

REMEMBERING AMERICA'S "SPLENDID LITTLE WAR"

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR COLLECTIONS

at the Minnesota Historical Society

A D A M S C H E R

“Honolulu,” “Manila Bay,” “Malate,” “Samploc”. . . Arthur Riches’s weather-beaten hat is covered with the names of exotic places that conjure up visions of palm trees, sand, and surf. But in 1898, Riches didn’t sail across the Pacific to sun on the beach and sip margaritas. America was at war with Spain, and the lad from Hastings, Minnesota, along with more than 1,000 other Minnesotans, was battling death and disease in the steamy jungles of the Philippine Islands. How did this happen? What were Minnesota farm boys doing thousands of miles from home trudging through rice paddies fighting Spaniards and, subsequently, Filipinos?

Troops including the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Regiment departing San Francisco for the Philippines aboard the City of Para, June 26, 1898



Front page of St. Paul's Pioneer Press, Sunday, April 24, 1898, the day before Congress officially ratified the declaration of war

In 1898 Minnesotans were still recovering from the financial panic of 1893 and were looking forward to prosperity, not a war. But as the nineteenth century drew to a close, American ex-

ploded while moored in the harbor, killing 266 of the 350 sailors on board. The origin of the explosion was not immediately apparent, and debate remains as to whether the cause was sabotage or a mechanical malfunction. Nevertheless, the Hearst and Pulitzer papers, eager to capitalize on the tragedy, quickly presumed foul play, and their blaring headlines fanned American antagonisms toward Spain.

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¹ On the origins of the Spanish-American War, see H. Wayne Morgan, *America's Road to Empire: The War with Spain and Overseas Expansion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965); Ernest R. May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961); French Ensor Chadwick, *Relations of the United States and Spain: Diplomacy* (New York: Scribner's, 1909).

pansionist policy was building steam. Throughout the century, advocates of Manifest Destiny had promoted the acquisition of Spanish-controlled Cuba. Rich resources of agriculture, sugar, and tobacco, combined with close proximity to the United States, made Cuba especially attractive to American businesses. American interest in the island intensified after 1895 when Cuban nationalists initiated a struggle for independence from Spain. Spanish authorities responded by placing Cuban noncombatants into concentration camps where thousands died from disease and famine. News of the suffering, often dramatically presented in the newspapers of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, fueled American insistence for intervention and the annexation of Cuba. Many Minnesotans were on the fence about matters in Cuba, however. The *Minneapolis Tribune*, a pro-expansionist newspaper, favored Cuban independence over interference, while trade journals like the *Northwestern Miller* and the *Representative* criticized the sensationalist press and the supposed profitability of intervention.¹

In January 1898 the U.S. battleship *Maine*, the pride of the navy's fleet, was sent to Havana on an official courtesy call—with the implicit charge of protecting American lives and property if necessary. On the evening of February 15 the ship mysteriously

Minnesota's Archbishop John Ireland attempted to defuse the situation with a peace mission to Washington, but meetings with President William McKinley could not stem the nation's enthusiasm for war. On April 20, 1898, McKinley signed a joint resolution of Congress prepared by Senate foreign-relations committee chairman

Cushman K. Davis of Minnesota, recognizing Cuba's independence, demanding Spain's immediate withdrawal from the island, and directing the president to employ the military to enforce the ultimatum, if necessary. Spain responded by severing diplomatic relations, and on April 25 Congress ratified a declaration of

² The U.S. Navy concluded that the *Maine* was the victim of a mine; *Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Naval Court of Inquiry Upon the Destruction of the United States Battle Ship Maine in Havana Harbor, February 15, 1898. Together with the Testimony Taken Before the Court*, 55th Cong., 2d sess., 1898, S. Doc. 207, serial 3610, p. 9–293. Spain maintained that the explosion was internal and accidental, not sabotage. A 1976 re-investigation led by U.S. Admiral Hyman G. Rickover concluded that the explosion was likely the result of spontaneous internal combustion such as a coal-bunker fire; Hyman Rickover, *How the Battleship Maine was Destroyed* (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of the Navy, 1976). On Archbishop Ireland's visit to Washington, see Franklin F. Holbrook, *Minnesota in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection* (St. Paul: Minnesota War Records Commission, 1923), 3–4; for the resolution, see Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, *Affairs in Cuba*, 55th Cong., 2d sess., 1898, S. Rept. 885, p. xxi–xxii.

