setting as Camp Morton, Camp Lakeland or Camp Massachusetts. Soldiers jokingly referred to it as Camp Little-To-Eat. One report described the site as “most picturesque” and “one of the healthiest spots in this state.” A history of Company L added that the camp was “an ideal one, situated on the picturesque banks of Lake Morton in a grove of tall white oaks, whose drooping branches were festooned with great bunches of beautiful Spanish moss.”

However, some accounts were less enthusiastic. One noted that after leaving Lakeland the regiment went to Ybor City which was “more satisfactory ... being a great deal cleaner and an ideal camping place.” Ironically, milder weather was one of the reasons given for Lakeland’s selection over Tampa, but according to one newspaperman, Second Regiment soldiers in Lakeland “stood around perspiring and watching a thermometer climb to 125 degrees!” Describing Lakelanders, this Massachusetts reporter wrote: “These natives, by the way, are a
constant source of interest and delight to the officers and men with their quaint dialect and ways which are much different from ours.” According to this northerner, “The people here are nice, that being the word that best expresses it, that is the people who use them right. But Lord help the man who attempts to ‘mash’ or speak lightly of their women,” he explained. “In such cases, their action is quick and usually certain, the usual medium being a revolver bullet.”

Daily life soon became a routine for the Massachusetts Volunteers. They set up camp quickly and uneventfully, except for an occasional scorpion. Swimming proved a favorite activity for the men. It was said to “alleviate greatly the inconveniences of camp life.” The following schedule indicates a typical Massachusetts Volunteer’s day:

- Reveille, First Call: 4:45 am
- March: 4:55
- Assembly: 5:00
- Breakfast: 5:15
- Surgeon’s call: 6:10
- First sergeant’s call: 6:45
- Drill (except Sat/Sun): 7:05-8:30
- Drill for recruits: 8:35-9:30
- Dinner: 12 noon
- Guard mounting: 5:45 p.m.
A company kitchen of Massachusetts troops camped in Lakeland.

Photograph courtesy of Lakeland Public Library Special Collections.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>retreat</td>
<td>6:00</td>
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<td>assembly and roll call</td>
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<td>supper</td>
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<td>tattoo</td>
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<td>taps</td>
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Reveille and retreat roll calls were held under arms in canvas uniforms, except on Sundays when blue uniforms were worn. Company commanders were required to make complete inspections every Saturday, and they made daily inspections of the men’s quarters and kitchens. The senior medical officer undertook daily inspections of the camp and insured that proper sanitary regulations were followed, while other medical officers inspected tents to enforce daily raising of tent walls and airing. They also checked food and drinking water and enforced rules governing proper disposal of water. There were also restrictions on the use of lakes. Second Regiment soldiers were permitted to bathe between 4 and 8 a.m. and between 4 and 6 p.m., “provided due regard to public property and town ordinances [was] observed by the bathers.”

The city’s first casualty was a Massachusetts soldier, Company I Private Wesley Brass. Ill for several days with pneumonia which he had contracted in Massachusetts, he died on May 21. An historic marker, erected in 1948 on the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Lake Morton
Drive, mentions him by name. A memorial service was held in a small Episcopal Church along Lake Mirror, after which the body was escorted to the depot to begin its journey northward. Every company in the regiment marched behind the carriage, and citizens lined the streets as the cortege passed. On May 30, the Massachusetts Infantry broke camp and went by train to Tampa.

FIRST U. S. CAVALRY

The First U.S. Cavalry arrived in Lakeland during the evening of May 16. Brigadier General Young was the commanding officer. One unit of the First, the Rough Riders, included Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, although it is not known if he was in Lakeland. The cavalry camped between Lakes Morton and Hollingsworth. Each morning and afternoon the cavalry band played “The Star-Spangled Banner” and other popular tunes. On the morning of June 1, Tom Tiger, chief of the local Seminole Indians, visited Lakeland and toured the First Cavalry camp. The illustrious chief was enthusiastically received by both soldiers and citizens. The *Tampa Tribune* gave the following account of his visit.

He says that he is anxious to enlist in the army with his tribe of red men as scouts. He was dressed partly in citizens clothing, but the deer skin leggins and other wearing apparel peculiar to the Seminole warrior were noticeable. He looks to be a man of at least 60 years and measured about
six and a half feet in height. Tom was a great attraction for the small boys, and they followed him all over town. 22

The majority of the First Cavalry left Lakeland on June 7, but some men who were ill remained until August. At least nine regulars died in camp. One newspaper suggested “an epidemic of measles” as the cause of death. 23

SEVENTY-FIRST NEW YORK VOLUNTEERS

On May 17, at 4 a.m., the Seventy-First New York Volunteers arrived in Lakeland from Tampa. The regiment camped on the northwest side of Lake Morton, between Walnut and Lime streets, and between Florida and Massachusetts avenues, where today the law firm Lane-Trohn stands. Soldiers named the camp “Wabash” after a popular song. 24 A New York newspaper described it as “the best camp in Florida. There is not a sick man among them. The tents are pitched in a lovely grove, from whose rustling branches hang graceful wreaths of Southern moss. At the very feet of the camp ripples a splendid lake, with waters clear as crystal and fit to drink.” 25

According to another reporter, “Lakeland had the advantage of any town in the state,” in terms of the abundance and quality of the lake water. 26 If the soldiers had remained in Tampa, they would have bivouacked on burning sands at sea level. “Now their tents are pitched in pleasant places and on the highest elevation in the State,” a New York paper assured hometown readers. 27
The New York Volunteers’ commander, Colonel Francis Greene, had a reputation as a disciplinarian. “Not a man was permitted to leave the train on the way down,” a New York reporter wrote, “and even the pretty women of the South who sought the cars and tossed nosegays to the soldiers at nearly every station had to be content with bright glances from the windows of the cars and fleeting outstretched handshakes.” Once in camp, Colonel Greene did not allow newspapers to be sold until the afternoon, since papers “distracted the boys from working.” Curiously, soldiers with full beards and mustaches were not forced to shave, but men who had only recently decided to start growing facial hair were “punished while they slept.” Coal tar was rubbed on their faces. Coal tar, it was said, was fatal, so shaving became a necessity. On Saturday, May 28, the entire Seventy-First formed a line at the base of their camp at the foot of Tennessee Avenue and marched to the railroad station. Cheered on by citizens who lined the street, the Volunteers bade farewell to General Greene, who had been promoted from colonel. On that same day Private Hobsmith died of dysentery contracted while en route from New York.

Three days later the regiment broke camp at an early hour. With heavy wagons filled with provisions, tents, and ammunition, the soldiers streamed toward the depot. A train took them to Tampa, where they awaited orders to go to Cuba. A number of local young ladies gathered at the station to see them off. There was a custom among soldiers to remove buttons from the uniforms and give them to civilians as souvenirs, but it was noted that when the New York Volunteers left,
buttons were in short supply, so the ladies “did not have the honor of obtaining so many [that] morning.”

FIRST OHIO VOLUNTEER CAVALRY

The First Ohio Volunteer Cavalry received orders to leave Camp Thomas, Chickamauga Park, on June 30, but the order was immediately countermanded. Two weeks later the men boarded trains for Tampa, only to be diverted to Lakeland. They arrived on July 15 at 6 a.m., the day after the fall of Santiago and the same day as the surrender of Spain. Upon deboarding in Lakeland, the soldiers cooked breakfast in Munn Park, or as one source described it, “on the commons near the station.” Then they marched to camp, located in what later was called the Dixieland area (today known as the South Lake Morton District) between McDonald Street and Lake Hollingsworth Drive, and between Pennsylvania and Ingraham avenues.

According to Sergeant Gordon F. Miles, Lakeland provided a perfect campground with pleasant breezes and an abundance of fish in the lakes. He did have a couple of complaints, though. One was that the insects were “exceedingly ill mannered.” He added that “Lakeland is a nice little place, but slower than the resurrection, for you cannot buy a single thing there on Sunday, as every business house, including drug stores, are tightly closed and one cannot buy ice cream even at a hotel.” Nevertheless, the Ohio sergeant emphasized, “The people here are far superior to the Georgia ‘Cracker’ and are very hospitable to our boys.”

The weather was no warmer than it had been in Georgia, drills were less frequent owing to the sandy soil, and in general the men had more freedom. Adjoining the camp were an orange grove, banana trees bearing fruit, and watermelons “plentiful as Ohio corn.” “The favorite pastime is swimming and fishing,” wrote one observer, “at which the boys spend so much of their time that there is hardly enough left in camp for the necessary details.” But not everyone agreed about the pleasant surroundings. One man noted the complete absence of song birds, while vultures were everywhere. With the exception of those who were ill, most of the regulars enjoyed themselves. However, Sergeant Miles related one man’s unfortunate introduction to Florida. The soldier rode his horse through a nest of yellow jackets, fell off, and fled to one of the lakes. He returned two and a half hours later with over one hundred stings on his body. “He had the boys chewing tobacco and rubbing the chews on him for an hour,” wrote Miles.

The First Ohio had more illness than other regiments. On August 29 the Press-Post noted that fifty-four Ohio men were suffering from malarial and typhoid fevers. But the typhoid cases did not originate in Lakeland; they were due to consumption of tainted water at Chickamauga. Many accounts of illness suggest confusion or misdiagnoses. One soldier, Second Lieutenant Paul Loving, became weak and emaciated from what ultimately proved to be typhoid but which was originally described as due to impure water at Lakeland or a result of “one of those treacherous fevers indigenous to the southland.” Concern about illness led to some curious prohibitions. Ohio soldiers were not allowed to eat watermelon due to the great amount of sickness.

The practice of “throwing horses” began July 30. The men were told to exercise great caution because the horses had become very valuable after three months of training. According to one report, “A slight injury means unfitness for service, and as the value of a cavalry horse is not
estimated in dollars, the loss would be considerable. A better place for such work could not be asked, as the sand furnishes a good place upon which to throw them.”

By the end of July, the First Ohio was “still anxiously awaiting orders to move.... ‘To the front! To the front!’ [was] the continual cry,” according to an Ohio newspaper man. Impatience only increased through the month of August. On a given day the troops would be ordered to prepare to break camp, and then the order would be countermanded. One day they would be ordered to Puerto Rico and the next to some northern camp. Rumors flourished in that climate of confusion, and journalists noted “a constant state of gloom both in the sky and among the men.” The First Ohio finally left on August 20 and reached Huntsville, Alabama, on August 23.44

CAMP LIFE

The sudden influx of troops created a number of logistical problems. Basic necessities were often in short supply. Ice had to be ordered from Tampa.45 Horses were scarce too. “Every farmer in the country has sold his horse to the officers now here,” reported one paper. Mail delivery also became a problem; the postmaster was reportedly “laboring under many difficulties.”46 In August a shortage of milk occurred, and troops scoured the country looking for that beverage.47
As soldiers waited anxiously for orders to leave for Cuba, they complained about a number of irritants. Mosquitoes were especially bothersome, and the men were issued mosquito netting. The “deplorable condition” of the streets made movement difficult. The *Tampa Tribune* reported that “the long dry spell has caused the clay to become soft and the heavy wagons have ground the pavements into dust. When the rains come they will be in still worse condition for awhile, than they are at present.” Polk County was dry in other respects as well, since local option prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages. Nevertheless, beer was not in short supply. A carload of the liquid refresher arrived by train two days after the first troops were settled.

One problem for which there was no solution was the weather. In May alone over a dozen men were hospitalized because of heat exhaustion and “fever caused by over exertion.” One private was called from Lakeland to Tampa, because his brother, a soldier with the Third Ohio Infantry, had suddenly lost his reason due to excessive heat.

