

# U.S. Marines in Battle

10 JUNE – 9 AUGUST 1898

## GUANTÁNAMO BAY







Cover: *Cuzco Well, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, 1898*, by Charles H. Waterhouse. The first Marines to campaign in and around Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, landed during the Spanish-American War, and the area now known as GITMO has been a Marine base ever since. In the decisive engagement of the battle, Marines of the First Marine Battalion assaulted and captured the blockhouse overlooking the Spanish base of Cuzco Well. Skirmishers, under covering fire of the new tenants, cleared the fields of any Spanish defenders around the windmill and water supply. Source: Art Collection, National Museum of the Marine Corps

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by Jerry A. Roberts

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## MARINE CORPS HISTORY DIVISION

Director

**Dr. Edward T. Nevgloski**

MCU Press Director

**Angela J. Anderson**

Editor

**Stephani L. Miller**

Visual Information Specialist

**Jose J. Esquilin**

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# GUANTÁNAMO BAY

10 JUNE–9 AUGUST 1898



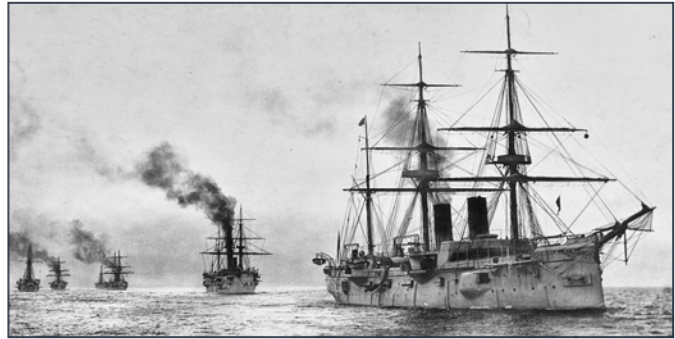
On 21 April 1898, the United States declared war on Spain and for the first time since the American Civil War the U.S. military found itself at war on a national scale. The Spanish-American War was the first open conflict between the United States and a foreign power since the Mexican-American War of 1846–48. In four decades of peace, the United States had allowed its military to atrophy to near pre–Civil War levels. For example, the Army had seen its active-duty strength reduced from more than 2.6 million troops under arms to fewer than 40,000. By 1879, the total number of ships on the Navy rolls had dropped from the peak Civil War strength of more than 600 fighting vessels to 142. At any given time, the Navy could only muster an average of 48 ships capable of service. The secretary of the Navy publicly lamented that “in the entire Navy there was not a single, high-power, long-range, rifled gun!”<sup>1</sup>

The Spanish-American War proved to be a watershed event for the entire United States military. The outcome of this conflict altered the nineteenth-century American military focus on defense of the homeland to a military with global missions and responsibilities. The need to defend newly acquired territories in both oceans required a military with the means to rapidly project power across the seas. The actions of a small Marine force at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in the summer of 1898 proved to be particularly impactful on the future of the Marine Corps. This small and short-lived battle served as a major catalyst that spurred the evolution of the Marine Corps from a naval guard force to the naval expeditionary force of the twentieth century that we recognize today.

## The Late Nineteenth-Century Environment

The Navy, although greatly reduced in size from 1865 levels, had fared somewhat better than the Army in the peacetime budget battles. In the 1880s and 1890s, the Navy embarked on an extensive shipbuilding and modernization program. In less than 15 years, the Navy would be transformed, moving out of the age of wood, iron, and sail into the modern era of technologically advanced steel ships.

The Navy began its aggressive shipbuilding program in 1883 with the construction of what was known as the “White



The White Squadron in 1890. The commissioning of these four ships marked the beginning of a shipbuilding program that by 1898 had transformed the U.S. Navy from an antiquated coastal defense force to a modern sea control and power projection force.

Naval History and Heritage Command

Squadron.” This squadron comprised four ships: one steam frigate (USS *Chicago* [cruiser]), two corvettes (USS *Atlanta* and *Boston* [protected cruisers]), and one dispatch boat (USS *Dolphin* [PG 24]). In the late 1880s, Navy ship design and construction then transitioned to battleships such as the USS *Maine* (ACR 1) and *Texas* (1892) and in the early 1890s to the pre–dreadnaught battleship era with ships such as the USS *Indiana* (BB 1), *Massachusetts* (BB 2), and *Oregon* (BB 3).<sup>2</sup>

The modernization of the Navy in the last two decades of the nineteenth century began the Navy’s transition from its traditional mission of defending the American coastline to a modern power projection and sea control force. By 1890, the theories of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan on the importance and influence of seapower to national interests had gained wide support in both the naval Service and government circles. This change in strategic mindset was illustrated by the passage of the Naval Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 1891 (Battleship Act of 1890) to build modern battleships. Upon passage of the bill, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin F. Tracy gave clear and unambiguous instruction to the head of the Navy Construction Bureau: “Now, sir, what you’ve [got] to do is to design a ship that can lick anything afloat.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Battleships such as the *Maine* and *Texas* were more commonly known as second-class battleships or armored cruisers, as advances in ship design and technology made them obsolete before they were officially commissioned.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Spears, *Our Navy in the War with Spain* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 54.

<sup>1</sup> John D. Long, *The New American Navy*, vol. 1 (New York: Outlook Company, 1903), 14.

In 1898, with the outbreak of war with Spain, the U.S. Navy fielded a capable surface fleet built around a nucleus of modern battleships, supported by armored cruisers and auxiliary ships. Although certainly not comparable in size to the great navies of the world, the Navy possessed individual ships that stacked up well against some of the most capable ships in the world at that time.

By comparison, the Marine Corps in 1898 was a very modest force of 3,100 officers and enlisted men scattered around the globe in Marine barracks, other shore installations, and more than 50 detachments at sea on Navy ships. The ninth Commandant of the Marine Corps, Colonel Charles Heywood, championed two principal missions for the Marine Corps, as did his predecessor Colonel Charles G. McCawley: guarding naval shore installations and providing detachments for Navy ships.<sup>4</sup> The guard forces assigned to the major barracks were a manpower resource to be drawn on in response to crisis, while the ships detachments' main duties were to man secondary batteries on ships and provide personnel for ad hoc landing forces.

In the spring of 1885, world events provided an operational venue that highlighted the issues the Marine Corps faced between the missions it could or should perform and the disparities in manpower that limited the ability to pursue those missions. The Isthmus of Panama had erupted in civil unrest and revolt against Colombia, causing great concern in the United States. Although President Grover Cleveland was not interested in foreign intervention, he was concerned about protecting U.S. citizens and property in the region.

On 1 April 1885, President Cleveland authorized a naval expedition to Panama to protect U.S. interests. Maintaining the ability to transit the isthmus and prevent the disruption of the free movement of people, goods, and communications from the Atlantic to the Pacific was deemed to be of high importance to the nation. The protection of American companies was given high priority. To ensure their assets were protected, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company provided the Navy the use of two steamships (*City of Para* and *Acapulco*) to transport the expeditionary force.

On 2 April 1885, the eighth Commandant of the Marine Corps, Colonel Charles Grymes McCawley, received orders to organize a battalion of Marines and to embark them for Aspinwall, Panama. A battalion of 234 Marines was quickly organized under the command of then-major Charles Heywood by drawing available personnel from the Marine Barracks at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, as well as Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Washington,

DC. The battalion also included company commander Captain Robert W. Huntington and First Lieutenant George F. Elliott (future 10th Commandant), who both would play critical roles in the Guantánamo Bay landings 13 years later. Navy Commander Bowman H. McCalla (also a future key player at Guantánamo Bay) was selected to be the naval force commander for the Panama expedition under the overall command of Rear Admiral James E. Jouett.

On 3 April 1885, the Navy Department telegraphed the commander of the North Atlantic Squadron, Rear Admiral Jouett, assigning him overall command of the mission. Admiral Jouett's instructions were very straightforward. He was authorized to use a naval expeditionary force for the sole purpose of protecting American lives and property and to ensure free and uninterrupted transit across the isthmus. He was cautioned to use great discretion in his actions and in no way to interfere with the sovereign acts of the government of Colombia or to take part in any of the political or social events.

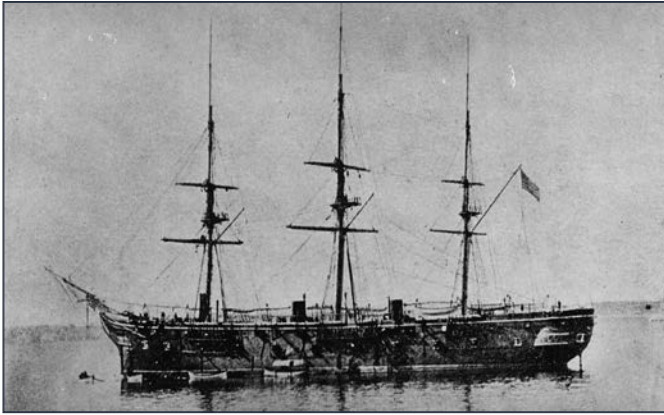
The expeditionary force, with Heywood's battalion as the main landing force, sailed from New York on 3 April 1885, landing Heywood's Marines in Aspinwall, on 12 April. Ultimately, three Marine battalions would be formed and deployed to Panama. They would be nominally consolidated into a brigade under the command of Major Heywood and operate ashore for the better part of a month, restoring and maintaining order until sufficient Colombian troops arrived between 30 April and 5 May to take control. This was the first time a United States Marine brigade had ever been organized.<sup>5</sup> Commander McCalla would arrive on 15 April and make the decision to come ashore to take personal control of the operation, which would ultimately lead to conflict between the Navy and the Marine Corps in the post-operation environment.

The formation of this provisional Marine brigade caused the Corps to reduce its Atlantic coast shore installations by more than half. To make matters worse, at this time there was no Marine battalion or regimental organizational structure. The efforts to form larger tactical organizations such as this where none currently existed were naturally very ad hoc evolutions, leading to an environment characterized by improvisation and discovery learning. One of the more interesting outcomes of this successful employment of naval forces in response to a crisis was not so much its impacts on world events as was its impact internally on Service and individual professional opinions and theories being discussed in the naval Service. A hot topic at the time was the

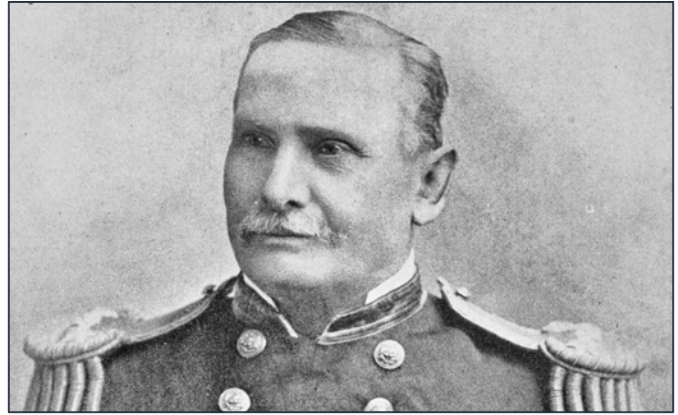
<sup>4</sup> At the time, the commandancy was filled by a colonel; the rank was raised to brigadier general in 1899 and to major general in 1902. Col Heywood served as Commandant from 1891 to 1903.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Debs Heinl, *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962* (Baltimore, MD: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1991), 93.





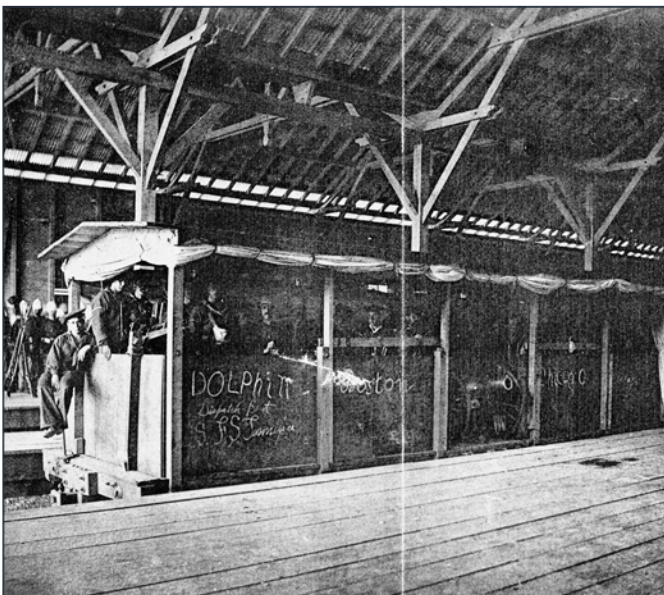
RAdm Jouett's flagship, the USS *Tennessee* (1865). Originally USS *Madawaska*, the ship's name was changed to *Tennessee* on 15 May 1869.  
Naval History and Heritage Command, NH46920



RAdm James E. Jouett, commander of the North Atlantic Squadron. Selected as the overall commander for the Panama intervention, Jouett assigned oversight of operations ashore to Cdr B. H. McCalla.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



Lead elements of the Marine battalion landing at Aspinwall, Panama, 1885.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



An armed railroad car used by Marines to provide security for rail traffic across the Isthmus of Panama in 1885.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

role of the Marine Corps and its future utility as a naval landing force in expeditionary operations versus the use of Marines in ships detachments.