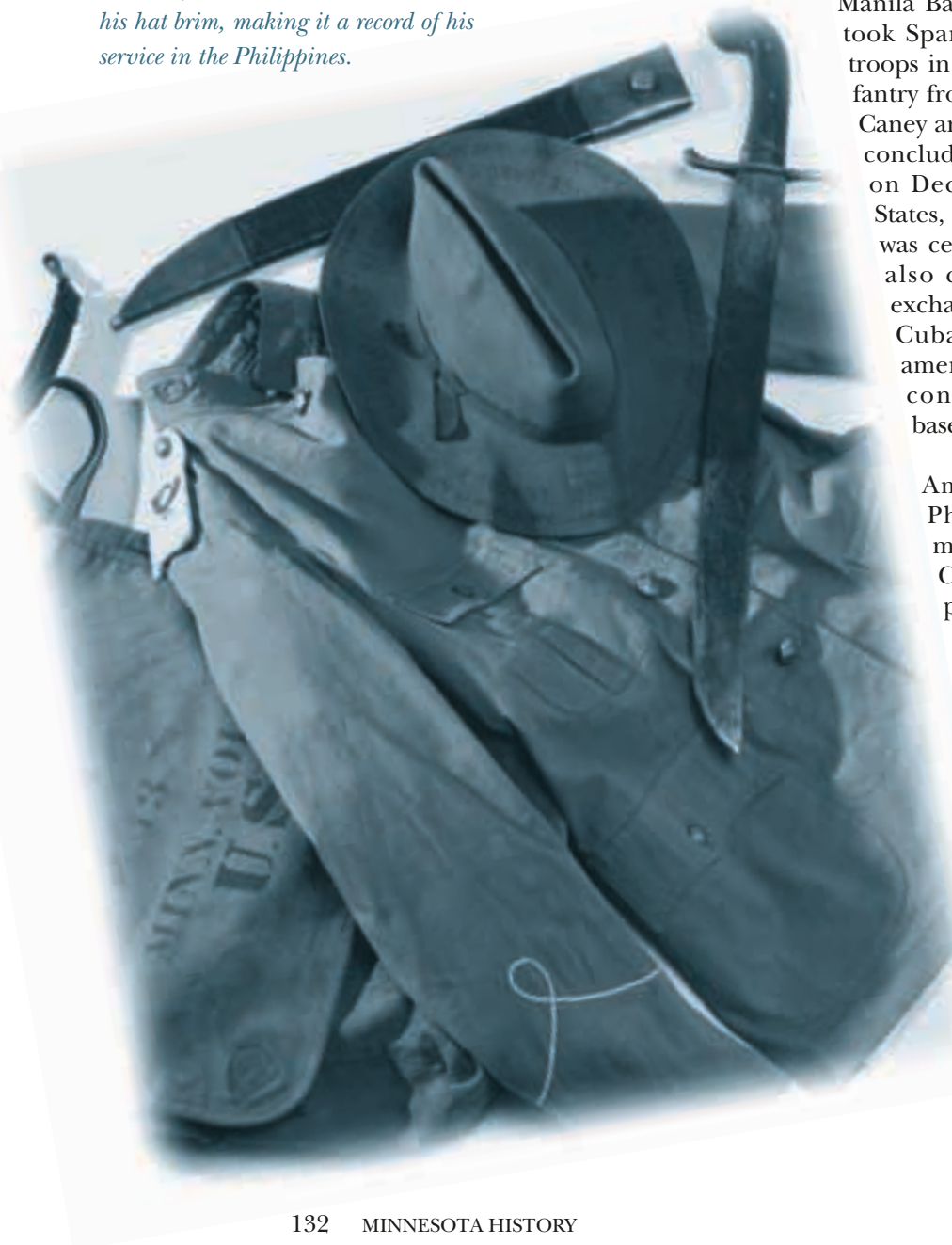


Philippines-bound Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Regiment marching past well-wishers down Minneapolis's Washington Avenue, May 1898