Even though the majority of the soldiers adapted to the warm climate, most of them had difficulty satisfying basic needs, especially food. Business was described as “on the rush.” “Every man and boy that can muster sufficient capital together to purchase a dozen lemons and a pound of sugar establishes a refreshment stand,” declared one newspaper. “In every nook and corner in town there many be seen shops and stands of different kinds.” Reporters minced no words, referring to those stands as huck stores and calling the people who operated them as hucksters. The pejorative labels, however, do not accurately represent the situation. Lakeland women who realized that the soldiers were “hungry all the time” turned their family kitchens into restaurants. They sold lemonade, custards, and pies. Although some made money from these enterprises, the soldiers had money and seemed eager to purchase the commodities. Often lost in the criticism of the townspeople is the fact that many of them turned their homes into makeshift hospitals and provided nursing care and nutritional meals. With respect to food, soldiers often supplemented their meals with whatever happened to poke its nose into camp or whatever they could catch in the lakes. Fish, rattlesnakes, raccoons, alligators, and turtles often provided tasty meals. Quail, rabbit, and deer were also available. Regional differences in tastes led to conflicting opinions about camp food. New York soldiers complained about the superabundance of beans, while Massachusetts men “did not get enough beans to fill a teaspoon.”

In addition to the usual complaints, the Volunteers groused that they did not receive the same treatment as enlisted men. Many resented the fact that they were unfairly restricted to camp and that meals were often limited to salt horse, beans, and hard tack (a kind of saltless bread or biscuit). However, one veteran saw the situation the other way. He explained that many regulars did not re-enlist after serving their term, but instead joined the Volunteers, where advancement was more rapid and where their superior experience obtained for them the rank of sergeant or even a commission.

Despite difficulties, the troops found a way to cope. They could find comfort in religious services, held by the respective chaplains. For amusement, every company had a mascot, generally a pig, raccoon, dog or goat, that was “stolen en route.” Even rifle drills could provide comic relief. Soldiers in the New York Seventy-Second had engaged in little or no practice shooting guns, so their experience was instructive to themselves and amusing to the veterans. Leisure activities, such as baseball, also took the edge off camp life. Games were played between
the First Cavalry and the Seventy-First Infantry, and between the Twelfth Cavalry and Twenty-First Regiment, New York Volunteers. Swimming and fishing were also popular pastimes, as was music. The Seventy-First New York staged an impromptu performance with skits that “pleased the officers,” and concerts were offered by Troop D of the Ohio Volunteers and the Tenth Cavalry band. Officers from the Massachusetts Volunteers formed a club in town and entertained the troops by singing and playing banjos.\textsuperscript{56} Local organizations also provided leisure activities. Lakeland Masons invited the Masons of the First Ohio to attend lodge with them. Such fraternal ties proved useful in other ways, as one Massachusetts Volunteer pointed out in a memoir written after the war.

The banker of the town was a man by the name of Neuenkamp, a German of good education, who had been a consul at some South American port at one time. I had taken the precaution to establish my credit at this bank so that in case of need I could obtain money through it on my personal checks. My Masonic associations also helped me, as Mr. Neuenkamp was master of the Lodge at Lakeland.\textsuperscript{57}

Despite the confusion and shortages, it is perhaps a minor miracle that a small village could respond as well as it did to what amounted to a military invasion. Though unprepared for the onslaught of thousands of soldiers, Lakeland provided for the troops more effectively than Tampa, which was plagued with problems such as an inadequate port and rail facilities, bureau-
ocratic incompetence, inadequate food supplies, and the lure of seamy attractions. Tampa and Key West certainly played more important roles in the Spanish-American War, but Lakeland acquitted itself well.

1 For information on Lakeland in the 1890s, see newspapers in the files of the Lakeland Public Library’s Special Collections Unit; U.S. Census of Population: 1950 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952), 10.

2 Tampa Tribune, May 17, 18, 31, 1898; Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, May 18, 1898; unidentified Massachusetts newspaper in the Lakeland Public Library’s Special Collections Unit, Record Group 1101; letter from Major General Edward F. Witsell to Lakeland Public Library Director Serena C. Bailey, February 18, 1948, ibid.; Gary R. Mormino, “Tampa’s Splendid Little War: A Photo Essay,” Tampa Bay History 4 (Fall/Winter 1982), 46; Columbus, Ohio, Press-Post, August 30, 1898.

3 Columbus Press-Post, July 22, 1898.

4 Thirty-Ninth Congress, Session I, Chapter 299, 1866, p. 332; The History of the Tenth Cavalry, 1866-1921, compiled and edited by Major E.L.N. Glass (Ft. Collins, Colorado: The Old Army Press, n.d.).

5 Unpublished note from the late Herbert J. Drane (Lakeland Congressman), Lakeland Public Library, Special Collections, Record Group 1100; Witsell letter.


7 Ibid., Tampa Tribune, May 18, 1898; Charles Johnson Post, The Little War of Private Post (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 54.
8 Unidentified Massachusetts newspaper, 1898, Lakeland Public Library, Special Collections, RG 1101.


10 *Tampa Tribune*, May 29, June 2, 1898.


13 Unidentified Massachusetts newspaper, Lakeland Public Library, Special Collections, RG 1101.


16 Springfield Republican, May 24, 1898.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., May 22, 1898.

19 According to an unpublished letter, dated September 24, 1949, and written by Serena C. Bailey, the marker incorrectly reflects the spelling of the soldier's first name; it should read “Weslie.” Lakeland Public Library, Special Collections.

20 Unidentified Massachusetts newspaper, May 22, 1898, ibid.; *Tampa Tribune*, June 2, 1898.

21 Unpublished note from Herbert J. Drane; Springfield Republican, May 24, 1898.

22 *Tampa Tribune*, June 2, 1898.

23 Unpublished note from Herbert J. Drane; *Ohio State Journal*, August 21, 1898.

24 Letter from Mrs. James W. Passmore, daughter of Herbert J. Drane, to Esther Perry, June 9, 1947, Lakeland Public Library, Special Collections, RG 1100; *Tampa Tribune*, May 29, 1898.

25 *New York Journal and Advertiser*, May 18, 1898.

26 *Tampa Tribune*, May 19, 1898.

27 *New York Journal and Advertiser*, May 18, 1898.

28 Ibid.

29 *Tampa Tribune*, May 19, 1898.

30 *New York Journal and Advertiser*, May 18, 1898.

31 *Tampa Tribune*, May 29, 31, 1898.
32 Ibid., May 31, 1898.

33 Ohio State Journal, July 1, 17, 1898; Columbus Press-Post, July 3, 1898; Columbus Dispatch, July 20, 1898

34 Columbus Dispatch, July 20, 1898.

35 Passmore letter.

36 Columbus Press-Post, July 22, 1898.

37 Columbus Dispatch, July 20, 1898.

38 Ohio State Journal, July 25, 1898.

39 Columbus Dispatch, July 20, 1898.

40 Ohio State Journal, August 21, 1898.

41 Columbus Press-Post, July 22, 1898.

42 Ibid., August 19, 28 (quotation), 1898; Columbus Dispatch, August 2, 29, 1898; Ohio State Journal, August 21, 1898.

43 Ohio State Journal, July 31, 1898.

44 Ibid., August 21, 24, 1898.

45 Columbus Press-Post, August 19, 1898.

46 Tampa Tribune, May 22, 1898.

47 Columbus Press-Post, August 19, 1898.

48 Ibid., July 28, 1898.

49 Tampa Tribune, May 20, June 1 (quotation), 1898, p. 1.

50 Ibid., May 21, 25, 1898.

51 Columbus Press-Post, July 31, 1898.

52 Tampa Tribune, May 29, 31, June 1 (quotation), 1898.


56 Tampa Tribune, May 18, 22, 24-26, 1898; Columbus Dispatch, July 1, 1898; Columbus Press-Post, July 28, 1898.


“TAMPA IS A BUM PLACE”: THE LETTERS OF FIRST SERGEANT HENRY A. DOBSON IN 1898

by Alicia Addeo

When soldiers marched off to fight, they often communicated with their families by writing letters. On their way to the front, during lulls in the action, and even when sick at camp, soldiers described their experiences. They also tried to reassure loved ones that they were brave and could face danger, even though they preferred to be home. These letters serve as valuable documents offering insight into soldiers’ daily existence and struggles. Many families saved correspondence sent home by their sons. The Dobsons of Washington, D.C., were one such family. Their son, First Sergeant Henry A. Dobson, wrote many letters and postcards to his parents describing his experiences during the Spanish-American War. Between May 31 and July 28, 1898, Henry A. Dobson sent letters to his mother and father discussing his health, condition of the food and water, and diseases such as yellow fever and typhoid fever. Health-related subjects provide a theme running throughout most of his letters and postcards. Dobson wanted to share almost everything with his parents including his medical problems, but he also needed to reassure them that he was fit for duty and did not want to be discharged. He obviously took his job as first sergeant seriously. His letters contain gems of information about his daily work schedule and observations of the world around him during his stay in Tampa en route to Cuba.
Henry A. Dobson was born June 7, 1878, the youngest son of Dr. and Mrs. Hervie Dobson of Washington, D.C. He had two brothers, William and Alle, and a sister, Helen (“Dot”). He attended local public schools, and as a sixteen-year-old high school student he “was a member of the Ordway Rifles, Co. D, 4th Battalion, District National Guard, rising to the rank of Sergeant. He won a medal for competitive drill, also one in target practice, and earned a sharpshooter’s cross.”

As an adult, Dobson had a light complexion, brown eyes, light hair, and stood about five feet seven inches. He listed his family’s home address as 110 Eleventh Street Northeast, which was on Capitol Hill. After high school, he accepted a position with the Patent Office, joined the Sons of Veterans and became “an active member of the Eastern Presbyterian Church and Sunday-school.” As America geared up for war, Dobson mustered in as a First Sergeant, Company D, First District of Columbia (Infantry) Volunteers on May 13, 1898. He was one month shy of his twentieth birthday. While Dobson was in the military, his brother Will worked as a missionary in China.

Henry was miserable most of his tour of duty due to his health, which was generally poor throughout his service. Substandard food and water contributed to his sick stomach, along with other medical ailments. His lack of money to purchase good food was a constant problem. In his
first correspondence, dated May 31, 1898, he discussed the dreadful conditions en route to Tampa: “Not well, water too much like compound cathartic whether boiled or not. Broke, – stomach could not hold bacon, to[o] fat, had to buy bread and milk, that and the ride up drains me out. Can you help me at all? If so I don’t know where you would send it yet. Pretty tough here, no water, no food.” His next letter, written two days later, mentioned food three separate times. In this four-paragraph, two-page letter to his mother, Dobson wrote: “Food still poor. Poor food is making men cross, doubles my work, triples it. I am always tired now. Would give my years pay though to get one square meal at the N.W. corner of our table.”

Occasionally, Dobson was able to obtain better food, relatively speaking. “We had excellent stew for supper,” he wrote on June 6. “The boys called it ‘clear-up’ as it contains 3 days scraps. Hardtack and black coffee completed supper! That sentence ought to copy-righted; it’s always true. I was va[c]inated today the boys call it branding, it’s sore alright (i.e., my arm is sore). The boys are catching fish lately rather large and nice.” Additional comments about food and his health in this letter were positive. “I received Dot’s letter and Papa’s also the ‘dough’ which I believe saved me from a severe attack of sickness, because I ate, ate, ate plain food though steak, eggs, potatoes, etc. My stomach is getting much better now, and I think it will be O.K.”

Dobson’s next letter, six pages written June 12, was very optimistic and mentioned his health only once. “Well, my stomach is getting much better,” he claimed, “thanks to my being able to process something better than bacon.”

A postcard addressed to his mother three days later mentioned his stomach problems, along with something new: “I am in Room of Y.M.C.A., closing time. Will write sure tomorrow and explain. O.K. Stomach O.K. arm very sore and swollen to wrist — – its taking.” By June 18, he appeared to be in poor spirits. In a six-page letter, he poured out his heart to his mother:

I have just spent my last cent or rather dollar to have one of my front teeth quieted – Dr. Cowart on Franklin St – he took out a thimble full of matter, had to take out old filling, put in by Tommy Songster. It occurred 10 minutes ago...I have not slept for two nights on account of that tooth. I’ve got to go again Monday to have it finished – another “William” – where it will come from, I don’t know. Regardless of what the papers say, the food is miserable, for 6 days I have been living on one meal per-day, having to buy that one. Once in a while we get something good. Very seldom. Coffee rank; have not touched any for 10 days, except to taste it...I didn’t say anything about it before, but I took 1 cubic inch of my own right heel out the other day. It was terrible. I had to walk. But I treated it carefully and it has stopped hurting and the Surgeon says will not bother me anymore . . . My arm is getting very well thank you, swelling all gone except in immediate vicinity of wound. I’m glad it was done – also glad it is over.