Commander McCalla issued a detailed after action report on the isthmus operations to the secretary of the Navy. In this report McCalla praised the Marines for their efficiency and discipline but was very critical of their tactics and proficiency with artillery and machine guns. He even went so far as to critique the current rifle manual and manual of arms and to make recommended changes to the existing manuals.<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, detailed criticisms of Marine ground operations by a naval officer did not sit well with Marine Corps leadership.

Most significantly, McCalla took direct aim at the primary Marine mission of guarding naval installations when he concluded that too much time on barracks duty came at the expense of professional education of Marine officers and meaningful training of Marine units to prepare them for expeditionary operations. Commander McCalla recommended annual summer maneuvers with Marines in conjunction with the fleet and U.S. Army to develop the tactics and techniques and organizational structure needed for major landing operations. He also advocated the Navy purchase transports specifically designed to carry Marine brigades.<sup>7</sup> Although McCalla's report actually advocated the development of the Marine Corps as a true expeditionary arm of the fleet, that salient point was lost in what was viewed by Marine leadership as a direct refutation on the currently accepted core missions of the Marine Corps.

<sup>6</sup> "Report of Commander McCalla upon the Naval Expedition to the Isthmus of Panama, April 1885," Annual Report of the Navy Department, Bureau of Navigation, 1885, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, 61.

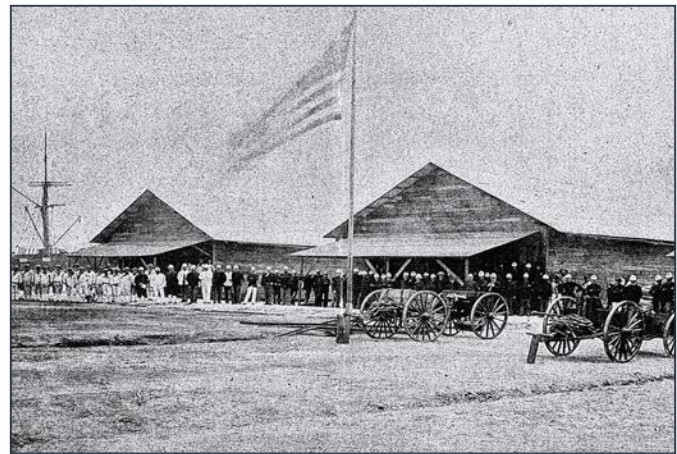
<sup>7</sup> "Report of Commander McCalla upon the Naval Expedition to the Isthmus of Panama, April 1885," 67.

McCalla's recommendations struck directly at the dilemma the Marine Corps faced throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Marine Corps was a force with very limited resources that allowed them to perform their current mission, but with little hope of adding new structure and resources to take on new missions. Colonel Commandant McCawley strongly rebutted Commander McCalla's conclusions and recommendations and defended the status quo, describing the missions of the Marine Corps in the traditional terms of ships detachments and guard duty at the Navy yards. He made no reference to the possibility of future expeditionary roles for the Corps.<sup>8</sup>

In retrospect, the 1885 Panama operation provided a telling preview of the employment of Marines at Guantánamo Bay in the Spanish-American War 13 years later, with McCalla as the naval force commander, Heywood as Commandant of the Marine Corps, Huntington as commander of the Marine landing force, and Elliott as a company commander in the operation's decisive engagement.

The issues raised in Commander McCalla's report were illustrative of the professional and institutional split between the leadership of the Marine Corps and an influential Navy reform element led by Captain Alfred Mahan and Lieutenant William F. Fullam. The transformation of the Navy from a predominantly coastal defense force to an instrument of power projection and sea control in the 1880s and 1890s brought forth significant implications for the current and potential future missions of the Corps. This period was characterized by intense professional debate on the future structure and missions of both elements of the naval Service. The Navy reformers had become a dominant driving force in determining the future of the Navy and the Corps.

In 1889, a crisis point was reached for the leadership of the Corps when the Navy board led by Commodore James A. Greer (formed to address future Navy and Marine Corps organization) released its recommendations. It was clear in the Greer report that a significant number of naval officers were bent on severe reductions or outright elimination of Marine detachments aboard combatant ships, with others openly advocating elimination of the Corps entirely. The following year, an article by Fullam was published in the U.S. Naval Institute's *Proceedings* in which he contended the presence of Marines on board ship was not needed and was in fact a hindrance to developing sailors and petty officers. The Greer report contended that the reduction of the number of Marines on board ship would allow larger Marine organizations to be trained as separate expeditionary landing forces. From the per-



The camp of the naval expeditionary force located at Aspinwall, Panama, 1885. Naval History and Heritage Command

spective of the Corps' leadership, the Greer report and Fullam's article were direct attacks on the future existence of their Service.<sup>9</sup>

McCawley and his successor, Heywood, would steadfastly defend the status quo. They both viewed the strategy of organizing the Marine Corps around the dual missions of the barracks guard forces and ships detachments as keeping the Corps closest to integral Navy missions. In hindsight, one might fault them for failing to embrace the expeditionary mission that would ultimately define the twentieth-century Marine Corps. But that decision must be looked at within the context of the times. The Corps at this point was very small, with little prospect for growth in numbers and budgets required to form regiments or brigades to take on the expeditionary landing force mission. To many in the Corps, a move away from what were perceived as core Navy missions was taking on the inherent risk of failure and potentially having the mission and the Marine Corps ultimately absorbed by the Army.

For the senior leadership of the Marine Corps, this period was a constant struggle for the institutional existence of their Service. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the Commandants of the Marine Corps steadfastly supported the barracks and ships detachments missions as the key to institutional survival. In their view, these missions made the Marine Corps a more integral part of the Navy structure and as such were the best approaches to ensure the Corps' existence in the future. However, it was clear that many influential U.S. naval officers of the day, including Captain Mahan, did not see things in the same way.

## The Road to War and Initial Operations

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the island of Cuba was in near-continuous turmoil due to a series of revolts against

<sup>8</sup> Jack Shulimson, *The Marine Corps' Search for a Mission, 1880–1898* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 62.

<sup>9</sup> Shulimson, *The Marine Corps' Search for a Mission, 1880–1898*, 94–99.





Col Charles G. McCawley, eighth Commandant of the Marine Corps. During his tenure as Commandant, he fought for the institutional survival of the Marine Corps against the more strident elements of the Navy reform movement. Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

Spanish colonial rule. Diplomatic relations between Spain and the United States were strained by these events since Spain suspected the U.S. government was providing material support to Cuban rebels. Additionally, American public sentiment was decidedly against the Spanish for their perceived harsh treatment of the Cuban people, which included placing the territory under martial law in 1896 and moving the population to concentrate it centrally as a way to deprive Cuban guerrillas fighting for independence of the ability to hide in plain sight among civilians. The relocated Cubans, though guarded by Spanish troops, suffered from poor conditions, nutrition, and medical care; 30 percent of relocated people died.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the fact that Spanish control of the island represented a vestige of European colonialism in America's backyard and a direct violation of America's long-standing Monroe Doctrine was more than enough to tilt public sentiment against Spain.

For many years, numerous American entrepreneurs, commonly known as "filibusters," contracted with Cuban insurgents to smuggle arms and other banned material onto the island. One of the more famous incidents occurred in 1873, which became known as the *Virginian* affair. The *Virginian*, a ship that carried fraudulent U.S. registration papers and flew the U.S. flag, was used illegally to clandestinely ship arms to Cuba. The illicit use of the ship to support insurgents in Cuba was widely suspected, if not well known, by U.S. diplomatic agencies. The ship was captured by the Spanish gunboat *Tornado* and taken to Santiago, Cuba, where the mixed American and English crew and other passengers were imprisoned. Within a week, nearly 50 of the crew were

summarily executed by the Spanish military. Legally justified or not, such events contributed to the strong anti-Spanish sentiment of the American public for several decades.

American and Spanish relations took a turn for the worse during the Cuban insurrection that began in 1895. In February 1896, Spain sent General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau to suppress the revolt. Weyler was determined to end the rebellion at any cost, instituting a policy of harsh and brutal suppression of the insurgents or even of those who were not actively assisting their Spanish overlords.

Weyler's approach was to cut off aid to rebels by forcing much of the Cuban rural peasantry into armed concentration camps, called *reconcentrados*. The end result was abject misery and the rise of starvation. Concurrently, American citizens in Cuba often found themselves under house arrest or in jail without what they believed to be just cause. The result was a backlash of humanitarian outrage in the United States, accompanied by official protests from the U.S. government. The culminating event in this period of strained relations came when the United States minister to Spain, Stewart L. Woodford, delivered the American government's position in unambiguous language: "You must take Weyler out of Cuba or we will do it for you."<sup>11</sup> General Weyler was recalled by Spain in October 1897, but not before grave damage had been done to the relationship between Spain and the United States, particularly in the court of public opinion and in the American press.

The removal of Weyler did not resolve the Cuban situation and anti-Spanish riots again erupted in Havana in January 1898. Former Confederate general and governor of Virginia Fitzhugh Lee, the American counselor general in Havana, described conditions in Cuba as explosive and suggested to President William McKinley that the presence of a U.S. warship in Havana might calm the situation. The North Atlantic Squadron had previously been dispatched to Key West to conduct winter maneuvers as well as to be in position to respond to a crisis in Cuba if required. On 24 January 1898, McKinley directed the commander of the North Atlantic Squadron, Rear Admiral Montgomery Sicard, to send the USS *Maine* to Havana in support of Lee's request in an attempt to calm the situation.

The *Maine* departed Key West the evening of 24 January to time its arrival at Havana after daylight the next morning. The *Maine* was received with the appropriate courtesy by the Spanish and anchored at buoy number four. Due to the volatile situation in Havana, Captain Charles D. Sigsbee, commander of the *Maine*, took extra precautions by establishing a greater than normal number of armed sentries as well as keeping enough steam up

<sup>10</sup> "The World of 1898: The Spanish-American War—Reconcentration Policy," Hispanic Reading Room of the Library of Congress Hispanic Division, accessed 27 February 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Spears, *Our Navy in the War with Spain*, 62.

in the boilers so as to be able to quickly employ the ship's main battery of 10-inch guns if needed.<sup>12</sup>

Considering the political volatility at that time in Havana, the next several days were remarkably calm. There were no public demonstrations or confrontations between the Spanish authorities and the Cuban populace who supported independence. The *Maine's* presence in Havana took on the semblance of any other port visit for a U.S. warship. Visits by friendly Cubans supportive of the United States as well as less congenial visits by Spanish representatives on official business were the daily routine. The tense political atmosphere between the United States and Spain did not improve when on 9 February the *New York Journal*, owned by William Randolph Hearst (whose name will forever be tied to the term *yellow journalism*), published what came to be called the *de Lôme letter*. Cuban revolutionaries had gained possession of a letter from the Spanish ambassador to the United States, Don Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, addressed to the minister of Spain. The letter was forwarded to Hearst, who was always eager to publish anything that would sell newspapers. In this letter, the Spanish ambassador expressed some very pointed and uncomplimentary opinions about the character of President McKinley.

On the evening of 15 February, approximately 30 minutes after "Taps" was sounded on the *Maine*, the ship was wracked by two tremendous explosions that lifted the bow of the vessel out of the water. As Sigsbee struggled down the dark passageway from his cabin to get out on deck, he met Marine Private William Anthony, who saluted and reported the ship had blown up and was sinking. In the end, 260 sailors and Marines were killed in the explosion or later died of injuries in the hospital. That evening, Captain Sigsbee sent the following message to the secretary of the Navy:

Maine blown up in Havana Harbor at 9.40 to-night [sic], and destroyed. Many wounded and doubtless more killed or drowned. Wounded and others on board Spanish man-of-war and Ward Line steamer. Send light-house tenders from Key West for crew and the few pieces of equipment above. No one has clothing other than that upon him. Public opinion should be suspended until further report. All officials believed to be saved. [Lieutenant Friend W.] Jenkins and [Assistant Engineer Darwin R.] Merritt not yet accounted for. Many Spanish officers, including representatives of General [Ramon] Blanco, now with me to express sympathy.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A. B. Feuer, *The Spanish-American War at Sea: Naval Action in the Atlantic* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 6.

<sup>13</sup> "Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1898, part 2," Naval History and Heritage Command, 22 April 2015.