war.²

In Minnesota, volunteer military units ranging from university students to the Sons of Veterans sprang up throughout the state, ready to offer their services to the government. Governor David M. Clough and Adjutant General Herman Muehlberg were besieged with requests for drill manuals and weapons for training. Even Civil War veterans, most now in their fifties and sixties, were eager to lend a hand.

The cotton uniform and knapsack of Arthur Riches, principal musician, Company M, Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, and a Philippine bolo knife are part of the Minnesota Historical Society's extensive military collection of Spanish-American War artifacts. Riches inked locations and dates onto his hat brim, making it a record of his service in the Philippines.



“Give me a chance like a good fellow,” wrote one veteran to the adjutant general. “Just as young as ever, and would like a whack at them.” Three regiments of the Minnesota National Guard were federalized and became the Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth Minnesota Volunteer Regiments. Three other volunteer units, the Fifteenth Minnesota, a contingent of the Forty-Fifth U.S. Volunteer Infantry, and a company of the Second U.S. Volunteer Engineers, would also be formed. Minnesota men also joined the Third U.S. Volunteer Infantry, which was stationed at Fort Snelling. Only the Thirteenth, the Forty-Fifth, and the Third would see action overseas.³

The war was brought to a decisive conclusion in less than four months. American forces in the Pacific defeated the Spanish navy at Manila Bay, captured the city of Manila, and took Spanish Guam and Wake Island. U.S. troops in Cuba, including the Third U.S. Infantry from Fort Snelling, won victories at El Caney and San Juan Hill. Peace negotiations concluded with the Treaty of Paris, signed on December 10, 1898, and the United States, which had already annexed Hawaii, was ceded Puerto Rico and Guam. Spain also ceded the Philippine Islands in exchange for \$20 million. A beleaguered Cuba, spared from annexation by an amendment to the U.S. war resolution, conveyed land for American naval bases.⁴

But the bloodshed was far from over. American occupation of the Philippines was a bitter disappointment to Filipinos who, like the Cubans, had fought to establish independence. By 1899 tensions between

³ Holbrook, *Minnesota in the Spanish-American War*, 11–12. For histories of Minnesota regiments, see 32–114; Minnesota Office of the Adjutant General, *Biennial Reports, 1891–1904* and *Miscellaneous Records, 1898–1900*.

⁴ Recent comprehensive studies of the conflict include David F. Trask, *The War With Spain in 1898* (New York: Free Press, 1981); Albert A. Nofi, *The Spanish-American War, 1898* (Conshohocken, Pa.: Combined Books, 1996); Ivan Musicant, *Empire by Default: The Spanish-American War and the Dawn of the American Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

U.S. forces and Filipino nationalists had erupted into armed conflict. The Thirteenth Minnesota, which had served nearly seven months on police duty in Manila, spent two months engaged in combat with Filipino soldiers before departing for home in August 1899. Three years later, in 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt declared the Philippines “pacified,” but Filipinos would have to wait until 1946 before achieving independence from the United States.

Arthur Riches’s campaign hat is but one of hundreds of Spanish-American War items that the Minnesota Historical Society makes publicly accessible for study. In addition to uniforms, the military collection contains canteens, knapsacks, cartridge belts, mess kits, saddles, swords, knives, and firearms from American, Spanish, and Filipino forces. There’s even a Spanish cannon tube that was presented to Senator Davis. Personal items from the soldiers include identification tags, money belts, shaving kits, eyeglasses, sewing kits, and a piece ofhardtack carried by a trooper in the Third U.S. Infantry.