I’m broke ‘ can you help me at all. Its a long ways to pay-day I’m afraid. I should not have sent money home this time while my stomach is weak. I’ll try and borrow some some where.

Another six-page letter to his mother followed, on June 23:

I am better. We changed cooks yesterday and the result is apparent, good food including bacon. He, Yratman, cooks bacon so that is it fine. My stomach seems well. Night before last I was carried to the Hospital with the strangest illness I have had a sick – headache and a weakness that was awful. But they got my stomach cleaned cleaned out, (I vomited scrapes of Bacon that I know I ate at Camp Alger, and lots of grease, etc.) Now I feel better, internally, than at any time since leaving home. I’ve got some cuts on my feet, of course. But they don’t count – nothing to speak of.
In the same letter, Dobson discussed sickness, yellow fever or typhoid fever, in the Tampa camps, but tried to reassure his mother everything was all right. “You people must not be worried at any reports of sickness from here,” he reassured her. “There has been no real sickness at all here, in our regiment, only cramps etc., nothing bad. Very healthful place it seems. If I get taken sick-bad—I’ll telegraph or if I’m not able Wooldridge or the ‘Captain’ will so never worry.”

The next day, in a postcard to his father, Dobson again mentioned his health. “Just got ‘registered’ at P.O. In Tampa and off to get tooth fixed – had to wait. “Apparently his family had been so concerned about his health that they may have asked him to obtain a discharge from the military. “Get discharged?” he wrote, “Not a bit of it. Stomach getting well will write more tonight.” A postcard to his mother, dated June 29, put to rest any notion of getting discharged from the service: “If papa thinks I was a disch,” Dobson wrote, “He has forgotten what Dobsons are made of. I’ll come home with the boys.” A two-page letter written the same day only briefly mentioned his health: “Don’t worry about me. I’m getting stronger now that my stomach has settled.” In a postcard to his father on July 2, Dobson reported he had received a package of food from his parents: “I am feeling O.K. Box fine. Bread – Beef Butter – Cherries – Dates all O.K.” In a postcard written July 4, while aboard the transport ship Catania, Dobson wrote he felt better. “Don’t worry about me,” Dobson reassured his mother again, on July 9, “Because I’m O.K. – never felt physically better.”

Henry Dobson cared deeply for his men, and mentioned them often in his letters and postcards. Even when he was ill, he did not want to let them down. As a first sergeant, he was responsible for their well-being. Writing reports, drilling his men and making sure everything ran smoothly left him little time to eat his meals, bathe, or wash his clothes. In a letter dated June 2, he discussed how the poor quality of food affected his soldiers, how they were coming along, and how he felt about the officers. “Poor food is making men cross, doubles my work, triples it,” Dobson complained. “I’m always tired now. But my non-coms. are learning and it will be easier after a while. I hope. Officers treat me as if I wore stripes as far as possible. Very nice.” Dobson constantly tried to reassure his parents his stomach was better and insisted he would continue with his men. “My stomach is getting much better now, and I think it will be O.K.,” he wrote June 6. “Tell papa that I’ll go with the regiment, and won’t be left behind.”

In his letter of June 12, he described a typical Tampa work day to his mother:
Here is my program for the day. Get up at 5:00 A.M., wake up the boys at First Call 5:10, get them into line at 5:25, Reveille have them in uncover while the band plays “the Star Spangled Banner,” Call the roll at 5:30, take my report to the commanding officer, give the company “sitting-up exercises” for 10 minutes. Have the Sick Report made out and sent to the Hospital. March the company back to quarters, dismiss them. Fall them in again at 6:00 for Breakfast, march them to the kitchen have them fed, there try to eat my own breakfast and at the same time make out and deliver to headquarters my morning report and mess report for breakfast. This has to be done by 6:50 because at that time First Call for Drill sounds and I have to get the boys ready for assembly at 7:00 when I form the company and we drill before 10 A.M. when the bathing is ordered stopped till 6 P.M. Then the streets and tents are cleaned under my direction, and presently it is 11:30 and I have to answer First Sergeants Call at headquarters. There at 12. Comes mess, and I mean the weather is so hot that you feel flattened to the ground. At 1:30 comes Noncommissioned officers school. At 3:30 P.M. drill with the same performance till 5:00. Mess at 5:30. Same work, including mess-report to head-qtr’s. Then at 6:00 comes 1st Call for Retreat and Inspection, get the boys ready; at 6:10 form company. Inspection and Roll call; dismissal. Nothing more until 9:00 when the company is formed once more for roll-call, then at 9:30 Taps, and I must see that all lights go out.

Mixed in with all that I am supposed to wash myself, clothes, dishes, make details, and passes, and answer the thousand-and-one worrying questions of 75 men... Well I suppose that I ought to be satisfied, since Uncle Sam pays me $8.40 extra for the extra work per month.

In the same letter, Dobson claimed conditions were much better, which had improved morale. “This is a nice campground, good bathing 10 rods from our tents ‘Tampa Bay’ Drinking water at the company street, and a breeze. The boys are a great deal happier than they were and everything seems much brighter that it did.” In a letter to his mother June 18, he claimed to be popular with his men, but had a problem with one of them. This particular soldier irritated him enough to write: “Our good boys like me better than ever. But there is one man who if I see turn around in battle I’ll battle I’ll shoot right away – he thinks I’m down on him and is revengeful. Wait till he threatens once more. I’ll have him court-martialed. All the boys dislike him for his actions toward me but I’m O.K. never fear.” In the same letter, he mentioned a Mr. Ritchey, who might have been an officer or a soldier in his regiment. Mr. Ritchey also received mail from home and the two must have shared their correspondence. In his next letter, Dobson mentioned that Mr. Ritchey had received another letter from home and that he wanted to be sure he was “remembered” in Dobson’s letters to his parents. Dobson also sent greetings from “Sgt. Dickinson and all the rest including some that never saw you.” On June 29, Dobson was busy and worried about his regiment which was going to lose some of its men. “Lost one sergeant and seven privates by transfer to the U.S.V. Signal Corps we’re getting short,” he observed.

In a long letter written on June 18, Dobson went into great detail about a horse stampede. This frightening encounter provided an example of the courage his men exhibited. Dobson was very proud of his men and how they handled themselves during the stampede. According to his description, the stampede was likely the most hazardous event the D.C. volunteers had experienced up to that point in the Tampa camp:

Perhaps you read of [the] stampede the other night. That, showed what the companies were. The boys were all asleep. I was writing when I heard the peculiar roar of the horses hoofs. I know what it was and proceeded – in my blue shirt – to the captains tent and awakened him. A moment later came the crash of the fence and the cry of the sentinel “guard no. 6” followed by the “bang” of his rifle sounding the alarm. In an instant all was confusion, the trumpets sounded – the call “To Arms” and men came springing from their tents to answer their first call at night. In 30 seconds I
had on pants, shoes-(unlaced), hat and belt, another 30 seconds and my men were in line and I was calling the [muster] roll – that quieted the boys. Meanwhile my cooks with excellent presence of mind started large fires to keep off the rushing animals. Others followed their example and camp was safe on the coral side. But the horses circled the camp and entered the officers street, and came plunging down it [and] they passed within 2 yards of me and the right of our company. **But my boys never moved not a man.** The Co. in front broke and ran back into our street. But my men are men. We expect another stampede any time as some one is keeping the mules excited at night. If they get loose-well I hope not.23

Dobson enclosed a small map he drew, showing where the stampede took place, the location of the streets, and where the tents were located. This visual added to the high drama of the moment. He and his men, he claimed, exhibited discipline during a life-threatening and chaotic situation. It took courage not to panic like the others.

Henry had good and bad days in Tampa. On bad days, when he was homesick, lonely or ill, everything bothered him. On June 18, he described a visit to the dentist, the bad food, and the poor quality of available fruit. He talked of home and eating at the family dinner table. In the same letter, Dobson provided his parents with a vivid description of Tampa and the immediate vicinity of his camp, including a map:
Tampa is, collectively speaking, a BUM place. Its map is like this. [He drew a map showing the
Tampa Bay Hotel with the comment “Nice” below it, and indicating the location of the New York
and District of Columbia camps and where his was situated.] Our camp [is] on the right. Coral
behind, water filled with glass before sun [shines] on top. Sand beneath 2nd N.Y. on our site 5th
Md on [the] other, total – rather bum, dotted line – the way I go to swim, old sunken tug (x) water
very salty, 20 ft deep at tug, bottom good – informal assemblies morning and night. The water in
front of [the] camp is shallow and filled with shells, . . . iron, glass and other hardware.24

When he had time, Dobson was able to get away from the camp to go swimming. He probably
envied high ranking officers and war correspondents, most of whom were quartered at the nearby
opulent and luxurious Tampa Bay Hotel. In the sea of camps, the hotel appeared almost as an
island of wealth and status. While the more fortunate stayed at the hotel, the soldiers had to
“rough it.”

In letters to his parents, Dobson recorded other interesting experiences he had while at the
Tampa camp. Since he was from Washington, D.C., Spanish moss was an unfamiliar sight. On
June 12, he wrote, “I am lying under a live-oak, from whose massive branches hang the famous
‘Hanging Moss.’” In the same letter, he described conditions in his tent once the summer rains
began. “The rainy season started in yesterday evening, came down by bathtubs full. Our ‘Pup
Tents’ make excellent shower baths, sprayed the water all over you.”25 On June 23, he mentioned
the rain again. “The rainy season is on us sure. It rained 8 times today. It Clears, Rains, Clears,
Rains, Clears, etc. all the time.” One of his most memorable experiences in Tampa was seeing a
beautiful rainbow:

I saw a strange and beautiful sight this evening. It was while we were standing at inspection
(which takes the place of dress parade); we face the east and it is just before the sun leaves us in
the strange dark twilight of the south. A few clouds had come into view, and presently, right before
us there appeared a beautiful clear, full arched, rainbow, this above it another and above that still
another – a triple bow. But then the strange part came. The lower and brighter bow became four or
rather a quadruple repetition of the colors. The bow itself remained unchanged but beneath it were
narrow lines of color added to it in regular order, four times repeated the violet at the bottom a.
third bow, b. second, c. original. [He drew the rainbow] d., e., f. three perfect little bows blended
with the c. Although it was the most beautiful “sky piece” I have ever seen.26

Dobson celebrated his twentieth birthday on June 7, 1898, while in Tampa. He was far away
from family and friends and was not pleased with his surroundings. “Well this is the strangest
birthday I’ve ever had, sand, heat, flies, gnats, hunger, dirt, and an intense desire to walk up our
front steps at 100-11 N.E.”27

Little information survives about Henry Dobson’s experiences after he left Tampa. His last
letter was dated July 28, 1898, when he was at the battle San Juan Heights, Santiago de Cuba. An
eleven-page, typed, single-spaced letter written by Dr. Dobson September 20, to Henry’s brother
Will, a missionary in China, discussed several letters received after July 28, but they are missing
from the family collection.28 Newspaper clippings saved by Dobson’s family, along with his
military service record, provide the only information on his activities after that date. An undated
article reported the locations where he had served: “Camp Alger, Va., Chickamauga, Tampa,
Port Tampa, Key West, Siboney, Juragua, Santiago and San Juan. He fought in the trenches and
under fire before Santiago, and was present at the surrender.”29
According to Dr. Dobson’s letter to Will, Henry Dobson and his men returned from Cuba to Camp Wikoff, located in Montauk Point, Long Island, New York, via the transport ship *Hudson*. This was the same location where Colonel Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders were sent after the Cuban campaign. According to his father, Dobson had injured his back while boarding the transport.