Anti-Spanish sentiment was often portrayed in political cartoons of the time. These two 1898 examples were published in *Puck* magazine, one of the most widely read and popular periodicals of the era. Library of Congress

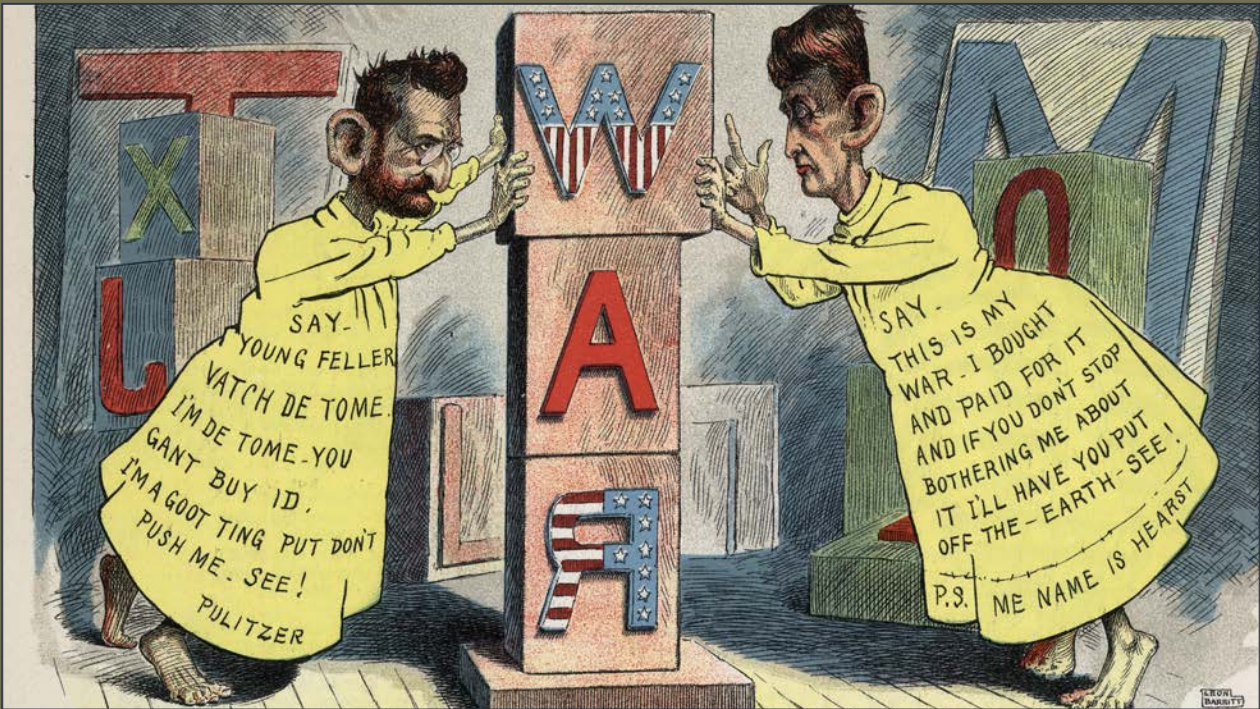
President McKinley immediately ordered the Navy to conduct a formal court of inquiry into the cause of the explosion. The Spanish government offered to participate in a joint inquiry but was rejected by the Americans. Thus, two investigations, one American and one Spanish, were conducted concurrently and independently. The American inquiry convened on 21 February, headed by Captain William T. Sampson (soon to be the naval force commander of operations against Cuba). The court reported out one month later and concluded:

In the opinion of the court the *Maine* was destroyed by the explosion of a submarine mine, which caused the partial explosion of two or more of the forward magazines. The court has been unable to obtain evidence fixing responsibility for the destruction of the *Maine* upon any person or persons.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> [Naval Operations of the War with Spain] Appendix to the Report of the Chief of the Bureau of Navigation (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 17, hereafter *Naval Operations of the War with Spain*.



## Yellow Journalism



Puck magazine political cartoon depicting Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst in competition to shape war coverage and public opinion. Library of Congress

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *yellow journalism* as a term applied to reckless or unscrupulous newspapers or writers of newspaper articles.<sup>1</sup> The Spanish-American War coincided with the height of yellow journalism in America. The term was coined in the mid-1890s to characterize the sensationalistic style used by Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*. Both newspapers were accused by critics of sensationalizing the news to drive up circulation. Embellishment and telling a compelling story often overrode serious investigative reporting. Pulitzer and Hearst are often portrayed as influential figures in shaping American opinion in support of war against Spain. Both newspapers heavily covered the revolt in Cuba and were known for sensational and often exaggerated accounts of the conditions in Cuba. An English magazine in 1897 noted, "All American journalism is not 'yellow,' though all strictly 'up-to-date' yellow journalism is American!"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., vol. 20, eds. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. "yellow journalism."

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth L. Banks, "American 'Yellow Journalism,'" *Nineteenth Century, a Monthly Review* 44 (July–December 1898): 328, as quoted in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "yellow journalism."

The Spanish investigation asserted that the *Maine* was destroyed by an internal explosion, but their arguments fell on deaf ears. War now seemed to be an inescapable inevitability. In the 100-plus years since the destruction of the *Maine*, there have been numerous studies and analyses of the incident. The consensus of these efforts is that the sinking of the *Maine* was caused by an internal fire and explosion. The *Maine* was loaded with bituminous coal, which was known for its potential for spontaneous combustion. Between 1895 and 1898, there were numerous documented incidents of U.S. Navy ships experiencing coal bunker fires.

Coupled with a design flaw in the *Maine* (and other ships) that placed coal bunkers adjacent to ammunition magazines, a bunker fire could have created enough heat transfer through the bulkheads to cause a detonation of ammunition. However, in the volatile diplomatic and political climate of 1898, dispassionate scientific analysis had most likely fallen victim to preconceived conclusions.

On 26 March 1898, within a week of the conclusion of the USS *Maine* court of inquiry, Captain Sampson found himself in temporary command of the North Atlantic Squadron due to the poor health of Rear Admiral Sicard. All prewar planning for naval

operations against Spain in the Atlantic fell to Sampson. With the outbreak of war, he was given command of the fleet and promoted to the rank of rear admiral.

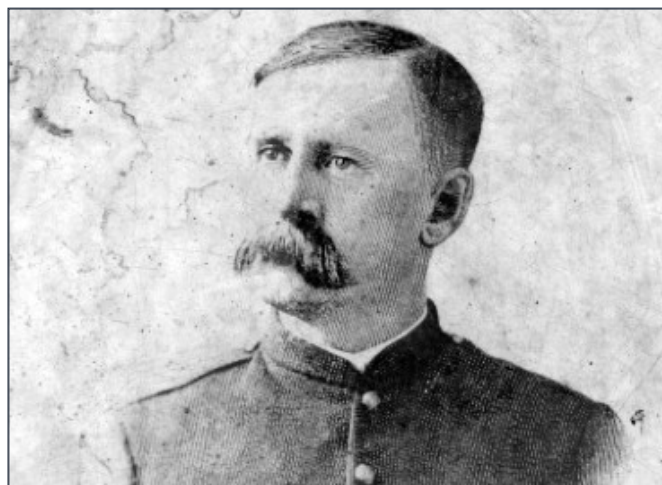
On 6 April, Sampson received his orders for war preparations from Secretary of the Navy John Long. At the outbreak of hostilities, Sampson was to capture or destroy Spanish vessels in West Indian waters and to establish a blockade of Cuba. The northern coast ports of Havana and Matanzas were of primary concern. If resources allowed, the blockade was to expand to the southern Cuban ports of Santiago de Cuba, Manzanillo, and Cienfuegos. In addition, the secretary cautioned Sampson against engaging Spanish shore batteries, as readily available repair facilities were lacking and he might not expect ground forces to be available for the seizure or occupation of key points until as late as October.<sup>15</sup>

As Captain Sampson wrestled with the dilemma of how to turn Secretary Long's instructions into an executable plan of action, he formulated a concept for the immediate employment of the Marine Corps to support his maritime blockade of Cuba. In a message to the secretary on 13 April, Sampson put forth the argument that to establish a blockade it "will be a necessity to hold certain small places, both as a refuge for our smaller ships and as the most convenient method of closing these places for trade."<sup>16</sup> To accomplish this task, Sampson recommended a battalion of 400 Marines be formed and readied to deploy as early as 20 April, with a second battalion ready by the 25th. Sampson was convinced that with the protection provided from the guns of the naval squadron a small landing force could take and hold key points along the Cuban coast.

The United States and Spain were moving rapidly toward a state of war. The U.S. consul-general to Cuba, Fitzhugh Lee, departed for Key West on 9 April. On 11 April, President McKinley presented a resolution to Congress requesting authorization to use force in Cuba, which was approved on 20 April. The publishing of the signed joint resolution of Congress demanded that Spain remove all forces from Cuba and relinquish all authority and government of the island. The resolution also authorized the president to initiate a blockade of Cuba, a clear act of war on the part of the United States. The resolution was delivered to Spain on 20 April, resulting in the Spanish government expelling the U.S. ambassador and declaring war on the United States the next day.

<sup>15</sup> *Naval Operations of the War with Spain*, 171.

<sup>16</sup> Capt William Sampson, commander in chief U.S. Naval Force on North Atlantic Station, letter to the secretary of the Navy, 13 April 1898, Spanish-American War papers, folder 1 of 5, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA, hereafter Sampson 13 April 1898 letter to secretary of the Navy.

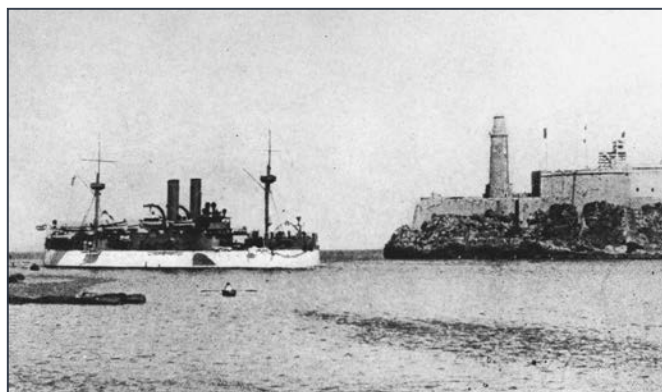


Pvt William Anthony of the Marine detachment of the USS *Maine*. He found Capt Charles D. Sigsbee in the passageway, calmly saluted, and reported that the *Maine* had blown up and was sinking.

Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division



An artist's contemporary rendition of the explosion of the USS *Maine*, published by Muller, Luchsinger & Co. Library of Congress



The USS *Maine* (ACR 1) entering Havana harbor on the morning of 25 January 1898, in an attempt to calm the volatile atmosphere in Cuba. Naval History and Heritage Command



With the declaration of war, the North Atlantic Fleet was immediately put into action. On 21 April, Captain Sampson received notification of his official assignment to command of the naval forces on the North Atlantic Station and promotion to rear admiral.<sup>17</sup> In a separate correspondence sent that same day from Secretary Long, Sampson was ordered to initiate the blockade of the northern coast of Cuba. The following morning, Sampson's force sailed from his base at Key West for Cuba, a mere 90 miles to the south.

As the North Atlantic Fleet put to sea early on 22 April, Admiral Sampson faced major resource shortfalls that greatly limited his flexibility to conduct operations during the next 30 days. As Secretary Long alluded in his directives to Admiral Sampson on 6 and 21 April, the initial strength of the North Atlantic Fleet was insufficient to completely blockade the island of Cuba, much less to have additional resources to concurrently meet the highly probable threat of a Spanish naval force coming to relieve the blockade.

A major contributor to Sampson's resource issue was the fleet organization that he inherited when he assumed command. The North Atlantic Fleet was initially divided into two major components, the Blockading Squadron under Commodore John C. Watson and the Flying Squadron under Commodore Winfield S. Schley. The Blockading Squadron was directly under Sampson's control, whereas the Flying Squadron was an independent force initially positioned in Hampton Roads, Virginia, and answering directly to the secretary of the Navy. By positioning the Flying Squadron in Virginia, the secretary of the Navy hoped to calm the fears of the American public on the East Coast about a possible attack by Spanish naval forces. This perceived need effectively withheld some of the Navy's most capable ships from Sampson's initial operations against Cuba.

The United States was fully aware that a Spanish flotilla under the command of Admiral Pascual Cervera y Topete had assembled in the Cape Verde Islands off the west coast of Africa on 20 April for possible deployment to the West Indies. On 29 April, a news report that the flotilla had departed with an assumed destination of either Puerto Rico or Cuba interjected a great element of uncertainty into Admiral Sampson's calculations. The North Atlantic Fleet commander not only had to execute the blockade of Cuba but simultaneously needed to keep a significant force at sea to find and counter this mobile threat.

