During the summer of 1898 the United States fought that "splendid little war" with Spain. While Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders gained national acclaim for their gallant activities in Cuba, Americans were also fighting and dying in the Philippines. On 1 May 1898, just five days after the formal declaration of war, Commodore George Dewey's Asiatic Squadron annihilated the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. This stunning victory, however, could not be followed up until the arrival of sufficient land forces. They came in July and August. Among the 11,000 troops that arrived to participate in the capture of Manila were 8,500 state volunteers, consisting largely of infantry regiments from western states. South Dakota sent 1,000 men and Nebraska provided more than 900; these troops were destined to play a key role in American involvement on the Islands.

The First South Dakota Regiment, the Fighting First, as it was commonly called, was the National Guard unit of the state. On 30 April 1898 Governor Andrew E. Lee ordered guardsmen to mobilize at a hastily constructed camp east of Sioux Falls. Commanded by Colonel Alfred S. Frost, formerly a lieutenant in the regular army, the First left the state for San Francisco on 29 May. After additional training at Camp Merritt in San Francisco, the Second and Third Battalions sailed for Manila on 23 July, and the First Battalion left six days later.\(^2\)

The First Nebraska, known also as the Fighting First, was part of the Nebraska National Guard. On 23 April 1898 Governor Silas Holcomb ordered the two regiments of the guard to mobilize in Lincoln. In May the First Nebraska Regiment departed for San Francisco and Camp Merritt, while the Second Nebraska left for Chickamauga Park, Georgia. On 15 June the First, commanded by Colonel John P. Bratt of Bennett, left California for the Philippines. The Nebraskans arrived in Manila Bay on 17 July. Unlike the First South Dakota, who arrived in the Islands on 27 August and 2 September, the First Nebraska participated in the general advance on Manila that started on 13 August.\(^3\)

Spain's surrender of Manila and the Philippines failed to bring about the immediate return of the First South Dakota, the First Nebraska, and the other American units to the states. Rather, the August armistice produced an uneasy peace. Tension mounted not between Americans and the Spaniards, but between Americans and the Filipino nationalists, commonly called Insurgents or Insurrectos. Their leader, the young and resourceful General Emilio Aguinaldo, who had recently returned from exile, spearheaded the drive for Philippine independence. Quickly the

\(^{2}\) Material relating to the history of the First South Dakota Regiment can be found in the leading daily newspapers of the state. Of special value is the “South Dakota Regiment Edition,” an eight-page supplement to the Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 13 Oct. 1899.

slogans “Death to the American Tyrants,” “War upon the False Americans who Wish to Deceive Us,” and “Independence or Death!” were heard and seen throughout the Islands. Slogans turned into acts of violence against American soldiers on the night of 4 February 1899, when, according to the Omaha World Herald, “Three Daring Insurgents Start [ed] the Combat by Seeking to Make a Dash through Lines of Nebraska Troops.” Both sides exchanged gunfire and the Philippine Insurrection began.

The coming of a second full-scale conflict in the Philippines caused Americans to ponder the goals of the nation as a new world power. While there were those who backed President William McKinley’s plans for annexation of the Archipelago (mostly Republicans), others (mostly Democrats, Populists, and some Republicans) openly criticized such action. Pointing out that the tradition of the United States was against having distant Oriental possessions, the Detroit Journal noted that, “the best thought of the country is opposed to holding the Philippines.” The New York Post echoed the same sentiments against annexation, “to keep the Philippines would be simply another ‘Indian problem’ multiplied by thirty.” William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska issued an 1899 Lincoln’s birthday manifesto, which castigated America’s involvement in the Philippines and outlined antiimperialism as the great coming political issue. Also, Governor Lee of South Dakota, a Populist and avid antiimperialist, quickly became embroiled in a bitter fight with fellow residents over the question of American involvement in the Philippines. “Our policy should be to expand the horizon of liberty in every direction,” wrote the governor in January 1899, “and to see to it that the freedom of these people [Filipinos] in whose interest we have fought and expended our public money is fully preserved throughout all future time so far as lies within our power. This extension of


5. Omaha Morning World-Herald, 6 Feb. 1899.

democratic influence in the affairs of the world cannot help being beneficial, but if we should now assume the attitude of colonial imperialists, the moral effect of the extension of so-called democratic influence would be entirely lost.”

Soldiers, too, seemed troubled about the country’s policies toward the Filipinos. “A lot of fellows from Pennsylvania, Tennessee and the Western States, who had volunteered for war with Spain, with intent to kill Spaniards in order to free Cubans,” noted an early historian of American involvement in the Far East, “are not with intent to kill Filipinos for also wanting to be free.” Similarly, Nebraska trooper J. E. Fetterly in a 17 February 1899 letter to a Lincoln friend wrote, “I think they [Insurgents] will make a desperate struggle for what they consider their rights. I do not approve of the course our government is pursuing with these people. If all men are created equal they have some rights which ought to be respected. . . . In a word, I believe they should be accorded all the rights that we claim for ourselves. As for myself, I marched into the battle to make them free—not to make them subjects.” Although the views of all the soldiers can never be determined, Fetterly’s opinions were probably typical.