On the transport, he volunteered to care for the sick and was with the surgeons and others on the upper deck. He was taken with a chill when two days out and could not eat the stinking meat and musty hard tack, and he wrote me, “lived on four ounces of hand me outs from the pantry – starved[,]” as he said, so when reached Montauk he was very weak. On going ashore on . . . [August] 27th, he was so weak that he was relieved from duty and a doctor was called.30

Dobson’s health grew worse. Camp Wikoff had been erected almost overnight and was not up to the task of handling so many sick soldiers. At the camp, there was much confusion and lack of a coordinated effort. Henry finally saw a doctor, who diagnosed his condition as malaria. Sadly that diagnosis was incorrect. Dobson had typhoid fever. His mother traveled to Montauk to care for him.

Mrs. Dobson found her son in poor condition. She reported that “since leaving Santiago he had not had a change of clothing nor a bath,” and she proceeded to bathe him.31 Dobson was moved to the *Shinnecock*, bound for New York City, the next day. His mother was so persistent that she was allowed to go along with him.32 Mrs. Dobson realized her son was getting worse during the trip. “He was delirious during the night and would call ‘attention company,’ and call the roll from memory, the only sergeant that could do so in the regiment.”33 On September 7, 1898, he was taken to St. Peter’s Hospital, a civilian facility in Brooklyn, New York.34 His condition grew worse immediately upon arrival. “Here mama sat by his side for two hours and no one came near him,” Dr. Dobson wrote Will. “Finally they undressed him and put on underclothes. At five o’clock they ordered her out of the building.”35 Mrs. Dobson was incensed and requested to be with her son, but hospital personnel balked. She tried again, but to no avail. Mrs. Dobson had him moved from St. Peter’s to the Long Island College Hospital on September 9, 1898.36

By the time Dobson arrived on Long Island, he was gravely ill. According to a handwritten medical report in his military service record, he arrived “in a weak delirious state, with a temperature of 103 2/5 degrees.”37 Mrs. Dobson notified her husband of his condition, and he immediately proceeded to New York to be with his wife and son. Henry Dobson was near death
when his father arrived. Delirious and incoherent, he had a temperature that fluctuated between 102 and 105 degrees. He died on Sunday, September 11, 1898, at 9:30 in the morning. Dr. Dobson notified the family in Washington, D.C., of his son’s death.

Dobson’s body was brought to the family home, where friends paid their respects. The church service was attended by many people from “The Y.P.S.C.E., Ladies’ Aid, Easton Literary Association, Patent Office, Pay Division, and while others sent flowers, and his company gave a broken wheel.” He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, with military honors provided by men from his company. Dr. Dobson described the burial site in his letter to Will:

His grave is number 5835 A. Go into the grounds until you come to the Hawkins monument on the left hand, almost opposite the mansion. It is the tallest, finest monument in the grounds...Close by him rest five other boys. Maupin, Griffiths, Maddux, Gaskill, and first sergeant Jost, only a year older than Henry. Others will soon be there, for death is after them. It is awful.

Throughout his letter to Will, Dr. Dobson wrote of how his son was truly loved by his men and everyone else. Also, he mentioned that even though Henry was ill at Montauk, he still wrote home. “Henry wrote me when he first came to Montauk, but his ambition to march up the Avenue with his regiment, and at the head of his company, made him conceal his real condition. He deceived all and even himself. No one thought him so ill.”

After Dobson’s death, his sister Dot received a letter from a woman he had met in Tampa. She was impressed by Dobson's intestinal fortitude and deep-rooted faith. While in Tampa, he had struggled to live by his Christian beliefs in the face of temptation. His father wanted to share this information with Will:

Dot has a letter from a Miss Scott at Tampa, who had written her to know if the name she saw in the paper was really Henry. She tells us of his struggles against the temptation to let things go as they might in Tampa, as so many of his men had given themselves up to temptation. She is [a] librarian of the C.E.[Christian Education] at the Y.M.C.A. rooms. He came there, came again, and each time received help and strength and spoke well in the meetings, telling of his trials. She saw him just before he sailed away and said he was happy, having conquered and had organized a society of C. E. This was kept up all the time. It was pretty hard place for a boy like him, but thank God he withstood all and is safe now.

Miss Scott’s letter was a relief and a blessing, confirming he had raised his son to be a man of conviction and integrity. He was proud of Henry and missed him dearly.

First Sergeant Henry A. Dobson, along with many soldiers during the Spanish-American War, lost his life to infectious disease, rather than to combat wounds. According to one historian, “The total number of deaths in the Army from disease and other noncombat causes between the end of April and the end of September [1898] was 2,565; only 365 men had died in action. The total strength of the Army during this period reached 274,717.” Many of these deaths resulted from inadequate preparation to organize and supply the troops with fresh drinking water or food. It was a logistical nightmare. Food was transported by train, where it spoiled when manifests posted outside each car did not accurately reflect the contents. There was not even a master list of what was on each train. The location of latrines near fresh water sources also contributed to the spread of infectious diseases, such as typhoid fever. Government advisors had been very
concerned about the soldiers health even before the war began. They warned the military against sending troops to Cuba during the rainy season, knowing that they would be subjected to the risk of malaria and yellow fever.

A portrait of the last days of Henry Dobson’s life emerges from his letters to his parents, newspaper clippings, his military record, and the lengthy letter from Dr. Dobson to his missionary son in China. All these surviving records make it clear that Henry A. Dobson proudly served his country under difficult and trying conditions and died in service to his country.

[Acknowledgments: The author thanks Mrs. Ann (Dobson) Faʻalogo for the use of her great uncle’s letters and photographs for this article. In addition, the staff of the Henry B. Plant Museum provided invaluable assistance through a museum internship in 1997. Henry A. Dobson's letters and photographs are on permanent display in a room dedicated to the Spanish-American War in the Henry B. Plant Museum, which is housed in the former Tampa Bay Hotel, now the University of Tampa.]

1 Newspaper clipping, n.p., n.d. [1898], Archives, Henry B. Plant Museum, University of Tampa, Tampa, Florida.

2 Henry A. Dobson, Military Service Record, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
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Henry A. Dobson to Mrs. Dobson, June 15, 1898.
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30 Dr. Dobson to Will Dobson.

31 Ibid.


33 Dr. Dobson to Will Dobson.

34 Military Service Record.

35 Dr. Dobson to Will Dobson.

36 Ibid., and Military Service Record.

37 Military Service Record.

38 Dr. Dobson to Will Dobson.

39 Dr. Dobson to Dobson family, September 11, 1898.

40 Dr. Dobson to Will Dobson.

41 Ibid.

“THE ROCKING-CHAIR WAR”: VIEWS OF TAMPA IN THE NEW YORK PRESS DURING 1898
by William A. Lorenzen IV

As the United States made preparations for war with Spain during the spring of 1898, the press played a significant role in keeping Americans abreast of developments. According to one study, newspapers in “New York City were the most active and effective in dealing with the Cuban question.” Once Tampa became the operations base for the war in Cuba, it was the source of many stories in New York newspapers which sent reporters to cover the scene. However, the articles that appeared did little to boost Tampa’s reputation. In the view of the New York press corps, Tampa was not so much a city as it was a raw and distastefully sandy bit of geography, which lacked the infrastructure to provide for over 50,000 troops on their way to Cuba. Unprepared military authorities were responsible for much of the confusion, which resulted in part from repeated postponement of the scheduled embarkation for Cuba. Indeed, at one point in May, military inactivity led Richard Harding Davis, a correspondent for the New York Herald, to refer to “the rocking-chair period of the war,” emphasizing how officers passed their time on the veranda of the Tampa Bay Hotel.¹
The prominence of the New York press reflected the power and influence of its audience. New York City was the most populated and industrialized city in the United States in the 1890s. It was also the battleground of the fabled newspaper wars of the late nineteenth century which came in the wake of much improved printing press technology and the conversion from expensive rag pulp to cheaper wood pulp paper. These changes enabled mass distribution of cheaper papers. The Spanish-American War and events leading up to it provided an opportunity for the “new school” of journalism that sought to capture a mass audience by use of “popular features and sensational appeals.” This approach represented a departure from the traditional editorial reserve of New York papers. Contributing to the new sensationalism of newspapers was the fierce competition for readers in the New York market. This rivalry pitted the New York Journal of William Randolph Hearst against the New York World of Joseph Pulitzer, but other papers like the New York Times also fought for readers, especially during the Spanish-American War.

In May and June 1898, correspondents for New York newspapers found Tampa to be a harsh, alien environment made chaotic by waves of incoming military personnel. The New York press gave little consideration to the customs, industries, or daily lives of Tampa’s permanent residents, who numbered around 15,000. The city’s largest industry, cigar manufacturing, received only passing reference in the New York papers. This occurred in June when a New York Times reporter attempted to photograph the interior of a cigar factory while accompanied by an army officer. As the reporter tried to take a picture, “a score of Spanish cigar makers... left their benches, some starting toward the stairway and some toward the doors. They had made up their minds that if that officer was going to arrest another spy it was time to disappear, to keep out of bad company.”

Most of the New York press disdainfully described Tampa’s primitive conditions. Although reporters admired the Tampa Bay Hotel, now the University of Tampa, with its intricately grand construction and Moorish minarets glinting in the southern sun, they depicted the surrounding town as sparse and inadequate. The same was said of Tampa’s life line, the overburdened and thus unreliable South Florida railroad of Henry B. Plant, which had only a single track leading from Tampa to Port Tampa.

According to New York correspondents, the hastily constructed military camps in and around Tampa were in a “sorry state” with the ground “thickly covered with palmetto roots” and roads that were “dirty, sandy and impassable.” Reporters also complained about the climate. A journalist from the New York Times wrote that “from the cloudless sky pours a flood of light as brilliant and burning as molten brass, and from the waste of sand, white and gleaming, comes a heating glare as dazzling as if each grain of sand were a refracting mirror.” In such an atmosphere, the troops’ “spirits were sinking under the depressing toil and heat.” The only relief came at night with the “freedom to roam over the little city and explore its half dozen points of interest; a turn about the big hotel and its flower-burdened grounds; a glance at the queer mixture of fashionable and martial life that war has thrown together here in its crucible.”

In an example of journalist spin, newspapermen presented most hardships as proof of soldiers’ toughness. Although the troops confronted numerous difficulties, they quickly adjusted to conditions, according to reporters. One wrote that “the volunteers even when they are a picked lot of men as in the Seventy-first New York, are plainly not in the condition for hard work in the
open fields.” Coming “fresh from banks, counting rooms, and law offices,” they “suffer in this climate.”

8 However, their morale remained high, and “the men have drilled and worked with as great assiduity and enthusiasm as if war were the one aim of life.”

9 New York readers were reassured that their troops were “rapidly becoming acclimated, and when the time for leaving comes, a bronzed and trained lot of men will break camp and embark.”

10 The New York Times reported that “the regular troops of the United States are as superb a body of men as could be found in the world. They are athletic, seasoned to hardship, alert and spirited.”

11 The New York Herald ran a story about “suffering” by the troops, but it quickly carried a follow-up that attributed the story to “a few disgruntled men, who seek every opportunity for the dissemination of unreliable reports.”

12 Some papers clearly sought to maintain popular support for the war, while satisfying military and business interests, including their own circulation. The Herald stated that “of all the untrue stories circulated by the sensational papers, there have been few more cruel than those declaring that the volunteers here are suffering from ill health and from want of proper food. Such stories are without the slightest foundation and only serve to make unhappy the friends of the volunteers . . . . The truth is the men are lavishly fed.”