A major impediment to Sampson's operations was the logistical problem of keeping his ships resupplied with coal. The U.S. Navy had a great shortage of colliers (ships designed to carry coal and resupply other ships). Recoaling a ship was a

time-consuming process that often took several hours. This was a task best accomplished in a port or protected anchorage. Recoaling at sea was possible but the process was vulnerable to weather conditions, and it was not a capability that could be relied on to sustain fleet operations over an extended period of time. As a result, ships of the Blockading Squadron had to routinely redeploy back to Key West to be resupplied with coal. This process could take an individual ship out of action anywhere from 24 to 48 hours, depending on weather and the ship's speed in transit.

The recoaling problems came to a head with the search for Admiral Cervera's flotilla during the last half of May 1898. Admiral Sampson had formed an eight-ship squadron that sailed for San Juan, Puerto Rico, in an attempt to intercept Cervera's force, but the Spanish were not anywhere near this location. After bombarding the defenses of San Juan on 12 May, Sampson retired back to Key West to refuel his ships.

While Sampson was conducting this somewhat fruitless search operation around Puerto Rico, Cervera's flotilla was spotted off Martinique on 12 May and at Curaçao on 14 May attempting to recoal. Cervera finally limped undetected into the harbor of Santiago de Cuba on the morning of 19 May, low on fuel and with ships badly in need of repair.

Commodore Schley's Flying Squadron was ordered from Hampton Roads to Key West on 13 May, where his squadron would eventually come under the operational command of Sampson. After recoaling his ships, Schley was dispatched on 19 May around the western side of Cuba to search for the Spanish flotilla suspected to be in the southern Cuban port of Cienfuegos. Schley arrived on 21 May, but was unable to determine whether the Spanish flotilla was in the port. On 23 May, Schley was informed by Sampson that unconfirmed reports put Cervera's force at Santiago de Cuba. It took Schley almost a week to finally confirm the Spanish naval force was in fact at Santiago de Cuba, not Cienfuegos. After receiving several messages from Secretary Long on the absolute necessity of keeping the Spanish blockaded in Santiago, Schley sent the following message on 28 May:

Secretary of the Navy, Washington:

The receipt of telegram of May 26\* is acknowledged. . . . [collier] *Merrimac* [(steamer)] engines disabled; is heavy; am obliged to have towed to Key West. Have been unable absolutely to coal the *Texas* [second-class battleship], *Marblehead* [C 11], *Vixen* [yacht], *Brooklyn* [CA 3] from collier, all owing to very rough sea. Bad weather since leaving Key West. The *Brooklyn* alone has more than sufficient coal to proceed to Key West; cannot

<sup>17</sup> *Naval Operations of the War with Spain*, 174.



An 1897 map of Cuba, its provinces, railroads, cities, towns, harbors, bays, etc., published by Mast, Crowell & Kirkpatrick. New York Public Library, Maps of North America Collection

remain off Santiago present state squadron coal account. Impossible to coal leeward Cape Cruz in the summer, all owing to southwesterly winds. . . . Much to be regretted, can not obey orders of Department. Have striven earnestly; forced to proceed for coal to Key West by way of Yucatan Passage. Can not [sic] ascertain anything respecting enemy positive.<sup>18</sup>

Schley's message set off a flurry of activity at the highest levels of the Navy Department. Sampson, who had just recently been given operational command of Schley's Flying Squadron, immediately sent preemptive orders to the commodore that he was to "blockade the Spanish squadron at all hazards."<sup>19</sup> More ships, including colliers, were dispatched to Santiago to alleviate Schley's supply problems. On 30 May, Sampson arrived in the Santiago area with additional warships, ensuring that he had more than an adequate force to maintain a continuous blockade of the Spanish flotilla.

With the bottling up of the Spanish squadron in Santiago harbor and the extensive blockade operations off the northern coast of Cuba, the United States shifted its operational focus from Havana to Santiago. It was decided that the Army's 10,000-man expeditionary force preparing to depart from Tampa, Florida, would be sent to Santiago, where a joint Navy and Army operation would destroy the Spanish flotilla and secure a major Cuban port in a single blow. The American command felt it was imperative to move before the onset of the rainy season. With



The wreck of the USS *Maine*.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

the imminent employment of the Army expeditionary force, the continued need to blockade Santiago and the rest of Cuba, and the coming of anticipated bad weather with the Cuban rainy season, Sampson was convinced that the North Atlantic Fleet was in dire need of a forward protected anchorage for recoaling and repairs.

On 30 May 1898, in an exchange of messages, Sampson and Secretary Long came to an agreement that Guantánamo Bay, approximately 40 miles east of Santiago, was the best location for Sampson's advanced naval base. On the evening of 4 June, Sampson assigned the mission of securing Guantánamo Bay "as a base for his colliers, repair ships and other auxiliaries" to Commander McCalla, who was captain of the cruiser USS

<sup>18</sup> *Naval Operations of the War with Spain*, 397.

<sup>19</sup> *Naval Operations of the War with Spain*, 398.

*Marblehead* (C 11).<sup>20</sup> A message was sent out immediately to the commandant of Key West Naval Station, directing the embarkation of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Huntington's battalion of Marines for service in Cuba. Sampson's concept for the utilization of a Marine battalion to secure key points ashore in support of larger naval operations, first proposed to Secretary Long on 13 April, was now to be put into execution.<sup>21</sup>

## Formation and Deployment of the First Marine Battalion

As the United States and Spain moved inexorably toward war in April 1895, Commandant Colonel Charles Heywood was not waiting for events to dictate his actions. His experience in the 1885 Panama expedition served as a useful template for efficiently organizing an expeditionary battalion in a very short space of time.

In March 1898, Congress approved the addition of 473 new enlistments for the Marine Corps and ultimately authorized the temporary expansion of the Marine Corps (officially enacted on 4 May) by 1,640 enlisted billets to meet "exigencies that may exist" during the following 12 months.<sup>22</sup> With the authorization to recruit replacements, Heywood was now in a position to start stripping personnel from their current stateside organizations to provide immediate manpower for war service. In his annual report to the secretary of the Navy, Colonel Heywood asserted that without the additional manpower authorization the Marine Corps would have been unable to meet the requirements for both war support and guarding naval installations in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

On 5 April, eight days before Captain Sampson's proposal to Secretary Long for the formation of a Marine battalion, Heywood put out a call to his commanders of installations and ships detachments on the East Coast to identify troops for consolidation into an expeditionary unit at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The experience of Marines like Private John H. Clifford, assigned to Marine Barracks Portsmouth in New Hampshire, typified the sense of urgency permeating the Marine Corps: "On the 6th of April the 1st Sergeant called assembly and 60 men were identified to report to the quartermaster for war equipment."<sup>24</sup> The following day, these Marines, under the command of Captain William F.

Spicer, boarded a ferry to town, from which they took a train to Boston and then traveled by ship to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The Portsmouth Barracks detachment would become the nucleus for the formation of Company D, First Marine Battalion, with Captain Spicer as the commanding officer and First Lieutenant Wendell C. Neville (future 14th Commandant of the Marine Corps) as one of its two platoon leaders.

As was to be expected, the sudden influx of several hundred Marines into the Brooklyn Navy Yard strained the capacity of its limited facilities. Again, Private Clifford recorded, "My company slept in the loft of an old stable with woolen blanket for a bed, knapsack for a pillow and blue military coat for covering."<sup>25</sup>

On 16 April, Colonel Heywood received verbal authorization from the Department of the Navy to officially organize a 400-man battalion for service in Cuba. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Huntington, the current commander of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, was selected to command the battalion. On 18 April, Huntington reported that the battalion of four companies was formed and ready for embarkation.

On 21 April, Huntington was directed to increase the battalion to six companies, and in 24 hours he reported that the battalion—now five infantry companies and one artillery company, with a total of 24 officers and 623 enlisted Marines—was ready for embarkation. The battalion was a collection of men from Marine Barracks Washington, DC; Brooklyn, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Newport, Rhode Island; Norfolk, Virginia; and the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. Additionally, Marines were also drawn from U.S. receiving ships *Vermont* (1848), *Wabash* (1855, screw frigate), *Richmond* (1860, steam sloop), and *Franklin* (1864, screw frigate). The truly ad hoc nature of the effort to form a large tactical organization from disparate Marine stations cannot be overstated. In 1898, the Marine Corps still had no officially recognized organizational structure for tactical units. The Corps was organized along the specific requirements of the various barracks and ships detachments. When the First Marine Battalion was formed, the standard template for infantry formations at the time was the current U.S. Army structure, which was a holdover from the Civil War. Just as during the Civil War, in 1898 the base tactical infantry formation was the regiment. On paper, a regiment consisted of ten 100-man companies. Each company was divided equally into two platoons. A *battalion* was not a permanent standing organization, but a term used to describe a subset or detachment of a regiment that consisted of two or more companies. In other words, a battalion was a label applied to an organization that was larger than a company but not large enough to be called a regiment.

<sup>20</sup> Paolo E. Coletta, *Bowman Hendry McCalla: A Fighting Sailor* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979), 91.

<sup>21</sup> Sampson 13 April 1898 letter to secretary of the Navy.

<sup>22</sup> An Act Making Appropriations for the Naval Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June Thirtieth, Eighteen Hundred and Eighty-Nine, and for Other Purposes (1898).

<sup>23</sup> Jack Shulimson et al., comp./ed., *Marines in the Spanish-American War, 1895–1899: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters Marine Corps, 1998), 108.

<sup>24</sup> John H. Clifford, *History of the First Marine Battalion of the U.S. Marines* (Foster, RI: Brass Hat, 1930), 8.

<sup>25</sup> Clifford, *History of the First Marine Battalion of the U.S. Marines*, 9.



In his September 1898 annual report to the secretary of the Navy, Heywood lauded the efforts of the Marine Corps quartermaster, Major F. L. Denney, and the battalion quartermaster, Captain C. L. McCawley, in preparing the Marines for operations in Cuba. In anticipation of the deployment of a Marine expeditionary force for war, Major Denney had been aggressively purchasing and consolidating supplies and equipment, as Heywood noted:

The battalion was thoroughly fitted out with all the equipments [*sic*] and necessities for field service under the conditions prevailing in Cuba which experience and careful consideration could suggest, including mosquito netting, woolen and linen clothing, heavy and light weight underwear, three months' supply of provisions, wheelbarrows, push carts, pickaxes, shovels, barbed-wire cutters, wall and shelter tents, and a full supply of medical stores. Campaign suits of brown linen and campaign hats were ordered, but . . . it was impossible to send them with the battalion. They were shipped later, however, and proved a great comfort to the men.<sup>26</sup>

For all the herculean efforts of the quartermasters, there were the inevitable mismatches of equipment with capabilities. When loading the battalion's equipment onto the ship, a member of Company D noted, "We had several sets of double harness, two double wagons, one single wagon and a plow, but no mules. Whether it was forgotten to have the mules or the intention was for the Marines to be the mules I do not know."<sup>27</sup>

Considering the rapidity with which the Marine battalion was thrown together, it was remarkably well equipped (as attested by Commandant Heywood) and was also very well armed. Huntington's Marines were equipped with the recently acquired Lee Navy M1895 rifle. The Lee rifle was a straight-pull, bolt-action weapon with an internal five-round magazine. It could be quickly reloaded with a charging clip, making it the first American military rifle of its kind. It fired a high-velocity, 6mm smokeless powder round, which was a great technological improvement from its black powder predecessor, the .45-70-caliber Springfield M1873. The major drawback to the newly issued Lee rifle was the level of training the individual Marines had with the weapon in April 1898. The weapons had been issued to the Marine Corps the previous year and ammunition stocks were initially in very short supply. In his September 1897 report of the Marine Corps, the

Commandant noted that "no target practice with the new rifle can be conducted at present, and the men are entirely unfamiliar with the use of this arm, except for drill purposes. Target practice is at present conducted with the old Springfield rifle which is obsolete."<sup>28</sup> Increasing his Marines' proficiency with the Lee rifle would be a top training priority for Lieutenant Colonel Huntington in the initial weeks of the battalion's existence.

Company F was designated as the battalion artillery company and as such was equipped with four Hotchkiss 3-inch mountain guns. The Hotchkiss mountain gun was a breech-loading direct fire weapon designed to provide close supporting fires to infantry units. It was an effective antipersonnel weapon, firing 12-pound projectiles of three types: shell, shrapnel, and canister. It had an effective range of 4,000 yards, but was limited by terrain, as the crew had to visually acquire the target, estimate the range, and aim the weapon similar to aiming a rifle. Unfortunately, the only ammunition issued for the Marine artillery was shrapnel. The shrapnel round was an air burst projectile that needed to detonate in front of enemy formations to be effective. As noted by Lieutenant Colonel Huntington, "It was very difficult to explode this projectile, with any certainty, at short ranges."<sup>29</sup> With a total weight of 570 pounds, the lack of mules or horses to provide mobility for the guns would limit their use to fixed defensive positions at Guantánamo. As the men in the artillery company were principally trained as infantrymen, proficiency with the weapon was, of course, lacking.