Both the South Dakota and Nebraska units saw considerable combat action from February until May 1899. While the troops initially stayed in the Manila area, by March they were important participants in the Northern Campaign, the principal military operation of the war. On 31 March they helped to take Malolos, Aguinaldo’s provisional capital. The Dakotans and Nebraskans then fought their way to the northwest and participated in the successful battle to capture San Fernando, a key insurgent stronghold forty-five miles from Manila. During this northern campaign, the First South Dakota sustained 12 killed and 97 wounded and the First Nebraska had 20 killed and 168 wounded. Included on the casualty list was:


Colonel John M. Stotsenburg, the First Nebraska's commanding officer since November 1898, shot through the heart by an Insurgent's bullet.  

Although this undeclared war continued until Aguinaldo's capture in March 1901, the Nebraskans left the Philippines on 1 July 1899 and the South Dakotans departed on 10 August. By this time nearly seven thousand regulars had sailed for Manila to replace the state volunteers whose time had expired as the result of the final ratification of the peace documents with Spain.

The following faded but rare photographs of the First South Dakota and First Nebraska Regiments were either taken or collected by a Red Cross field nurse, Mary E. Gladwin (1861-1939) of Akron, Ohio. Miss Gladwin, an 1887 graduate of Buchtel College, now the University of Akron, had a distinguished professional career. She served as a Red Cross nurse and hospital supervisor in the Spanish-American War, the Philippine Insurrection, the Russo-Japanese War, and World War I. During the latter conflict, she was one of six nurses to win the highly coveted Florence Nightingale service medal. After the war Miss Gladwin worked as superintendent of nurses and director of nurses' training schools in several American cities. Her photographic collection and personal papers are housed in the University of Akron's American History Research Center.


12. The author is indebted to John V. Miller, Jr., the University of Akron archivist and Dr. David E. Kyvig, director of the American History Research Center, for their assistance in preparing this pictorial essay.
Emilio Aguinaldo (1869-1964), leader of the Filipino Insurgents. This photograph was probably taken by an official photographer in Manila before Aguinaldo and his army moved their operations to Malolos, twenty miles away.
This picture shows a company of South Dakota volunteers in camp near Manila in December 1898.

Outpost No. 2. It was here that the first shot of the war was fired. On the night of 4 February 1899, at this outpost in a bamboo thicket near Camp Santa Mesa (Manila), an insurgent lieutenant and his party appeared. According to the Omaha World-Herald, "He did not halt, and his men made a motion with their guns, which looked bad. [Private] Grayson [of Company D, 1st Nebraska] called out, ... and then let him have it, and also another man, who looked like he intended to shoot him." The war between the Americans and the Filipinos was underway.
Company G (Geneva, Nebraska) wading the Julianao River. These soldiers of the First Nebraska were on their way from the Manila Waterworks to the Insurgent capital, Malolos, in the so-called Northern Campaign, which started on 25 March 1899.

William Grayson, the private from Beatrice who fired the first shot of the Insurrection, is holding a Springfield rifle, the standard weapon of state volunteers.
Company G of the First Nebraska under fire. These two photographs were taken near the village of San Francisco del Monte during the six-day Malolos campaign in late March. During this battle two Nebraskans died and fourteen others were wounded.
South Dakota firing line near the Insurgent stronghold of Calumpit, northwest of Malolos. This photograph was taken in late April.

Colonel John M. Stotsenburg (1858-1899), an 1881 graduate of West Point, serving as commanding officer of the First Nebraska from 10 November 1898 until his death in combat on 24 April 1899. Known for his strict discipline, Stotsenburg proved unpopular with his Nebraska men; in fact, he was accused of being a “vicious and brutal officer.”

A typical Insurgent barricade encountered by state troops in the Northern Campaign.
South Dakota and Nebraska soldiers near Calumpit shortly before they went to Manila, and after a wait, home to the United States.

Nebraskans and South Dakotans relax near Calumpit. The men stayed in Calumpit for eight days, 26 April through 3 May, before making a final advance against the enemy.
On 6 May 1899 the First South Dakota, First Nebraska, and soldiers from Iowa arrived in San Fernando, twelve miles through enemy controlled swamps from Calumpit. The Fighting First remained nearly two weeks before returning to Calumpit. In San Fernando members of Nebraska Company G are pictured in front of a native home.
A cemetery near Calumpit that contains the “temporary” graves of three members of the First South Dakota: Lt. Frank H. Adams (Company H), Lt. Jonas H. Lien (Company H) and Lt. Sidney E. Morrison (Company E), all killed in the Calumpit area during the last week of April 1899.
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