13 In another obvious effort to reassure readers, the New York Evening Post announced on June 10 that “rations, supplies, and equipment continue to
pour in. Nearly all the volunteers are now uniformed, and the work of equipping them goes steadily on. There is now no complaint about rations.\(^{14}\)

However, some journalists continued to dissent from this optimistic view. For example, Harper's Weekly ran a piece by a well-known reporter of the day, Poultney Bigelow, who decried the poor conditions of troops and wondered why officials had selected so unfit a location as Tampa to encamp an army.\(^{15}\) Privately, Richard Harding Davis expressed similar misgivings. In a letter to his brother, Davis wrote of his reluctance to submit stories to his editors that were in any way negative, and he confessed that conditions in Tampa were poor enough that he “could go on for pages, but it has to be written later. . . [I]f I started to tell the truth at all, it would do no good, and it would open up a hell of an outcry from all of the families of the boys who have volunteered.”\(^{16}\)

In an apparent effort to avoid controversy, New York newspapers focused on the exotic. They featured stories of captured alligators as company mascots and reports that the “Rough Riders will play polo in Cuba,” once they “get the Dons subjugated sufficiently to make them understand the beauties of the game.” Other features told of such intrigues as the Ninth Infantry’s plan to spy on the enemy by using special kites, each of which was to be fitted with “an aerial adjustable camera, with a clever time clock release attachment, a set of army standard signals and box reels, upon which the half-mile long and specially manufactured kite cord is wound.”\(^{18}\)
Catchy headlines also emphasized unusual events, such as the *New York Journal’s* declaration that “Tampa is a Poor Place for a Stray Chicken.” This story featured a letter from a hardy trooper, saying “we have enough food – when we can get it – such as it is...[We] have to steal a stray chicken now and then to make out a meal.”

Unsavory incidents were alluded to, but in a rather innocuous way that made them sound more akin to boyish rough housing. The *New York Evening Post* wrote that “there was much disorder in the worst parts of town and outside the city limits raiding of liquor saloons and cheap theaters, affrays, and wild shootings.” But the article stressed, “In the main part of the town the soldiers behaved in an orderly manner.”

Shining briefly on Tampa, the national spotlight generally presented the little city in an unfavorable light. Nevertheless, for several months Tampa held center stage. The excerpts from the *New York Times* that follow give a flavor of the coverage Tampa received during the preparation of the invasion force. The datelines show that the Times sent a correspondent to Tampa soon after April 11, 1898, when President William McKinley asked Congress for authority to intervene in Cuba and military authorities began looking for a port to launch the expedition. Reports from Tampa continued to appear until mid-June when U.S. troops finally embarked for Cuba. During the “rocking-chair period of the war,” as Richard Harding Davis referred to the weeks of waiting in Tampa, millions of Americans read about preparations for
war and life in the Tampa Bay area. The following excerpts of press coverage are reproduced verbatim from the New York Times.

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TAMPA PREPARES FOR TROOPS

Tampa, Fla., April 16. Tampa is preparing for the arrival of the seven regiments of United States troops ordered to report here. Since it became positively known that they had been ordered to Tampa and that they might remain here for an indefinite period, the matter of finding a suitable camping ground has been agitating the military authorities of this place, who, it is expected, will be called upon by the (quartermaster’s Department of the army to assist in procuring a suitable and convenient site for the camp ground.

Three available places within close proximity to the city proper, to the railway depots, and to water communication have been selected, and it now remains with the Quartermaster sent in advance of the troops to decide between them. One of the places is a high point on Hillsborough Bay known as Ballast Point, where boats drawing twelve feet of water can land, and which is less than a quarter of a mile from the deep-water channel. Here there is also a splendid camp ground of more than 100 acres level and clear, having on it plenty of the best water obtainable in Florida.

One of the other places is the old Fort Brooke reservation, which until the last few months was the property of the Government and which has been used during all previous emergencies for the accommodation of soldiers stationed here. Since the Government threw open the reservation for settlement it has been considerably built up, and is now in the heart of Tampa and on the tracks of the Florida Central and Peninsula Railroad, one of the chief transportation lines reaching Tampa from the North.

The third available site is DeSoto Park, to the north of the city about a mile and possessing both water and rail facilities. The arrival of the advance Quartermaster is expected hourly, and when the selection is made it will be prepared immediately for occupancy by the soldiers. Photographers representing several newspapers are busy taking views. The news of the issuance of the order for the troops to report here has greatly excited the citizens of the place, who believe now for the first time that war is really imminent.

The citizens are almost unanimously in favor of a war, notwithstanding that Tampa is thus far wholly unprotected and until fortifications are completed would be at the mercy of a hostile fleet. Thus the announcement that a strong garrison is en route here has had a most salutary effect. This part of Florida is alive with patriotic men who will avail themselves of an opportunity to enlist in their country’s service. New York Times, April 17, 1898.

TAMPA TURNED INTO A CAMP

Tampa, Fla., April 22. Tampa has been changed from a quiet city of civilians to a veritable military post. Everywhere uniforms and brass buttons are conspicuous. The streets, hotels, clubs, and cafes are filled with soldiers. All last night and today trains have been arriving, filled with
troops from the West, North, and East, so that to-night more than 3,000 of the men are in camp .... Thus far no drill or routine work has been done on account of the confusion by the continual arrival of troops.

Gen. Wade\textsuperscript{21} and his staff have established permanent headquarters at the Tampa Bay Hotel, and thus far they have visited the camp but once....

Meanwhile the soldiers are enjoying themselves as only soldiers can. Already they have penetrated every corner of Tampa and are the apparent owners of the city. The officers have been elected honorary members of the leading social clubs and are thoroughly at home. The cock fights, bulldog fights, and wildcat fights which constitute one of the chief amusements of the Spanish and Cuban elements, have appealed to them also, as well as have the other sports enjoyed by them....

It is very doubtful if Gen. Wade himself knows anything definite about how long the troops will be here. New York Times, April 23, 1898.

WITH THE TROOPS IN TAMPA
Tampa, Fla., April 27. The big nameless camp of United States regulars is now the centre of attraction for all South Florida, and excursions are being run from many places in this and adjoining States, and thousands of persons are attracted by the novelty of having an army in the South...Ammunition and war supplies of all kinds, together with an enormous quantity of coal are on the docks in the warehouse. ...The officers who are close to the sources of information say that there is no longer any doubt that from twenty to thirty thousand more troops, regulars, and volunteers, will be encamped in Tampa within the next two weeks. At present everything points to this as a fact....

Gen. Wade has effectually established a press censorship here, so far as news of an official nature is concerned. This general order to remain mum is far-reaching in its effect, so that nothing in the matter of orders is known or can be ascertained until they are given to the world in the regular routine.

From a social standpoint the camp and the headquarters have been exceedingly dull, but on Saturday night Commodore and Mrs. [Henry] B. Plant will give an elaborate reception and ball in honor of Gen. Wade and the other officers. This affair is expected to break the ice, and begin a gay, though limited, military season. New York Times, April 28, 1898.

CLARA BARTON IN TAMPA

Miss Clara Barton of the Red Cross Society arrived here to-night from Washington, and she, with the entire Red Cross force, will leave Tampa to-morrow for Key West. New York Times, April 28, 1898.

Gen. Wade and his staff made an official call to-day on Miss Clara Barton and they had an important conference of half an hour. The exact nature of it is not known, but Miss Barton admitted that her future movements were concerned in it. To-night Miss Barton and those of the society who were with her left on the steamship Mascotte for Key West. New York Times, April 29, 1898.

ACTION EXPECTED AT TAMPA
Tampa, Fla., May 1. The army of invasion will leave Tampa for Cuba, it is believed here, on Wednesday next. Such is the programme as unofficially announced at the headquarters and in the camp.... The steamers of the Plant Steamship Company, which are to assist in the transportation of the troops are all now here and have up steam....

The arrival of troops has been the order of to-day.... The total number of troops now here will exceed 7,000, most of them comprising infantry commands.... Sunday has been unusually quiet in the three camps where the men are located. The strictest discipline is enforced, and the men are not allowed far from their camps. About twenty thousand of the people of this and adjoining cities have visited the camps today. *New York Times*, May 2, 1898.

**TROOPS MOVING ON TAMPA**

Tampa, May 2. To-night all of the mules, wagons, and heavy equipage of the camp in this city has been ordered to Port Tampa ready and convenient for shipment to Cuba. This fact is not known outside of the camp. The railroad authorities who are to transport them are under the strictest orders to give out no information. Thousands of troops, artillery, cavalry, and infantry, have arrived in the past twenty-four hours, and the city is one great military post swarming with
troops from every part of the Union, all eager for and expecting an early invasion of Cuba. There are now all told within the three established camps more than 10,000 troops, and 6,000 more are expected to arrive within the next two or three days. Their departure, if it is made at all, can hardly be made before Sunday, it is now thought, as it is impossible for a sufficient number of the chartered transports to arrive.... The belief that the army of invasion would be able to leave Tampa on Wednesday was based on the supposition that the transports would have reached Tampa before this. This has been dispelled by the information that the most important of the transports has been detained on route....

Two hundred native Cubans who have been quietly enlisted in New York City by Gen. Julio Sanguily arrived in Tampa to-night. They will be formed into a cavalry regiment and under the leadership of the famous Cuban who enlisted them will probably embark for Cuba with the American troops. The rest of the regiment will be made up of Cubans from Tampa and vicinity.

Dr. Guido Castillo [, who was in charge, was met at the railway station by 3,000 Cubans, representing every element of Cubans in Tampa. He was at once driven to his hotel, and the followers marched up the principal street of the city amid the hurrahs of the thousands of soldiers and citizens who were congregated on the street to bid them welcome. Gen. Núñez will return from Key West to-night or to-morrow and will complete the organization of his regiment which is expected to leave Tampa in a few days for Cuba.
The fortifications at Egmont and Mullet Keys, commanding the south channel of Tampa Bay, and on which work has been rapidly pushed, are now practically complete, and ready for the mounting of the guns. Most of these, it is said, will be the 8-inch calibre... *New York Times*, May 3, 1898.

**TROOPS HELD AT TAMPA**

Tampa, Fla., May 6. The movement of troops here is check by orders from Washington. Everything rests in doubt except that the President does not favor any hurried movement of the land forces against Cuba....

One hears it frequently remarked that the hurried preparations of 70,000,000 of people which have now extended over a period of two months ought to have something more to show than 6,000 men camped on this torrid sand pile with orders to wait indefinitely. It would not take much more to give to the whole plan of movement the semblance of opera bouffe and to dispirit the fine body of officers and men that has been assembled here for the deliverance of Cuba....

Seven transport boats are now at Port Tampa, and soon will be in readiness for the loading of the troops.... “The time of sailing will be made known to everybody,” said Gen. Shafter to-day. “This is too big an expedition to get away in a hurry. When the time comes everyone will be
notified.”...Many visitors are pouring into town to see the military pageantry. *New York Times*, May 7, 1898.

**CUBANS READY FOR INVASION**

Mr. Plant made a half festival of the day and military bands gave concerts at the port....

Gen. Castillo reports the Cuban forces here as being nearly 800 strong and full of spirit. They were, he said, to have been supplied with arms to-day, but they waited in vain at Cespedes Hall [in West Tampa] for them. The Cubans are to get their guns to-morrow, it is said, but will not be supplied with ammunition until they are aboard ship. They are very anxious to go to Cuba....

There was quite an exciting and patriotic scene at Cespedes Hall in the afternoon. Three hundred Cuban ladies met to christen the two regiments that have been raised here. They voted upon names, and the regiments were christened El Junco and El Maine. There was a sharp contest between those who favored the name of El Maine and those who wanted the regiment called Nestor Aranguren. One hundred and forty-seven voted for Aranguren, and 148 for El Maine. The women then voted to call the brigade the Nestor Aranguren in honor of the martyred Cuban hero. Women wept over the memories awakened by the event and the presence of the fathers of both Junco and Aranguren added pathos to the scene.

After a careful investigation the Medical Corps here reports almost an entire absence of sickness among the troops. It was greatly feared that the soldiers who came from the extreme Northwest would fall ill under the hot sun, but they have remained perfectly healthy and strong. Some of the regiments left the Northwest during snowstorms and reached here a few days later in a temperature of 94 degrees in the shade. All of the men and horses have apparently suffered no inconvenience from the heat. *New York Times*, May 9, 1898.