The First Marine Battalion was also the first American unit to employ a gas-operated machine gun in land combat. The battalion deployed with two Colt-Browning M1895 machine guns. The total number of guns in the battalion would grow to four when the Marine detachment from the USS *Texas* brought two guns ashore to reinforce the battalion after the initial landing at Guantánamo. The Colt machine gun fired the same 6mm ammunition as the Lee Navy rifle.

The task of transporting the Marines to war fell to the USS *Panther* (AD 6), commanded by Commander George C. Reiter. The *Panther* was a commercial steamship the Navy had recently purchased from Venezuela with the intention of using it as an auxiliary cruiser. The *Panther* was hastily converted to a transport to carry the anticipated 400-man battalion. Due to the short notice increase of the Marine battalion to six companies with more than 600 men, Colonel Heywood reported the deficiency in capacity of the *Panther* to the commander of the Brooklyn Naval

<sup>26</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish-American War, 1895–1899*, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Clifford, *History of the First Marine Battalion of the U.S. Marines*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Annual Report of the Colonel Commandant of the United States Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy (1897)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1897), 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Annual Report of the Colonel Commandant of the United States Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy (1898)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898), 25.

Station, who informed him that he had been directed to fit out a larger ship, the USS *Resolute* (1894, previously the SS *Yorktown*), as permanent transport for the Marine battalion. However, the commander wrote, "After the *Resolute* was fitted out and ready to sail and provisions placed on board for the battalion, the exigencies of the service required she be taken for other purposes."<sup>30</sup> The *Panther* now had to be reconfigured and reprovisioned to accommodate the additional personnel, all of which would be accomplished in fewer than 24 hours.

The *Panther* proved to be far less than ideal for the assigned mission. The Marines' living quarters were extremely overcrowded. The ship's mess deck could only accommodate feeding 200 men at one time, necessitating three separate mess calls for every meal. Lieutenant Colonel Huntington viewed these shortcomings as hurdles to be overcome and endured; eventually, however, he came to see them as great inconveniences that nevertheless were to be expected during time of war. Huntington wrote to his wife, "I think going in steerage is luxury compared to being a private on a transport. However unless the ship is as crowded as this I suppose no special evil would come from this."<sup>31</sup> In the end, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington proved to be adept at making the best of a bad situation for his embarked Marines.

On the afternoon of 22 April, the Marines marched in parade formation to the Brooklyn Navy Yard docks to the sound of cheering crowds with "intense enthusiasm in the navy-yard, docks, harbor front, and shipping of New York and Brooklyn."<sup>32</sup> By 1815, the battalion was on board, and at 1930, as "the naval band on dock played *The Girl I Left Behind Me*," the *Panther* pulled away from the pier bound for Fort Monroe, Virginia.<sup>33</sup>

At 2000 on 23 April 1898, 24 hours after departing the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the *Panther* dropped anchor off Fort Monroe. Commander Reiter and Lieutenant Colonel Huntington reported to Captain Schley, commander of the Flying Squadron, stationed in Hampton Rhodes, to receive follow-on orders. The *Panther* with its embarked Marines was directed to set sail for Naval Station Key West. The departure from Fort Monroe would not occur until the arrival of an escort ship, the USS *Montgomery* (C 9). Huntington utilized the short stop at Fort Monroe to move his Marines ashore for live fire training with both the Lee rifles and the Hotchkiss guns. The *Panther* and *Montgomery* finally weighed anchor and pulled away from Fort Monroe with the Marine battalion on board at 0800 on the morning of 26 April bound for Key West.

## Key West

With the Marines now in transit to Key West, there was still no defined mission for how, when, or where the battalion was to be employed. Regardless, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington was determined to make the most of the limited space on the *Panther* to ready his Marines for combat. Weapons training was of the utmost importance to increase the individual Marine's familiarity and proficiency with the Lee rifle. From 1400 to 1600 daily, all of the infantry companies (A, B, C, D, and E) "were exercised in volley and mass firing, each man using ten rounds."<sup>34</sup> The gun crews of the artillery (Company F) each fired one round from their 3-inch guns and then replicated the 10 rounds of small arms training of the infantry companies. Most of the remainder of the daily routine involved lectures and instruction on various subjects, such as first aid and tactical maneuvers. The Marines also detailed six signalmen to the *Panther* to maintain proficiency in receiving and sending messages using both lanterns and flags, as well as supplying half of the ship's designated life boat crews.<sup>35</sup>

The *Panther* arrived in Key West at midday on 29 April, and Huntington reported to Rear Admiral Sampson aboard the USS *New York* (ACR 2) the following day. Sampson had no defined mission, and as expected, no orders for the Marines. The Navy was completely focused on attempting to locate the Spanish flotilla under Admiral Cervera, which was last reported having left the Cape Verde islands headed for the West Indies. Sampson was about to depart with his squadron for Puerto Rico in what proved to be a futile attempt to intercept the Spanish force. Until the Spanish naval threat could be located and dealt with, there would be no movement of ground forces to Cuba. Huntington recorded, "If we expect to go to Cuba, I suppose we shall, but I have heard that the plans of the authorities in Washington have changed . . . and I suppose it is not desirable to land a small force in Cuba without having practical control of the sea."<sup>36</sup> Huntington's Marines would have to wait in Key West until the location of Cervera's ships was resolved.

The next month was a trying time for the Marines as they attempted to use the overcrowded *Panther* as a floating base of operations. On 5 May, Huntington began landing his companies to conduct training ashore. For the better part of three weeks, 5–23 May, Huntington cycled his companies ashore, up to four at a time, for what was described in the First Marine Battalion record as "Company Drill."<sup>37</sup> As Private Wilford Langley recorded

<sup>30</sup> *Annual Report of the Colonel Commandant of the United States Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy* (1898), 8.

<sup>31</sup> LtCol Robert Huntington personal papers, box 1, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

<sup>32</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 112.

<sup>33</sup> Clifford, *History of the First Marine Battalion of the U.S. Marines*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, Cuba, 1898, Spanish-American War papers, folder 1 of 5, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

<sup>35</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 1.

<sup>36</sup> LtCol Robert Huntington personal papers.

<sup>37</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 3–6.



in his diary, “We lay at anchor for a month, going ashore once a week for drill. We went through many hardships suffering from intense heat and bad food.”<sup>38</sup>

As Lieutenant Colonel Huntington cycled his companies on and off the *Panther* for training in preparation for a still undefined mission, the first engagement with the enemy in Cuba involving U.S. Marines was already taking place. Boat crews made up of a mix of Marines and sailors were sent close in to shore outside the port of Cienfuegos to cut undersea telegraph cables. The Marines taking part in the action were assigned to the ships’ detachments aboard the USS *Marblehead* and USS *Nashville* (PG 7).

As the North Atlantic Fleet continued to improve its blockade of the coast of Cuba, it was important to not only prevent physical access to Cuban ports but also to sever external communication with Spain. Despite the blockade, Spanish forces in Cuba were in constant communication with Madrid via undersea telegraph cables that ran from Guantánamo Bay to Haiti and from Santiago de Cuba to Jamaica. The telegraph cable extended from Santiago de Cuba west to the port of Cienfuegos, then west to the port of Batabano, then overland to Havana. It was deemed of utmost importance to cut off Havana from direct communication with Madrid. The decision was made to cut the cables at Cienfuegos to isolate Havana from direct overseas communication.

The cable cutting mission fell to Commander McCalla of the *Marblehead* with the *Nashville* in support. McCalla organized the expedition consisting of one steam cutter and two launches from each ship. The steam cutters would tow the launches close to shore and provide fire support against any Spanish ground forces that might try to interfere with the operation. The cutter from the *Nashville* was armed with two Colt machine guns while the cutter from the *Marblehead* had a Hotchkiss 1-pounder quick fire gun.<sup>39</sup> The launches each had 12 men, comprising a mix of oarsmen, blacksmiths, and carpenters to handle the grappling and cutting tools for the cables, as well as Marines armed with Lee rifles as marksmen (five from the *Marblehead* and seven from the *Nashville*). The operation was set for 11 May.

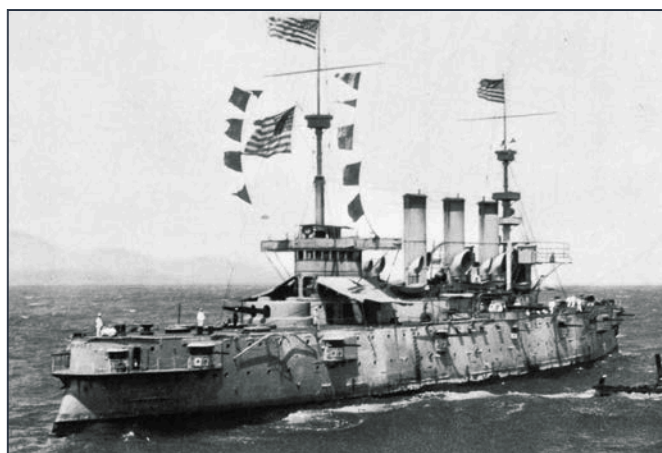
The undersea cables were located close to the shore off of Colorados Point on the east side of the harbor entrance. The point had a lighthouse and cable house, and the surrounding area was defended by Spanish infantry in rifle pits. The *Marblehead* and *Nashville* provided initial naval gunfire support, which scattered the defenders and allowed the steam cutters to get the launches close to shore without further hindrance. The men in the launches

<sup>38</sup> Margret Farrow Sacks, trans., “Diary of Private Wilford Langley of the U.S.M.C.’s First Marine Battalion (Reinforced),” 29 April 1898 entry, Spanish American War Centennial Website, accessed 1 August 2016.

<sup>39</sup> *Quick fire* was a term used to describe small caliber revolving multibarrel cannons.



Adm Cervera’s flotilla anchored in the Cape Verde Islands shortly before their departure for the West Indies in late April 1898.  
New York Public Library, Maps of North America Collection



The USS *New York* (ACR 2), an armored cruiser that served as RAdm Sampson’s flagship throughout the war.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

worked for more than two and a half hours within 50 yards of shore under sporadic small arms fire and successfully located and cut two large undersea cables.

As the crews in the launches began working on a third smaller cable, Spanish reinforcements reoccupied some of their former positions and brought accurate and intense small arms fire against the boat crews. Private Herman W. Kuchneister, a member of the Marine detachment from the *Marblehead*, described the scene:

The lifting of the cable was a very perilous and laborious task but the cutting crew went about their job coolly. Bullets were piercing the boat and the water was coming in. But coolly as ever we put a bullet in the hole and it helped keep the water out. Large shells dropped around us nearly

## Major General Charles Heywood



MajGen Charles Heywood, ninth Commandant of the Marine Corps.  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

orably mentioned by General Winfield Hancock of the U.S. Army, who was in general command, and received thanks from the Navy Department for his service. His next years of duty carried him to widely separated posts: Mare Island, California, and Brooklyn, New York.

In April 1885, he commanded a battalion of Marines for duty on the Isthmus of Panama to protect American citizens and property during a revolt against Colombia. His command eventually grew to 800 Marines and sailors. Heywood was promoted to lieutenant colonel on 9 March 1888 and on 30 January 1891 was appointed colonel Commandant of the Marine Corps. By special acts of Congress, he was promoted to brigadier general in March 1899 and to major general in July 1902. He was the first Marine to hold the rank of major general.

He was an advocate of professional education and standardized training. He was the first to establish a regular system of examinations for officer promotions and set up the system of officers' schools. Major General Heywood had completed more than 45 years as a commissioned officer in the Marine Corps when on 3 October 1903, he was placed on the retired list.

Source: MajGen Charles Heywood biographical file, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

Major General Charles Heywood, ninth Commandant of the Marine Corps, was born in Waterville, Maine, on 3 October 1839. He was appointed a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps from New York on 5 April 1858. During that year, he was stationed at the Marine Barracks Washington, DC, and at Marine Barracks New York in Brooklyn, New York.

During the American Civil War, he landed with the Marines at Hatteras Inlet in North Carolina, where he was present at the capture of Forts Clark and Hatteras, participated in a number of boat expeditions on the James River, was on the USS *Cumberland* (1842) in the battle with the CSS *Virginia*, and was aboard the USS *Hartford* (1858) in the Battle of Mobile Bay. His service during the Civil War thus secured for him two brevet ranks for distinguished gallantry in the presence of the enemy.

During the serious labor riots during the summer of 1877, Heywood commanded a battalion of Marines at Baltimore; Philadelphia; and Reading, Pennsylvania. He was hon-

lifting us out of the water. Shells from our own ship and the Spanish batteries passed over head.<sup>40</sup>

During this operation, Private Kuchmeister received a severe wound in the jaw that plagued him the remainder of his life.

The *Nashville* and *Marblehead* reengaged the Spanish with their 5- and 6-inch guns. The ships were able to completely suppress the enemy fire by destroying the cable house and lighthouse that some Spanish were using for cover, as well as scattering other troops that had attempted to reoccupy rifle pits near the shore.