Most men in the Thirteenth Minnesota had never been out of the country, and the Philippines presented ample opportunities for souvenir collecting. Troops brought back everything from bolo knives, ivory toothpicks, and coconut banks to a cigar from the headquarters of Philippine president Emilio Aguinaldo. The Minnesota Historical Society flag collection features state colors of the First Minnesota National Guard (later the Thirteenth Minnesota) and the Fifteenth Minnesota, as well as a national flag raised over Manila in 1898 by General Arthur MacArthur and again in 1945 by his son, General Douglas MacArthur.

The MHS library contains a wide range of materials relating to the conflict. Published texts offer descriptive histories, including biographical sketches of military and political figures. *Minnesota in the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection* by Franklin F. Holbrook provides a narrative of events leading to the war and the state’s preparation for service. Unit histories of the four regiments that were mustered into federal service detail Minnesota’s military role. Rosters of Minnesotans who served in the armed forces from the beginning of the war to the declared cessation of hostilities in the Philippines are also included. In addition, Holbrook’s work discusses the effects of the war on the home front, detailing the efforts of local Red Cross chapters and other relief societies, as

well as the war’s impact on politics and the economy. Other items in the library collection range from regimental reunion programs and relief-agency records to sheet music for a grand march composed in honor of the Thirteenth Minnesota. The state archives offers military service records, muster rolls, pension records, and other official documents including correspondence from Minnesota governors Clough and John Lind, Adjutant General Muehlberg, and Senator Davis.

Researchers can also peruse a variety of photographs and artworks that document the period. Photographic scrapbooks and albums trace

“Remember the Maine!” became the rallying cry for the American war effort. Images of President McKinley, Commodore George Dewey, and Major General Wesley Merritt, commander of the Eighth Army Corps in the Philippines, adorn this patriotic silk handkerchief. Among the souvenirs that Minnesota troops brought home are this ivory-tipped back scratcher and a cigar from the headquarters of Philippine President Emilio Aguinaldo.





Members of the Thirteenth Minnesota in trenches around Manila, August 1898



TOP: *Photos from home, pin-ups, and military gear festoon the Manila barracks where musician J. H. Brandhorst of St. Paul posed with a copy of the St. Paul Dispatch, June 1899*

BOTTOM: *Regimental band of the Thirteenth Minnesota parading through the streets of Manila, October 1898*



The Twelfth Regiment, Minnesota Volunteer Infantry was welcomed home with a bountiful dinner at the Brown County fairgrounds in New Ulm , September 1898. Composed mostly of men from southern Minnesota, the regiment spent the war drilling in Georgia and Kentucky.

colonialism was inappropriate for a nation that cherished its own great struggle for independence. A number of Minnesota soldiers stationed in the Philippines shared this perspective. Lewis Burlingham of the Thirteenth Minnesota, unfettered by the censorship characteristic of twentieth-century wars, profoundly illustrated this disillusionment in a letter to his parents:

Why did U.S. go to war with Spain. . . . why did she take this white elephant on her hands and pay \$20,000,000.00 to get it then she turns around and does what Spain was doing when we interfered. . . . all done for greed. . . . greed that will cause insanity amongst the troops. . . . This war here is nothing but a damn political and religious affair and has

cost the lives of 2,000 good American men to be laid away forever or else crippled for life, your eldest son amongst the last unfortunate one. . . . *This* is justice in the Philippines.⁶

The Spanish-American War and the ensuing struggle in the Philippines was a turning point in American history that marked the rise of the United States as a world power and the beginning of American expansionism abroad. Yet this significant chapter in our nation's past is, for many Americans, a forgotten one. With the possible exception of Teddy Roosevelt's charge up San Juan Hill, the war with Spain often fails to summon forth an indelible image in the American memory. This centennial year offers an opportunity to gain a new understanding of the Spanish-American War, and a wealth of fascinating discoveries awaits visitors in the collec-

⁶ Lewis Burlingham to his parents, June 1, 1899, Lewis Preston Burlingham Papers, MHS.

All illustrations, including the newspaper and cartoon, reprinted in an 1899 book, Cartoons from the Spanish-American War, can be found in the MHS library. The objects on p. 132 and 133 are in the MHS museum collections and were photographed by Peter Latner.



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