**TWO COMPANIES LEAVE TAMPA**


**IMPATIENCE AT TAMPA**

Tampa, Fla., May 11. The movement to Cuba does not seem as near to-day as it did yesterday....Whenever a movement seems about to be made an order comes from Washington checking it, and so day after day the pendulum swings between enthusiasm and discouragement....

Camp life here is not a recreation by any means. The soldiers for the most part are stationed on barren sand wastes where the heat and glare are almost unendurable. Cubans declare that the discomforts are no greater than they would be Cuba. There is no shade at the artillery and cavalry camps near Tampa. There is not a regiment that would not prefer going to Cuba at once to waiting here in the heat and sand glare and monotonous inaction. Neither officers nor men can understand the cause of delay....
The transport Orizaba came into Port Tampa to-day. This makes nine large vessels ready for the embarkation of the troops. The Florida has been set aside for use of the 800 Cubans under Gen. Lacret. The Florida is one of the Plant Line boats chartered by the Government. It has taken on a large cargo of Springfield rifles and ammunition, and may leave with a command of Cuban volunteers at any hour.

The most vigorous movement the army of invasion has yet made is now in progress in the ballroom of the Tampa Bay Hotel. Dozens of officers are waltzing with the ladies of Tampa, who are giving a reception at the hotel, and with a few fair Cuban refugees. The scene is a brilliant one and very far removed from war. An officer remarked that the scene was at least military looking, as even the ladies were in arms. New York Times, May 12, 1898.

GEN. WADE LOOKING FOR A CAMP

Tampa, Fla., May 15. Gen. Wade and part of his staff left here this afternoon for Jacksonville. It is given out here that his purpose is to select a site for a large encampment, as the water supply here has proved insufficient for the troops. A site has already been established at Lakeland, thirty miles northeast of Tampa, where there is abundance of water. The 14,000 soldiers here are taxing the water supply, it is said, to its limit. New York Times, May 16, 1898.
CAMPS ENLARGING AT TAMPA

Tampa, Fla., May 17. Gen. Shafter is again in command of the army corps at this camp.... From the 6,000 men that composed the army when Gen. Wade took command, the force has grown to 14,000 or 16,000, not counting the volunteers, most of whom are now, however, at Lakeland....

All movements looking to immediate departure have been checked, and the troops are working hard at their drills and camp duties, as if war was not at all near. There is great complaint among the troops as to the kind of water they have to drink and the kind of clothes they have to wear. The water is said to be a large extent mixed with oil and is unpalatable and not healthful.

When a complaint was made lodged on this ground it is said that one of the officers remarked that its endurance would be beneficial and proper to prepare for a campaign in Cuba. The water is not sufficient in quantities either. It is said that the troops may be removed from Port Tampa because of the difficulty of furnishing them with an ample supply of pure water.

The clothing the troops are now wearing is very heavy and uncomfortable. It is thick enough for Canada, and in this climate, where the heat of the sun is simply terrific, the troops suffer discomfort and are enfeebled. The new light uniforms are not yet available. Only a few of the officers have got light clothing, and that at personal expense....
The troops here are so healthy that out of 10,000 only 139, or less than 2 per cent, are on the sick list. *New York Times*, May, 18, 1898.

**CENSORSHIP AT TAMPA**

Tampa, Fla., May 17. A press censorship will be established here tomorrow. The censorship will apply only to dispatches relative to the movements and plans of expeditions. No censor will be appointed, but the telegraph company has been instructed not to send matter exposing military movements and plans over its wires. All correspondents here have also been instructed not to send information of expeditions before they are successfully landed in Cuba. *New York Times*, May 18, 1898.

**SCENES IN THE CITY OF TAMPA**

Dwellers in Northern cities at this time of excitement on the Southern coast have little or no idea of the excitement that prevails in the Florida cities, and particularly in those that are centres of military operations. What a huge thing the army is when it is brought together, yet how small is it when compared to the standing armies of other nations! The vast expanse of ground covered by camps, the limitless number of horses, wagons, and men needed to move an army, or even a regiment, can better be described by photographs than by mere words. To a civilian who has never been in an army camp, the bivouac of four or five regiments looks as if countless thousands of soldiers were quartered there. To the experienced eye of the General, however, the smallness of the real force and the magnitude of paraphernalia necessary to its use is more readily apparent.

In Tampa, in Port Tampa, and in Port Tampa City, during the last two or three weeks, everything has been of warlike character. Throngs of people surround the headquarters of the officers, eager for any item or atom of news that may be overhead or dropped. At the newspaper offices other crowds gather, to discuss the meagre bulletins set forth on glaring sheets of colored paper. Other crowds content themselves with reading telegrams pasted in a frame, which frame was once a deck skylight of the lamented battleship *Maine*. Dark scowls lurk upon the faces of American men as Spanish is heard spoken all around them. Whether by Cuban or Spanish refugee, even the musical language is hated. A mere suspicion that a man may be a Spanish spy would be enough to cause his life to end suddenly here, for this is a cosmopolitan city where men of all classes meet, and where only one political or national feeling is permitted to exist – a love for the Stars and Stripes.

In the night on the sandy streets, small groups of men are seen together. They are not of the better class, for the camp follower has already attached himself to the gathering army, and will ply his trade, no matter in what manner, to his personal gain. All alike are friends to his face, or he to theirs, but he will rob a soldier or a Spaniard in the night time, with equal grace and abandon. Two of this class came together the other night. One shot the other. The wounded man snatched a pistol from a passing colored soldier’s belt and killed his assailant. The soldiers, thinking they were attacked, and knowing the character of the men in the locality of their camp, opened fire, shooting over the heads of the gathering crowd. They killed or wounded no one, but, had one of their own been a weeding out of “bad men” that would have been a great good to this
The soldiers were, of course, arrested, as the innocent party always is down here. Threats have been made to murder the army by wholesale by means of poisoned water. The tanks which supply the city with its water, and from which the soldiers also get their quota, are accessible, and only a few days ago an attempt at poisoning these tanks was reported to the police and to the military authorities. Happily, it was proved to be a false alarm, but the mere suggestion that it carried was sufficient to show the soldiers how easily their lives might have been sacrificed. The saloons do not do as good as business as they had hoped to do. The morals of the regular army is far better than is generally imagined. In olden times, or just after the war, it was the custom for the enlisted men to drink everything, from canteen whisky to hair restoratives. Happily, however, this is no longer true, and the enlisted man has the pride of his regiment or his troop or company more at heart than was the case in former years. But this is not written with a view to being taken as a sermon on the army, rather than a description of the scenes in this section of the country, almost at Spain’s front door.

The City of Tampa proper has a population of about 5,000 [sic] souls. It is the centre of the cigar manufacturing industry, which has been constantly removing from Key West for several years. It is poor in architecture, poor in population, and worse as regards streets and highways than any city I have yet seen. It is impossible to drive half a mile out of the town in a carriage. The wheels will simply mire in the soft white sea sand. It is almost unlighted at night, and its business houses, with only a few notable exceptions, are far below what one would expect to see in a city of its size. New York Times Illustrated Magazine, May 15, 1898.
PRESS CENSOR MORE RIGID

Tampa, Fla., May 31. Capt. J.E. Brady of the Signal Service at Washington, who has been appointed censor for the State of Florida, with the exception of Key West, arrived in Tampa to-day and at once assumed his new duties. Capt. Brady will make his headquarters at Tampa. The censorship hereafter will be extremely rigid, and any news pertaining to the movements of the troops to or from Tampa or information of any kind that might be of service to the Spanish Government will not be permitted to be sent out. The censorship has been extended to private telegrams. New York Times, June 1, 1898.

TERRIFIC HEAT AT TAMPA

Tampa, Fla., May 18. The heat endured by the troops here is more trying, according to officers from the west and refugees from Cuba, than they would have to endure in a campaign against Havana. After several days’ experience in the arid sand wastes in which the army of invasion has pitched its tents, an officer who had campaigned in the Alkali Plains said: “This kills Arizona.” Gen. Shafter said to-day that it is worse here than anything he had ever experienced in the hot valleys of California. He said although the mercury rises sometimes to 110 degrees in California, the ninety-odd degrees here are far more exhausting and enfeebling. Cubans say that the breezes
that sweep Cuba keep it cool and wholesome, and Dr. Guiteras pronounces its climate and ideal one and paradisal in comparison with this part of Florida. When the breeze dies here — and it has a habit of doing so in the hottest hours of the day — then the heat is fearful.

Several of the Seventy-first Troop have been prostrated by the heat. Gen. Shafter is now arranging to establish camps at Dade City, Plant City, and other points near here, where there is more water and more shade. *New York Times*, May 19, 1898.

**PITCHING TENTS AT TAMPA**

Tampa, Fla., May 19. Orders are issued to-day that indicate further postponement of the invasion of Cuba. The artillery which has been stationed at Port Tampa for some time has been ordered to Tampa. The reasons assigned for this change in the position of the corps are that the rainy season is about to set in here, and as the camp of the artillery is pitched on low ground sickness might ensue, and that the water supply is inadequate and expensive.... Such permanent arrangements seem to indicate still a longer stay here than has been expected.... All is now in readiness, as all the transports are lined up at the docks at Port Tampa, gangplanks are laid, and the men could march aboard in a very short time....
It is reported that Gen. Shafter will soon pitch his tent with the troops. Officers who are camping declare that it is far more comfortable living in the open air in this hot weather than in hotels or residences. At night they find it cool enough for cover, and the temperature even in the day, except when there is no breeze, is not very uncomfortable. *New York Times*, May, 20, 1898.

**SCENES AT PORT TAMPA**

The little settlement of Port Tampa, Florida, for several years used as a terminus for the Savannah, Florida and Western Railroad and the Plant Steamship Line to Key West, has been in the throes of continuous excitement for three weeks, owing to the proximity of the forces of the United States Army. Her usual humdrum existence has been entirely changed, her docks are lined with transport ships, her coaling elevators are filled with thousands of tons of coal, uniformed officers and men swarm on the piers, and an army of workmen find employment there transforming the ships into transports. The Dock Master never had so much to do in his life before.... Over toward the east of Port Tampa docks, on Picnic Island, glisten the conical peaks of the First Infantry camp, pitched in the shadiest, coolest, and most picturesque spot to be found in all the country round about. In the harbor, anchored about a mile off shore, are other blackhulled steamships, coaled and provisioned, ready to receive the soldiers as soon as the army shall receive its orders to invade Cuba. *New York Times Illustrated Magazine*, May 22, 1898.

This great city of tents at Tampa has been growing so rapidly during the past two weeks that it is now impossible to see it all in a single day, if one hopes to devote any time in the various camps. The sleepy little town, which for a century has sweltered in the sun and sand, has experienced such an awakening as its staid inhabitants never dreamed possible, and had done more business in the last two months than ever before in its history.

On all sides of it, and down the long neck of sand which stretches to the Gulf, and ends at Port Tampa, the white tents of the cavalry, infantry, and artillery dot the landscape, or glimmer like clouds amid the dark green foliage of the pine trees. The population of this tented city is more than 15,000. *New York Times Illustrated Magazine*, May 29, 1898.

**TAMPA IN TIME OF WAR**

Tampa, Fla., May 19. This city, and, indeed, the entire State of Florida, is enjoying the pomp and circumstance of glorious war without the accompanying chapter of horrors. When war became imminent, members of Congress from the South deplored the commencement of hostilities because, they said, war would bring to this already impoverished region only additional distress and loss of life. The reverse has proved to be the effect of war. The South has found her opportunity in the present National crisis. Not only has war with a foreign power and in the cause of humanity removed many invisible but enduring sources of ill-feeling between the sections, but it has given to the South a season of commercial prosperity. Instead of having her coast cities bombarded and her seaboard harried by Spanish ships, she has had to open her coffers for an inflow of money that has sought her markets for the purchase of supplies for a half-dozen great bivouacs of an army in peace. Instead of having her sons slaughtered on battlefields in Cuba or by the more deadly scourge of fever, she has had to welcome thousands of
soldiers from the East, North, and West who are pouring their pay money into Southern pockets as fast as the Government puts it into theirs.