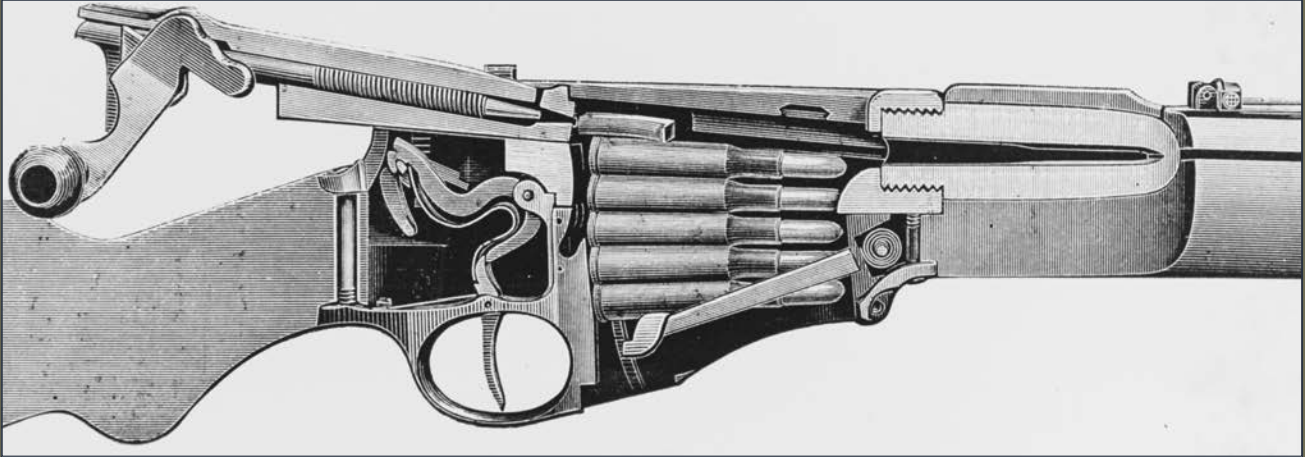
Under cover of this heavy fire, the launches and steam cutters were able to safely withdraw, but were unable to complete the cutting of the third cable. In all, the launch crews suffered two killed and seven wounded (one Marine killed, Private Patrick Regan, and one wounded, Private Kuchmeister).<sup>41</sup> All members of the launches (including all 12 Marines) were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions. From the beginning of the embarkation of the First Marine Battalion on board the *Panther*, the relationship between the Navy and Marine commanders was, at best, a strained one. At this time, there was no clearly defined naval doctrinal command relationship between the two commanders. Huntington considered the *Panther's* sole mission as that of providing transport for his Marines, while Commander

<sup>40</sup> William D. Furey, trans., "Private Hermann D. Kuchmeister's [sic] Account of the Cienfuegos Cable Cutting Expedition," Spanish American War Centennial Website, accessed 8 September 2016. While this secondary source spells the private's name with an "m," original documents give his last name spelled with an "n" (Kuchmeister).

<sup>41</sup> *Naval Operations of the War with Spain*, 191.



## Lee Navy Model 1895 Rifle



Depiction of the Lee Navy M1895 rifle internal five-round magazine system.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

### Lee Navy Rifle Model 1895 specifications

Weight – 8.32 pounds

Length – 47.75 inches

Caliber – 6mm

Action – Straight-pull bolt

Muzzle velocity – 2,560 feet/per second

Effective range

Point targets – 549 m/600 yards

Massed targets – 900 m/1,000 yards

Maximum range – 1,829 m/2,000 yards

When the First Marine Battalion went ashore in Guantánamo Bay, they were armed with the Lee Navy Model 1895 rifle. This weapon was a newly adopted straight-pull magazine rifle, manufactured by the Winchester Repeating Arms Company. It was the first American military rifle to be loaded by a charging clip of five rounds into an internal magazine. It fired a 6mm smokeless powder cartridge with a 135-grain bullet. The 6mm Lee cartridge also was interchangeable for use in the Navy version of the Colt-Browning Model 1895 machine gun.

The Lee had a reputation for adequate reliability in the field in the hands of well-trained troops. Marine reports after the Guantánamo Bay expedition criticized the design of the extractor as being somewhat fragile and prone to break or malfunction. This was particularly true in the hands of an individual who was not thoroughly familiar with the weapon. Several were issued to Cuban insurgents supporting the Marines at Guantánamo. The untrained Cubans experienced a much higher failure rate than with the Army (Krag) Model 1892/98 rifle.

Source: “Model 1895 Lee Navy,” Winchester Arms Collectors Association website; and Jim Hanson, “The 6mm U.S.N.—Ahead of Its Time,” *Rifle Magazine*, January/February 1977, 38–41.

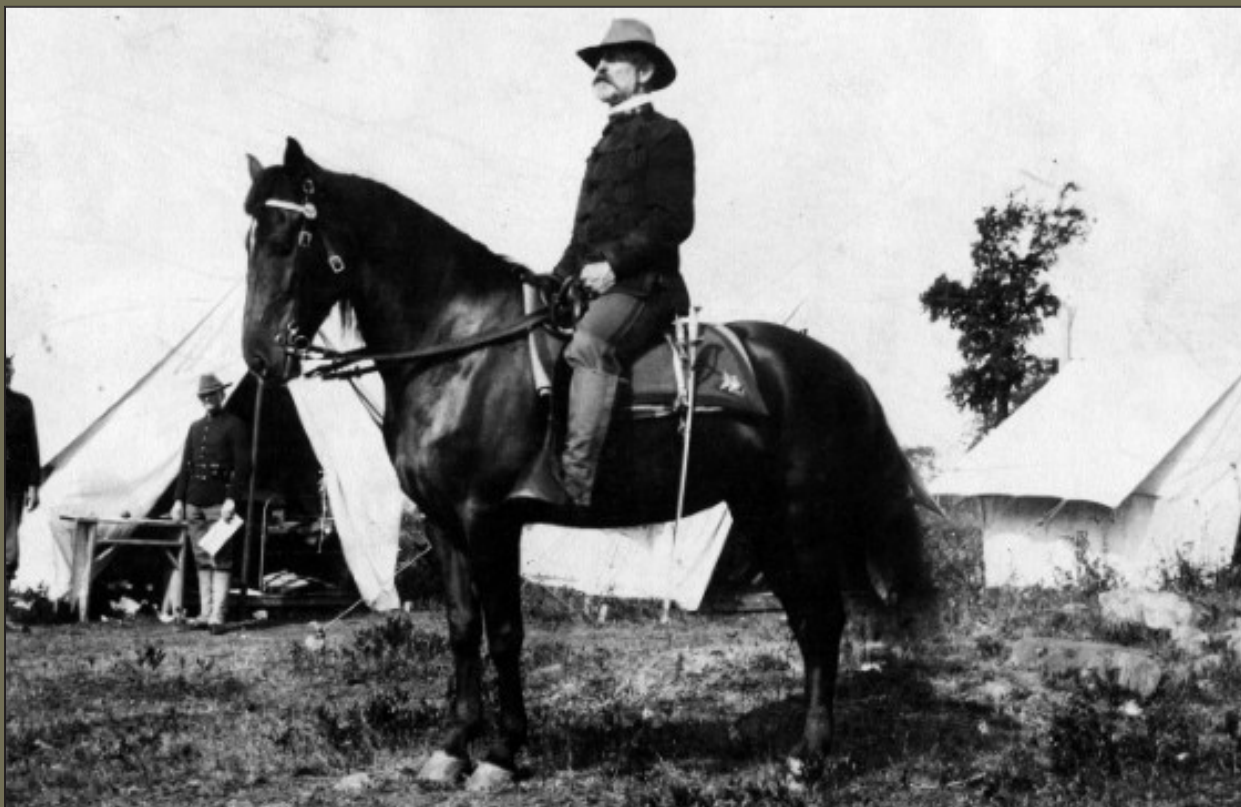
Reiter looked on the Marines as cargo, and like any other cargo, once on board his ship, it was his prerogative to make decisions on their disposition and utilization as he saw fit. With the arrival of the *Panther* at Key West, Commander Reiter sought to unload his cargo at the first opportunity. On 10 May, Reiter ordered the battalion ashore. Huntington was able to get this order revoked by appealing directly to Commodore George C. Remey, commandant of Naval Station Key West.<sup>42</sup>

This issue came to the forefront again when the *Panther* was

selected to tow the monitor USS *Amphitrite* (1883, screw monitor) from Key West to the blockading squadron in Cuba. On the afternoon of 23 May, the Marines were ordered ashore and the order was executed at 0400 the following morning. The departure of the Marines did not go smoothly. Commander Reiter ordered Huntington to leave half of the Marines’ 6mm and 3-inch artillery ammunition on board the *Panther* as ballast. Huntington again had to appeal to Commodore Remey, who modified the order to allow the Marines to offload all of their 6mm ammunition, but half of the artillery ammunition remained on the *Panther*. Huntington clearly noted his frustrations with the Navy in

<sup>42</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 113.

## Robert W. Huntington



LtCol Huntington, newly designated commander of the First Marine Battalion (Reinforced), in camp at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, 1898.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

Robert W. Huntington was born on 2 December 1840 in Hartford, Connecticut. He entered Trinity College in the autumn of 1860, but left the college at the outset of the Civil War to enlist in the 1st Regiment Connecticut Volunteers. While a member of the 1st Connecticut, he applied for a commission in the U.S. Marine Corps and was commissioned as a second lieutenant of Marines on 5 June 1861.

He fought in the Battle of First Manassas as a member of the Marine battalion under the command of Major John G. Reynolds. He subsequently served in the North Atlantic Blockading Fleet and participated in operations that resulted in the capture of Port Royal, South Carolina, as well as the capture of Fort Clinch, Fernandina, Florida.

As a captain of Marines, Huntington commanded the guard at the U.S. legation in Edo (then called Yeddo), Japan. From 1866 to 1898, he served on numerous sea tours and at various naval stations and posts in the United States and was a company commander in the Marine battalion during the expedition to the Isthmus of Panama in 1885.

On 20 February 1897, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and assigned to command the Marine Barracks New York Navy Yard, Brooklyn. On 22 April 1898, he was assigned to command the First Marine Battalion (Reinforced) and led that command during operations at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

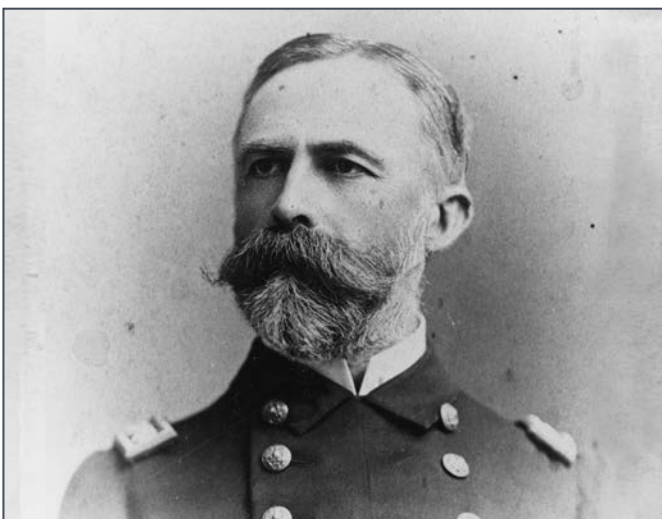
Huntington was promoted to colonel on 10 August 1898 for conspicuous conduct in battle at Guantánamo Bay. After disbanding the First Marine Battalion, Colonel Huntington returned to command the Marine Barracks New York Navy Yard. On 10 January 1900, Colonel Huntington was placed on the retired list, having completed 38 years of active and distinguished service as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Source: Robert Pendleton, contr., "The Biography of Colonel Robert Watkinson Huntington, United States Marine Corps, Commanding 1st Marine Battalion (Reinforced)," Spanish American War Centennial Website.