War has thus far, therefore, proved an unalloyed blessing. It is such a peaceful, war-ranted-not-to-kill sort of war. We might advertise as specialists in this kind of hostilities and announce to the world: “Turbulent colonies removed from the hands of tyrants free from pain” – to ourselves. Cuba can be freed from Spanish dominion by the very simple process of leaving the matter as it stands – keeping other Spaniards away and leaving those that are on the island to slow but sure annihilation by the Cuban machete, that bides its opportunity to slay, and by the pestilence, which waits for no opportunity, but slays unceasingly. While such warfare is waged in Cuba and our mighty camps are maintained at Chickamauga, New Orleans, Mobile, Lakeland, and Tampa, the South enjoys one of the few blessings of war – the provisioning of a great army. This, besides the glare of uniforms and gold braid and the fanfare of trumpets, is all that this part of the country knows of war.

But who would cavil at this result? By war the South was devastated and ruined. It would seem but poetic justice to have some of her prosperity and importance and some of her martial glory restored by war. A Lee may yet lead our arms to a far different Appomattox under the walls of Havana; and the better feeling established by this war for human brotherhood and the stimulus it
has given to Southern enterprise may result in that New South that will not be Southern, but National, which has been the dream of a generation of despairing men.

This miracle may be witnessed here by any curious persons who have a penchant for the miraculous. Samson confounded the Philistines by his fable of life coming from death, but here this miracle may be seen in its secret processes. Florida goes into a Summer sleep like some kind of animals in the tropics. This sleep is half death, as the State lives only a few months of the twelve, and consumes much of this waking period in shaking off its long lethargy. This year Florida is awake, through and through, from Atlantic to Gulf, and from the Everglades to Okefinoke Swamp. War has done this by simply establishing camps here and there in the State, and purchasing every green and dry thing that its people have to sell, and attracting to its hotels thousands of the curious who want to witness a brilliant military pageant set in the greater brilliance of an endless expanse of burning, flashing sand, and a cloudless, brazen, fiery heaven.

Tampa has the largest share of this glory and prosperity. It has at one stride taken its place as the first city of the State, and is somewhat abashed and overcome by its sudden rise to such great importance. It has not yet been able to adjust itself to its new conditions. It knew what was coming, but was appalled by the very magnitude of its good fortune. Merchants could have made large profits and realized more in a few weeks than a year would ordinarily yield them, if they
had appreciated the situation and prepared for it. As it happened, however, the army that had been hurried hither without time for supplying itself with many necessary things, the host of newspaper correspondents that had made practically no preparations, and the flocks of sight-seers that rushed here precipitately to catch a glimpse of the army that was to capture Havana, and who have not been able to tear themselves away – all found that the shops did not have stock enough for the demand of the first one or two days. Even after their shelves had been stripped of everything, many of the merchants would not take the risk of ordering more articles. They feared the army would move on and leave Tampa like a sandbank at ebb tide. Purchasers who could not wait ordered what they wanted by telegraphing to the Northern cities, and so Tampa has reaped only a part of the golden harvest at its gates. *New York Times*, May 22, 1898.

HOT WEATHER AT TAMPA

Tampa, Fla., May 24. Despite the fact that sunstroke is unknown under the fierce blaze of the tropical sun in this part of Florida, many of the unseasoned volunteers are suffering discomforts from excessive heat and the piercing glare of the sand. One walks here between two fires. From the cloudless sky the sun pours a flood of light as brilliant and burning as molten brass, and from the waste of sand, white and gleaming, comes a heating glare as dazzling as if each grain of sand were a refracting mirror. The skin tingles and burns in this double heat, and the brain becomes dazed.

To the young volunteers from the Northern States the heat and glare are a severe trial.... To withstand the effects of such a sudden change from snow to fire, one must needs have, what few of these young volunteers have, an iron frame. Even the troops from this State, accustomed to exposure in such suns, are affected by the intense heat, and the hardened soldiers, who have been seasoned by years of baking and broiling in the alkali deserts, suffer from exhaustion. The glare pains the eyes also, and produces headache and soreness of the lids, until one is driven to the awful refuge of smoked glasses.

There have been no fatal results from the heat, however, and the officers are now looking with keen solicitude after the comfort and health of the troops. The hours of drilling have been shortened, from three and four a day to an hour and a half, and all exercises are confined to the early morning or late afternoon. For the rest of the day, lounging or sleeping in the tents, and for the night freedom to roam over the little city and explore its half dozen points of interest; a turn about the big hotel and its flower-burdened grounds; a glance at the queer mixture of fashionable and martial life that war has thrown together here in its crucible – and then more lounging and sleep under the white tents. *New York Times*, May 25, 1898.

[RAINY SEASON]

The troops in the various camps to-day had a taste of Cuban weather. This is the rainy season in Florida, just as it is across the Gulf, and it rains here quite as frequently when the season begins as it does there. For seven months not a drop of water has fallen in Tampa. But to-day the floodgates were opened and the rain came down in torrents. It rained steadily for three hours, drenching men to the skin, soaking tents, and giving the soldiers a taste of what they will experience later. *New York Times*, June 2, 1898.
THE UNITED STATES COLORED REGULARS

Amid the scenes of preparation for the war, in the great tented city surrounding Tampa, there were no more interesting camps than those of the colored soldiers of the regular army. None of them have ever been stationed in the East until now and Eastern people regard them as curiosities. In the South their color is against them, for the Southern citizen who has a white skin calls every colored man a “nigger,” no matter whether he be a college graduate, a soldier, or a roustabout on a steamboat. And further than this, they want to treat them all according to their own ideas of what is due a “nigger.” There have been some happenings since the colored regulars came here that have convinced the people of the South that there is a vast difference between the classes. They have learned to keep hands off, even if they do not respect them, but never lose a chance, either by word of mouth or through the columns of the local newspapers, to vent their spleen against the colored man.

In order to see if possible, what difference there is between a white man in a blue uniform and a black man in the same garb, I have spent several afternoons visiting the camps of the colored troops. I am familiar with all of the white regiments and fairly so with the colored ones, but determined to study them a little on my own account.

The Twenty-fourth Infantry was encamped on Tampa Heights. Their location was behind every other regiment. I don’t know why this was so; perhaps it just happened that way. Col. J.F. Kent
was in command of the Twenty-fourth when I first visited it at Fort Douglass, Salt Lake City, Utah, a year or more ago. I noted then that the barracks of the men, while old and of obsolete pattern, were scrupulously clean and the mess kitchens were perfection. The officers of the colored regiments are white, of course, but all non-commissioned officers and enlisted men are colored. I saw them drill, witnessed retreat and dress parade, and saw the men in their quarters. Everything was soldierly and regulation. They were quick, energetic, painstaking, and thorough in everything they did, and the esprit de corps in the regiment was second to none in the service....

The camp at Tampa Heights was on a rolling bit of land, or rather sand – for there isn’t anything here but sand – and was as picturesque a spot as could be found about here. The tents, originally erected in perfectly straight military lines, forming company streets, were almost hidden by bowers and arbors, which the soldiers constructed of palmetto leaves and pine boughs to break the rays of the broiling sun. The streets were kept perfectly free from rubbish, and from a sanitary point of view no camp could be better conducted....

Up at reveille in the morning at 5.30, the colored soldier starts in on a busy day. After reveille and breakfast, if he is not on guard duty, he prepares for drills, which last anywhere from two to four hours. A substantial, though not epicurean, repast awaits him at 12 o’clock, when mess call sounds, and after dinner he has a little rest. Later in the afternoon come other drills and duties,
and a 6 o’clock retreat, which every man not on other duty must attend. His evenings are spent in camp, except now and again when he is given a pass by his company commander to go to town. Then he “loosens up a bit,” as the English say, and laughs, smokes and chaffs with others of his company, or with friends whom he may have made here. That he is a rolsterer, rowdy, or drunkard, as some of the papers here have tried to make out, is absolutely untrue. He is a good soldier, an efficient soldier, and one that will fight as long as he can stand on his feet....

The wagon trains of the Ninth Cavalry were in a field near headquarters when I visited the camp, and I went into a Spanish cigar factory, from the second story of which I made a photograph. Adjt. Wood was with me. I had just started to make the plate when the proprietor came in and said: “I don’t know, Senor, if I shall permit you for make the picture of my place. Do you have ask the permission of authorities?” “This is the Adjutant of the regiment encamped here,” I replied. “It’s all right, Sir,” guaranteed the Adjutant. “He may make the picture.” By this time a score of Spanish cigar makers had left their benches, some starting toward the stairway and some toward the doors. They had, about made up their minds that if that officer was going to arrest another spy it was time to disappear, to keep out of bad company. This proprietor was greatly relieved when we left. New York Times Illustrated Magazine, June 5, 1898.

THE NEGRO SOLDIERS


I like the colored regiments but they are having a hard row to hoe here. They are conscious that a difference is made between them and the white soldiers and they do not think this is fair. They say they are going to fight for their country, and fight just as hard as any white man will, and are willing to die just as freely, and they want to be treated just the same as white soldiers are. But that will never be in a Southern town. Even the grogshops shut their doors against them – that is, the white grogshops do. Here and there in Tampa one sees the sign, “Colored Bar” – and it is only there that the negro defender of his country can buy a drink. After he had become somewhat inflamed with such liquor as he obtains here, it is little wonder that, when joined by several of his fellows, he attempts to force an entrance to a “white bar” and then an affray is likely to follow, and the whole black soldiery, which really contains few bad men, gains a bad reputation. As a result of the, affrays which have taken place, the black soldiers are kept very closely in the camps. One seldom sees any of them on the streets now. The Bible does not say that Ham shall not drink in the rumshops of Japheth, but the prohibition is nevertheless piously enforced in Tampa. Perhaps sometimes the colored soldier is unduly afraid that he will be humiliated, and is as a result unduly self-assertive. I have seen some signs of that. And yet, as I have said he has a hard row to hoe. New York Times, May 13, 1898.

MR. ROOSEVELT AT TAMPA

Tampa, Fla., June 2. Theodore Roosevelt and his “rough riders” reached Tampa to-day. They came from Lakeland. The regiment is mounted splendidly, and full of spirit. Col. Wood and Lieut. Col. Roosevelt, as well as the officers and men, are very anxious to go to Cuba with the first expedition. The arrival of the “rough riders” created a decided sensation in Tampa, and as much so among army men as among citizens. New York Times, June 3, 1898.
ROOSEVELT'S ROUGH RIDERS


ROOSEVELT’S ROUGH RIDERS AT TAMPA

If the Spanish military authorities in Havana could get a momentary glimpse of a regiment of soldiers encamped in the sand at west Tampa they would see one of the numerous sights calculated to cause them uneasiness. Col. Roosevelt’s Rough Riders are there to the number of 1,000, and they certainly deserve the name that has been given them. They are not “roughs” by any manner of means, but they are rough, nevertheless, and will play rough when they get a chance at the enemy. They don’t know a great deal about the manual of arms, as practiced by the American army, and they can’t load a rifle and fire it with the trained regulation of a veteran soldier. But they can handle a Winchester with a swiftness and deadly precision that is astounding, and what they can’t accomplish with that weapon their heavy six-shooters will take care of. They are not men selected and graded as to size, weight, soundness of teeth, and waist measurements. Some of them weigh close to 200 pounds; others won’t tip the beam at over 100. But the little fellows, grizzled by years of exposure on the Western frontier, are as tough as pine knots, and can shoot as fast and as straight as a man who weighs three times as much....

They are a picturesque, devil-may-care lot of hardy men, whose hearts are in the right places, and whose hospitality is as broad as the limits of the earth. Their language is sometimes more picturesque than polite to be sure, but they are used to emphasizing their remarks when obedience is not immediately forthcoming. They have a wholesome disregard for rules and regulations and books on field instruction. They haven’t much use for junior Lieutenants of the army as a rule, and particularly for those of State regiments. But they uphold their officers, in everything they say or do.