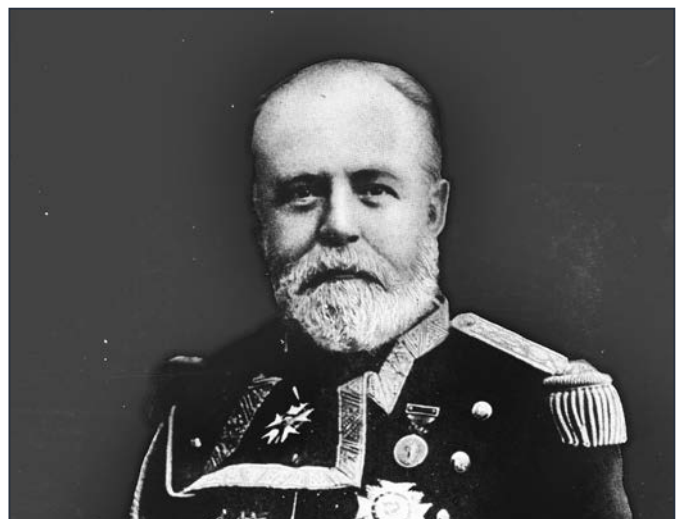




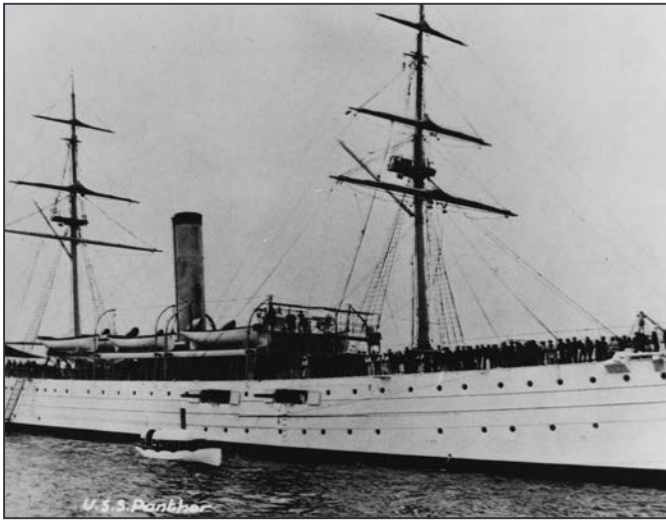
LtCol Robert W. Huntington, commanding officer of the First Marine Battalion.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



RAdm William T. Sampson, commander of all U.S. naval forces in the West Indies. He was an advocate of utilizing Marine landing forces to hold key points ashore in support of his naval operations.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



Adm Pascual Cervera y Topete, commander of the ill-fated Spanish flotilla sent by Spain to relieve the United States blockade of Cuba.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



USS *Panther* (AD 6), a commercial freighter converted to an auxiliary cruiser, then converted to a transport for the Marine battalion. The ship was too small to adequately accommodate the 650-man battalion that it would carry to Cuba. Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

a report to Commandant Heywood on 25 May, stating, “Owing to the short time allowed for the removal of the stores, and notwithstanding the fact that the men worked hard and worked fast, considerable quantities of our property and part of the ten days’ rations I requested were left on board.”<sup>43</sup>

Huntington believed that the order to summarily push the Marines ashore was due to the “earnest solicitation and representations of Commander Reiter.”<sup>44</sup> Although the overcrowded conditions on the *Panther* were far from ideal, the Marines viewed the *Panther* as their link to the war. An issue of great concern to many of the officers was that once put ashore they might be abandoned and in effect marooned in Key West for the duration of the conflict.

A camp was established along the beach approximately two miles from the dock. On 25 May, colors were raised for the first time over newly christened Camp Sampson. Impressions of the Marines concerning their new camp were universally bleak. A festering swamp, swarms of mosquitoes, and intolerably hot were common descriptors. In such an environment, sickness was a major concern. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington was determined to keep his Marines healthy. He ensured that wood flooring was procured for tents, issued the new brown lightweight linen campaign uniforms to replace the standard heavy blue woolen uniforms, and most importantly, ensured a good supply of clean drinking water. Daily, Huntington had

casks of distilled water brought ashore from ships in the harbor for drinking and gave strict orders that no water was to be used for drinking or cooking that had not been thoroughly boiled. Huntington would ensure strict adherence to this policy throughout the campaign. As a result, the daily sick list for the Marines averaged about 2 percent with no disease-related deaths. This was a remarkably low number for military units of that period operating in a subtropical climate.

Although training, with a heavy emphasis on marksmanship, was the first order of the day for the battalion, other assigned duties lent an air of routine to the encampment. With the influx of large numbers of people into Key West due to the war, the town had taken on a wild and lawless aspect. As Private Langley of Company F noted, “at daylight a murdered man was found outside of Leon’s Salon, better known as the Last Chance.”<sup>45</sup> On 25 May, the commandant of Key West Naval Base directed the First Marine Battalion to provide a guard to protect public property and maintain order. One officer and 33 enlisted were detailed daily to guard duty in Key West. In addition, the battalion detailed six enlisted men as orderlies in support of the station commandant, and it was frequently called upon to provide escorts for military funerals for naval personnel killed in action in Cuba.

Contrary to the fears of many in the battalion that the Marines might be left to languish in the swamps of Florida, the First Marine Battalion’s life at Camp Sampson would last less than two weeks. On 4 June, with Admiral Cervera’s fleet finally bottled up in the harbor of Santiago de Cuba, Rear Admiral Sampson called for the deployment of the Marines to Cuba. Camp Sampson was quickly broken down, and on 6 June, the Marines were reembarked aboard the *Panther*. Four companies disembarked on 7 June to provide one final funeral escort before the battalion departed. The *Panther* finally sailed from Key West at 1930 on 7 June with orders to report to the commander of the North Atlantic Fleet off the south coast of Cuba.

## Guantánamo Bay

On the evening of 6 June, Commander McCalla put Admiral Sampson’s orders to secure Guantánamo Bay as an anchorage for repair and recoaling into execution. For the initial phase of the operation, McCalla was assigned tactical command of the USS *Yankee* (1892, screw steamer) and SS *St. Louis* (1894, steamer) along with his own ship, the *Marblehead*. The first step in accomplishing the mission was to cut external communications to the Guantánamo area. The departure of the *Marblehead* and *Yankee* from the blockading force at Santiago de Cuba was timed

<sup>43</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> Sacks, “Diary of Private Wilford Langley of the U.S.M.C.’s First Marine Battalion (Reinforced),” 26 May 1898 entry.

## Hotchkiss 3-inch Mountain Gun

The Hotchkiss 3-inch mountain gun was a breech-loading weapon officially classified as a light field gun. It was designed to be transported by breaking the gun down and packing it on mules or towed behind a standard horse-drawn artillery limber.

As with all late-nineteenth-century light artillery, this was a line-of-sight, direct-fire weapon. It was utilized in close support of infantry formations in both the offense and defense. The lack of mules or horses with the Marine battalion at Guantánamo Bay would limit the gun's use to defensive operations.

The Hotchkiss mountain gun fired three types of projectiles: shell, shrapnel, and canister. Shell was a metal casing filled with a bursting charge designed to detonate on impact, breaking the shell into fragments. It was used against personnel or light fortifications. Shrapnel was a time-fused air-burst antipersonnel round that was effective against troops in open ground at mid to long range. Canister was a close-range antipersonnel round that was in essence a 3-inch-diameter shotgun shell.

The Marines at Guantánamo Bay were only issued shrapnel rounds for the Hotchkiss guns. The shrapnel round required an accurate estimation of range by the gunner, and an appropriately set time fuse so that the round would detonate on the downward arc slightly above and in front of the target. As noted by Lieutenant Colonel Huntington in a 26 August report to the Commandant, the short ranges of engagement made it difficult to effectively employ the guns with this single type of ammunition.

Source: *Annual Report of the Colonel Commandant of the United States Marine Corps to the Secretary of the Navy* (1898), 25; and A. B. Dyer, *Handbook for Light Artillery* (New York: J. Wiley and Sons, 1896), 23–27.



Capt Francis Harrington, commander of Company F (artillery company), with one of his four Hotchkiss 3-inch guns in a defensive position at Camp McCalla, Guantánamo Bay, 1898. Due to the lack of mules or horses for transport, these guns had to be placed in fixed positions.

Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

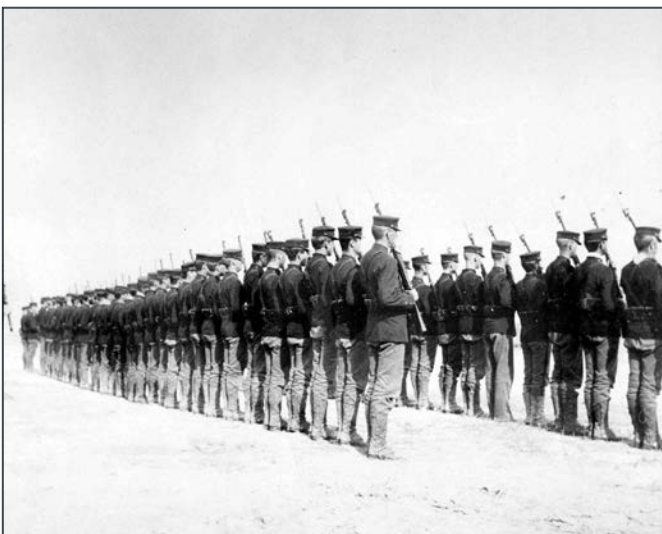
### Hotchkiss 3-inch mountain gun specifications

Range – 4,000 yards

Projectile weight – 12 pounds

Muzzle velocity – 870 feet/second

Total weight – 570 pounds

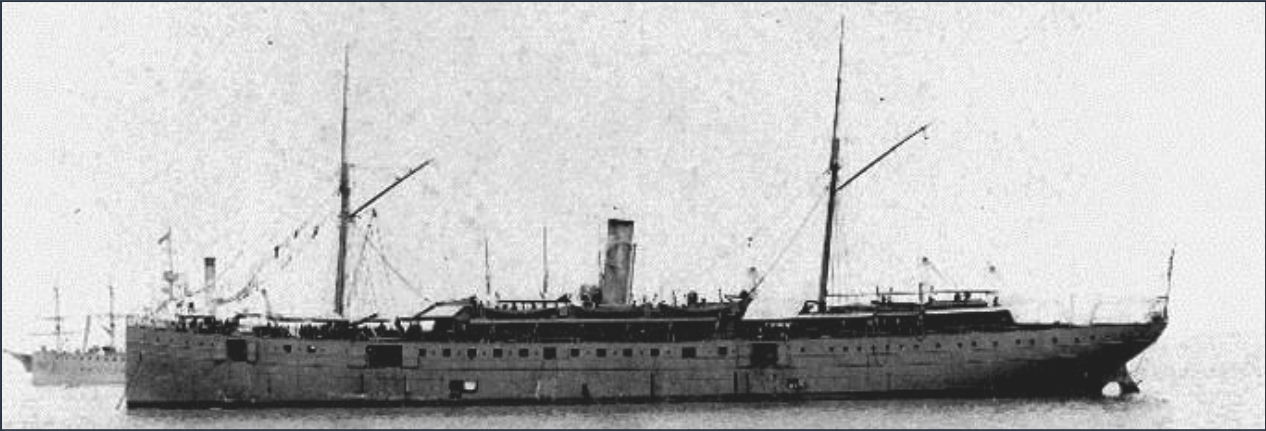


While awaiting orders to deploy to Cuba, the companies of the First Marine Battalion rotated ashore from the *Panther* to train (referred to in the battalion records as “company drill”) at Key West, FL.

Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division



## USS *Panther*



The USS *Panther*, an auxiliary cruiser hastily converted to a transport to convey the First Marine Battalion to Cuba. Originally configured to hold 400 embarked Marines, it had to be hastily reconfigured to hold 650 and proved to be inadequate for the assigned mission.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

The USS *Panther* was built by William Cramp and Sons of Philadelphia in 1889. First commissioned as the merchant steamship *Venezuela*, it saw service for several years as a cargo freighter transporting goods between the United States and Central and South America. The *Venezuela* was purchased by the Navy from the Red D Line Steamship Company on 12 April 1898, and recommissioned as the auxiliary cruiser USS *Panther*, Commander George Cook Reiter in command.

At the outbreak of war with Spain, the *Panther* was hastily converted into a troop transport. On 22 April 1898, the First Marine Battalion was embarked on board for transportation to Key West, Florida, and ultimately to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The *Panther* proved to be less than optimal for the task of transporting 650 embarked Marines, as it was originally configured to transport approximately 400.

Source: "Panther I (Iron-hulled Steamer)," Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, Naval History and Heritage Command, accessed 24 April 2019.



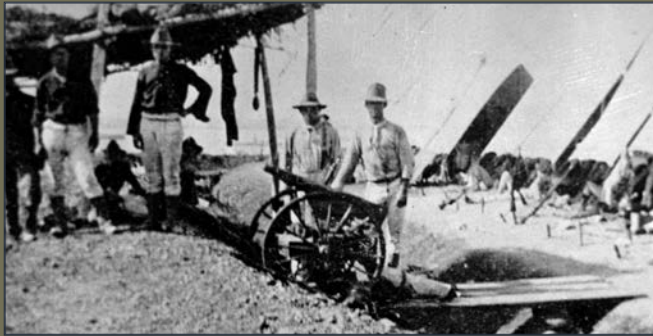
One of Company F's Hotchkiss 3-inch mountain guns in a fixed emplacement at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

so as to arrive at Guantánamo at first light on 7 June. Upon his arrival, McCalla found the *St. Louis* already on site outside the bay, dragging for the telegraph cable that ran from Guantánamo Bay to Haiti. As the *St. Louis* continued its efforts to cut the telegraph cable, the *Marblehead* and the *Yankee* proceeded into the bay to begin operations to secure the anchorage that was so badly need to sustain the fleet off Santiago.