The camp of the Rough Riders lies directly west of the town of Tampa, in an open sand flat, where the sun beats down all day with the heat of a furnace. Any regiment of volunteers camped there, without shade, and without tents, would die off like sheep. But these hardy fellows inured to heat, cold, and exposure in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, never think of making a complaint about their camping places. New York Times Illustrated Magazine, June 19, 1898.

GUARDING WATER AT TAMPA

Two Spaniards Believed to be Trying to Poison Soldiers.

Tampa, Fla., June 10. The greater portion of the water being used on board the vessels in the harbor has been obtained from a spring lake across the bay at St. Petersburg. This water is piped down to the docks and is readily loaded on the boats. The actions of two strangers who upon investigation proved to be Spaniards has excited considerable suspicion, and they are being watched. They have driven out toward this lake, and it has been decided that precautionary steps shall at once be taken. With this in view, a company will be dispatched over the bay to guard the
lake as well as the tanks supplied from it. In the meantime the stranger will be taken into custody.

Last night a Corporal of the National Guard of the District of Columbia was severely injured by unknown persons. It is though his skull is fractured. *New York Times*, June 11, 1898.

**THE EMBARKATION OF THE TROOPS**

Tampa, Fla., June 11. The army of invasion is now embarked on a large fleet of swift transports.

The first official notification that the time for a movement had arrived came in the form of a general order posted on May 31. The embarkation assumed definite shape on Monday afternoon, June 6, when the honor of embarking first was given to the First United States Infantry, Major Gen. Shafter’s old command, a regiment famous in the history of the army. As the regiment marched down the long pier at Port Tampa with their band playing they caused the most intense enthusiasm.

During the balance of that afternoon and until daylight next morning the movement was resumed with the utmost vigor. All during Tuesday the wharves were a moving mass of excited humanity. *New York Times*, June 12, 1898.

**BREAKING CAMP AT TAMPA**

On Board the Olivette, Port Tampa Harbor, June 8. After nearly two months of somewhat theatric bustle and noise, and the movement of troops hither and thither, and after a dozen orders from Washington and elsewhere to be ready to start at once, which orders were countermanded as rapidly as they were made, the army of invasion has got itself into a fleet of transports and has moved a few feet out into the bay.

The troops had been concentrated at Tampa for weeks. Their white tents lay like a pigmy city, squat amid the glaring sand waste. The heat and the labor of drilling in the soft sand were enervating them, and their spirits were sinking under the depressing toil and heat and mysterious delay....

Tuesday there was in the air that un-named feeling that something was to be done or attempted soon. Before night troops were moving, they knew not where or why, but instantly every one was convinced that the long-expected advance on Cuba had begun. Later there was a general rush for Port Tampa and the transports. The army was certainly on the march....

At once there was indescribable confusion. It was not the mere stir and bustle that must accompany even the most exact movements of an army, and which may readily be mistaken for confusion. It was confusion, unmistakable confusion.

There is one railway and one wagon road between Tampa and Port Tampa. The distance is short, not more than nine miles; but they are nine miles of sand, and the wagons sink a foot and
more in the clogging white powder that has been ground beneath wheels and hoofs for weeks. The railway was soon blocked, despite the fact that only military trains were run. Cars filled with soldiers or supplies, ammunition, and guns, stood on every sidetrack, and it was almost impossible to get even an engine through the confused mass. Trains fared worse, and only a few troops could be got through, although it had been estimated that at least 2,500 could be carried to the port every hour. In this emergency the sand road was used by the soldiers and by the wagon and pack trains. It was soon blocked as tight as the railway, and the nine miles lengthened to as many leagues. Wagons broke down under their heavy loads in the deep sandbeds; jaded horses and worn-out pack mules stumbled on and on and fell by the roadside, in the way of the tolling rear, and the port that seemed so near at sunset seemed as far away as the pole before midnight.

The army had been suddenly set to a task that it had not prepared for and could not perform. It began the inevitable abandonment of all impedimenta.... Rations were limited to the fourteen days regular and ten days’ travel ration; and officers’ baggage was cut down from 250 to 80 pounds. Even the horses of the officers were left, and only six were allowed to each regiment. The larger part of the cavalry was dismounted, and even the “rough riders” of Theodore Roosevelt – inglorious without their steeds – were ordered to go to the front on foot. Lieut. Col. Roosevelt said, very gallantly, that he would gladly go to the front if he had to go on “all fours.”...
I have already said that when the order to leave Tampa for Port Tampa came no one was prepared to go. Every one, indeed, was thoroughly prepared to stay at least a week longer. No one had any idea the army could be moved aboard the transports in less than forty-eight hours, but the order was that the transports must sail by daylight Wednesday. Several hours after daylight on Wednesday the headquarters staff reached the port and as coolly as possible in such trying circumstances sat down to breakfast in Port Tampa Inn. Six hours thereafter not a transport had started for Cuba. The army seemed immovable.

Another scene in the drama, and one that was not farcical, had just been enacted in the dimly lighted plaza and corridor of the hotel. Many women, wives and daughters of army officers, had sat through the night to see as much as possible of their loved ones before the ravage of shot and disease in Cuba should thin their ranks. They sat almost silent in the gloomy halls, some with hands touching, some with hands clasped; all rapt in that still communion of the soul as solemn and as holy as any Eucharist. Now and then some would glide silently out of the group and pass into the even more quiet and gloomier garden and sit or walk beneath the oleanders or the oranges that recalled earlier and happier days. This scene was surely too holy to be turned into a comedy; but before night these hearts, reunited, laughed at the sadness of that gloomy dawn.

Excitement reached its culmination in the early afternoon, when several transports steamed down the harbor and sank below the horizon. All the troops thought the advance on Cuba had
really begun and cheer after cheer went up as the lucky ships steamed past their sisters anchored in the bay.

Suddenly the gunboat *Castine* shot from her anchorage and started after the disappearing ships. As she passed among the transports she signaled: “Order to sail revoked. Await further orders.” Night fell before she overtook the troopships in the lower bay and turned them back to the harbor .... The matter? Why, Spanish gunboats had been sighted off Cardenas, off Kingston, off Key West, off Dry Tortugas, off Havana, off the Florida coast – of every port in the waters of the Gulf, Caribbean, and the straits. There was to be no expedition until all these ships had been hunted down, and our transports were huddled together in the slip like a covey of quail!

The *Florida*, which had been rammed and cut to the water line by the *Miami*, was run into a corner of the dock, where she was unloaded and abandoned. She is listed to port, but will not sink. With this slight damage and the loss of a number of horses, the army and the fleet are in perfect condition....

The whole harbor is aglow tonight. Over the black troopships the gunboats continually play their searchlights, or flash them into the black night overhead....
On Board the *Olivette*, Port Tampa Harbor, June 10. The fleet of transports still lies at anchor in the bay or tied close to the dock. *New York Times*, June 14, 1898.

Loaded transports moving into Tampa Bay.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.
Transports in Tampa Bay.

Photograph courtesy of Florida State Archives.


2 Wisan, Cuban Crisis, 21.


5 Ibid., May 25, 1898.

6 Ibid., June 6, 1898.

7 Ibid., May 25, 1898.

8 Ibid., May 22, 1898.

9 Ibid., May 25, 1898.

10 New York Evening Post, May 7, 1898.

12 New York Herald, June 10, 11, 1898.

13 Ibid., June 11, 1898.

14 New York Evening Post, June 10, 1898.


16 Ibid., 233, 323.

17 New York Journal, June 2, 1898.

18 New York Herald, June 12, 1898.

19 New York Journal, June 8, 1898.

20 New York Evening Post, June 3, 1898.


22 Clara Barton (1821-1912) was the founder and long-time head of the American Red Cross.

23 General Julio Sanguily was one of the Cuban military leaders who had been fighting against Spain and opposed U. S. intervention. Louis A. Pérez, Cuba between Empires, 1878-1902 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 113.

24 General Emilio Núñez was a Cuban expatriate in charge of the Department of Expeditions which had responsibility for delivering arms and ammunition for the Cuban War of Independence. Ibid., 231.

25 General José Lacret Morlet was a Cuban expatriate who returned to fight in Cuba and became a member of the Assembly. Ibid., 264.
BOOK REVIEWS


Marvin Dunn provides readers with a detailed account of African-American contributions to Miami’s history and culture. Despite the book’s focus on the twentieth century, Dunn sets the stage by briefly recounting blacks’ presence in Florida from the mid-seventeenth century. The author organizes his work chronologically, first setting the stage by discussing migration and settlement patterns in Miami and Dade County. He then reviews changes during the Civil Rights era and school desegregation, and finishes with an in-depth discussion of race riots in Miami. This work concentrates on the public life of Miami’s blacks and only to a lesser extent on private feelings and actions. Thus, we learn much about the public fight against discrimination but not the dynamics which brought diverse people together to join in that struggle. Likewise, we are introduced predominately to black elites and not to common men and women.

In detailing the growth of the black community, Dunn recounts four distinct phases: the collapse of the Bahamian economy in the 1880s, the Great Freeze in the southeastern U.S. in 1894-1895, the development of Florida’s East Coast Railroad in 1896, and later economic and political turmoil in Haiti and Cuba. One of the most valuable aspects of this study is its recognition of the diversity within Miami’s African-American population. While there is often a tendency to see the black community as monolithic, Dunn shows that first Bahamian and later Cuban and Haitian immigration influenced a community which, while often sharing skin color, differed greatly in its perspective.

This book is not just about the black experience, for Dunn acknowledges that both blacks and whites built the city, struggled for what each thought was right, and at times even worked together to overcome blacks’ second-class citizenship status. Of particular interest is his evidence that blacks and whites participated together in civil rights organizations like the NAACP and CORE. Indeed, he finds that in Miami whites comprised one-fourth of NAACP membership and two-thirds of the participants in CORE resistance activities. Despite examples of racial solidarity, Dunn also discusses common practices permitting whites to operate businesses catering to all while relegating African Americans to business opportunities only within the black community. Despite the inherent unfairness of this, it did provide black businessmen with opportunities to prosper, albeit within a limited market. The author also examines the tumultuous beginnings of neighborhood desegregation. By the 1920s, blacks comprised 32 percent of the city’s population, but only occupied 10 percent of the city’s available space. Dunn recounts how opportunistic real estate brokers used the fear of integrated neighborhoods to drive down prices of white housing. White realtors then resold the homes to black families at inflated prices. The result was desegregation, but at the price of increased racial friction.

Dunn devotes considerable space to tracing racial incidents in the city from 1898 to 1980. While these incidents are not directly related, they that show the potential for violent clashes remains near the surface. Many of Dunn’s findings reflect the situation in other southern cities, showing that, in many ways, Miami was not all that different from other locales. Dunn claims, however, that the presence of many northern whites in Miami made the social climate there less
oppressive. Having said this he notes that black frustration with limitations imposed by the white community took several forms, including civil disobedience, black self-help organizations, and political organizations such as CORE and the NAACP. He also notes that relations between the black community and police have always been strained in Miami. Until the 1950s arbitrary arrests and torture were not uncommon. Although reform efforts eradicated some of the most egregious abuses, a legacy of mistrust remains.

This book is primarily a local study that will most interest citizens of Miami, but it does an excellent job of documenting the activities and contributions of those often ignored in white-authored histories. Dunn makes excellent use of local and state archives to provide readers with evidence to support his points. He also deftly uses oral histories to bring previously unknown stories and perspectives to public attention.

Kathleen S. Howe
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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KATHLEEN S. HOWE, a Lieutenant Colonel in the U. S. Air Force, earned an M. A. in history from the University of South Florida and wrote a thesis entitled "Stepping into Freedom: An Analysis of the African-American Community in Hillsborough County, Florida, during the Reconstruction Era."

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COVER: Massachusetts Volunteers at their campsite in Lakeland, Florida, waiting to leave for Cuba in 1898. Photograph courtesy of Lakeland Public Library Special Collections.
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