Guantánamo is a deep-water bay leading to the small port of Caimanera, located five miles north of the bay entrance. Just south of Caimanera, there are several small islands that divide the upper area of Guantánamo Bay into three narrow channels leading to a large upper bay. The Spanish had constructed their main defenses to guard the channels on the upper end of Guantánamo Bay. The narrow channels were protected by mines with forts to cover the minefields. The main defense was a large sand fort on Cayo del Toro on the east side of the upper bay opposite Caimanera. This fort had mounted three antiquated 6.4-inch muzzle-loading guns and was intended to cover the

## Colt-Browning M1895 Machine Gun specifications



Length – 41 inches  
 Weight – 22.49 pounds (40 pounds with carriage)  
 Cartridge – 6mm  
 Feed system – belt  
 Rate of fire – 500 rpm  
 Maximum effective range – 2,000 yards

A Colt-Browning M1895 machine gun on a wheeled carriage at Guantánamo Bay, 1898. Three M1895s were taken with the Marines to Cuzco Well, where they were employed with great effect. Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

The Colt-Browning M1895, nicknamed “potato digger” because of its unusual operating mechanism, was an air-cooled, belt-fed, gas-operated machine gun with a rate of fire of 500 rounds per minute (rpm). Designed by John Browning in 1889, it was the first successful gas-operated machine gun employed by the U.S. military in land combat. The weapon fired the same 6mm ammunition as the 1895 Lee Navy rifle, and it could be configured to be fired from a tripod or a wheeled carriage.

The M1895 machine gun proved to be accurate and reliable for many years. It saw service with the Marine Corps in multiple conflicts, such as the Philippine-American War, the Boxer Rebellion, and operations in Veracruz, Mexico.

Source: “M1895 Colt-Browning Machine Gun,” Infogalactic.com, accessed 18 February 2019; “M1895 Colt-Browning Machine Gun,” World Heritage Encyclopedia, accessed 18 February 2019; “Colt Browning M1895 (Potato Digger),” MilitaryFactory.com, accessed 18 February 2019; Al Sumrall, “The Colt Model 1895 Automatic Machine Gun,” Spanish American War Centennial Website, accessed 18 February 2019; and “Colts Patents Arms Manufacturing Company Colt-Browning Model 1895 Machine Gun 0.30 – 06 Dewat,” GunAuction.com, accessed 18 February 2019.

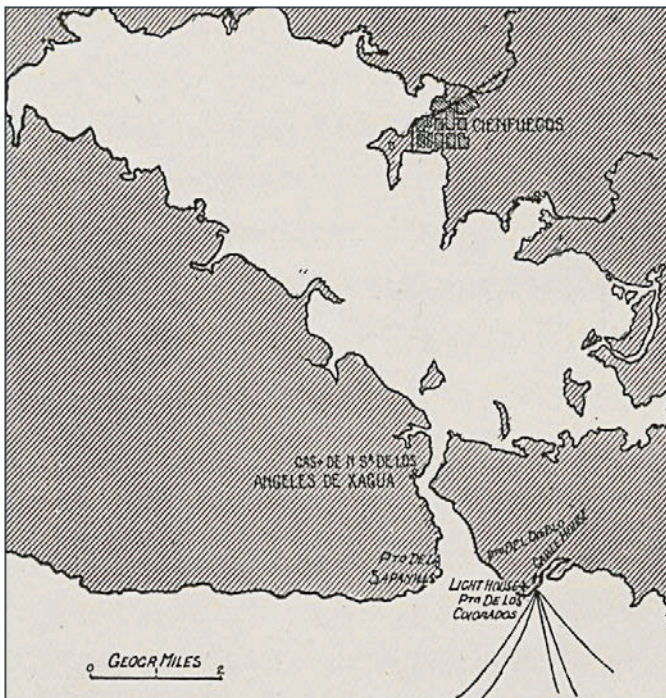
entrance to the channels. Smaller sand fortifications on the west side of the bay around Caimanera boasted a modern 3.5-inch Krupp rifle and several old muzzle-loading guns and field pieces intended to cover the upper minefields in the channels, supported by a lone Spanish gunboat, the *Sandoval*, armed with two guns (6- and 1-pounder).<sup>46</sup> The armament of these forts and the *Sandoval* would quickly prove to be no match for the modern U.S. warships and their large-caliber weapons.

The dominant terrain feature around Guantánamo Bay proper is on the southeastern shore, where a peninsula comprising the Cuzco Hills juts out into the bay entrance. The northern tip of this neck of land was known as Fisherman’s Point (also referred to as Playa de Este), so named because of a small fishing village along the shoreline. On a prominent hill directly overlooking the point was a telegraph station protected by a small force of Spanish troops manning a blockhouse with supporting trenches and two light muzzle-loading field pieces.

The entire combined Spanish and Cuban loyalist force in the area was estimated to be about 7,000 under the command of General Félix Pareja. Prior to the arrival of the U.S. Navy on 7 June, the main threat to Spanish forces was a large force of Cuban insurgents who controlled much of the area between Caimanera and Santiago to the west. Consequently, the bulk of Spanish ground forces were deployed west of Caimanera in an attempt to protect the railroad and telegraph lines to Santiago. Approximately 800 Spanish and Cuban loyalists were deployed east of Guantánamo Bay. The majority of the western shore of the bay entrance was under the control of Cuban insurgent forces, some of whom would play a key supporting role to the Marines in the upcoming operation.

As the *St. Louis* worked on cutting the undersea cables, the *Marblehead* and *Yankee* entered the bay and immediately took the Spanish positions on Fisherman’s Point under fire. With little protection from the ships’ guns and no ability to respond, the Spanish garrison quickly withdrew into the surrounding hills. The *Yankee* destroyed the telegraph station and the blockhouse as the *Marblehead* moved farther up the bay and took the Spanish fort on Cayo del Toro under fire. Return fire from the fort was ineffective due to the very limited range of its obsolete muzzle-loading guns. The Spanish gunboat *Sandoval* steamed down the channel,

<sup>46</sup> Capt Bowman H. McCalla, USN, “Lessons of the Late War,” extracts of lectures at Naval War College, Newport, RI, session of 1899, Naval History and Heritage Command, accessed 10 September 2016. Some sources refer to the Krupp weapon as a 3-inch mountain gun, however, McCalla described them as 3.5-inch rifles. The author has been unable to account for the discrepancy in McCalla’s description of the enemy forces’ weaponry.



Map depicting the location of undersea cables at Cienfuegos.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

and after firing several rounds in a somewhat symbolic gesture of resistance, withdrew back to Caimanera. Commander McCalla's two ships now controlled the bay and demonstrated it could be used as a safe anchorage without the necessity of reducing the Spanish forts on the northern end of the bay.

As the *Yankee* was completing the destruction of the Spanish positions on Fisherman's Point, Commander McCalla was conferring with Cuban insurgents aboard the *Marblehead*. The insurgents had been dispatched by Major General Calixto Ramón García Iñiguez to update the Americans on the status of Cuban forces in the area and to cooperate in any planned operations. McCalla departed at 1400 with the *Yankee* and his Cuban guests to report to Admiral Sampson at Santiago. After briefing Sampson on the situation at Guantánamo, McCalla was directed to return to Guantánamo and await the arrival of Huntington's Marine battalion, now en route from Key West. On the morning of 9 June, McCalla's force was reinforced by the USS *Vixen*, *Dolphin* (PG 24), and the battleship *Oregon*.

With the Marine battalion on its way, McCalla's most pressing order of business was to select a suitable landing site from where the Marines could protect ships in the harbor against harassment by Spanish ground forces. Captain Mancil C. Goodrell, the Fleet Marine officer aboard the *New York*, was tasked with finding a suitable landing site that was "a strong defensive one, covering the cable station and the lower harbor from attack from the hills to

the south and west."<sup>47</sup> On 9 June, after a combination of studying charts and maps and a physical reconnaissance of the eastern shore of the bay, Captain Goodrell recommended Fisherman's Point as the landing site and the hill overlooking the beach (the location of the Spanish blockhouse and telegraph station) as the best defensive position along the lower bay. The proposal was discussed with Commander McCalla and the Cuban insurgents. All agreed with Goodrell's recommendation, and Commander McCalla officially approved Fisherman's Point as the landing site for the First Marine Battalion.

The *Panther* arrived off Santiago at 0700 on 10 June. After a brief meeting with Admiral Sampson, Lieutenant Colonel Huntington and the Marine battalion finally had their assigned mission. No details were immediately available; Huntington only knew that his battalion would be going ashore somewhere at Guantánamo Bay. By 0900, the *Panther* was sailing for Guantánamo with orders to report to Commander McCalla.

As the *Panther* steamed toward Guantánamo Bay, the landing site was already being secured. At 0800, Captain Goodrell led a 60-man landing force (40 from the *Oregon* and 20 from the *Marblehead*) ashore at Fisherman's Point. The *Marblehead* stood close off shore ready to provide fire support if needed, but the landing party met no opposition. Goodrell described the scene in his report:

There were evidences [sic] on every hand of the hasty flight of the Spanish troops. They left behind them two brass twelve-pounder field pieces, the caissons filled with ammunition: a regimental flag, the third Principe [Prince's Infantry Regiment No. 3], between three and four hundred cartridge boxes filled with Mauser ammunition, also a number of Mauser [rifle] cartridges boxes that had never been opened, a considerable quantity of provisions, a complete signal outfit, several hundred knapsacks and haversacks, clothing of officers and men hanging in every house and shed, a dozen car-boys of rum . . . a watch, shot-gun, musical instruments and many toilet articles.<sup>48</sup>

Captain Goodrell's initial landing force swept inland several hundred yards and established a skirmish line to secure the area. The captain then went on board the newly arrived *Panther* to report the results of the landing to Lieutenant Colonel Huntington.

<sup>47</sup> Capt M. C. Goodrell, Report of 6 October 1898, Spanish-American War papers, folder 1 of 5, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

<sup>48</sup> Goodrell, Report of 6 October 1898, 3.



## The Medal of Honor in the Nineteenth Century

The Medal of Honor was established during the American Civil War to recognize enlisted men for gallantry. The U.S. Navy established the Medal of Valor in 1861 and the U.S. Army created the Medal of Honor in 1862. In 1863, the Army authorized issuing the medal to officers. The Navy continued to restrict the issue of the medal to enlisted personnel until 1915. The Medal of Honor was the only authorized medal to recognize the valor of soldiers and sailors in battle during the nineteenth century. That would change in 1918 with the establishment of lesser medals, such as the Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Service Medal, and the Silver Star. The early criteria for the Medal of Honor was not as well defined as it is today, and as a result it was not stringently and consistently applied. In 1863, for example, 300 members of the 27th Infantry Regiment, Maine Volunteers, received the Medal of Honor for reenlisting to protect the Capitol for the duration of the war (all were later rescinded by an Army review board in 1917). It was not until 1918 that Congress established clearer guidelines for awarding future medals that brought the criteria much more in line with what we know today.

As one looks at the recipients of the Medal of Honor during the Spanish-American War, it is important to view the justification of these awards within the context of their time. For example, all 52 men (including 12 Marines) who participated in the cable cutting operations at Cienfuegos were awarded the Medal of Honor. The actions of most of these men would not meet the modern threshold for the Medal of Honor, but they were consistent with existing precedent for issuing the medal in the 1890s.



Front and back of a Medal of Honor awarded to BM Thomas Gehegan for personal valor while serving as captain of USS *Pinola's* (1861) 11-inch gun during the Battle of New Orleans, 24–25 April 1862. The medal was forfeited because of misconduct and remained in Navy Department custody.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

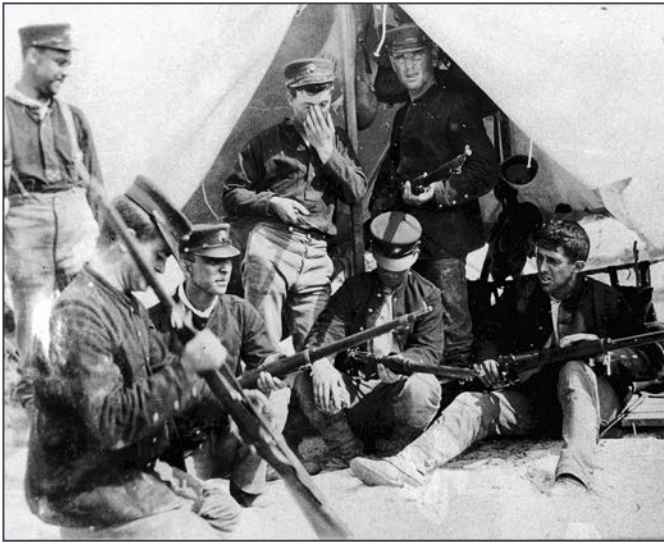
Source: "History," Congressional Medal of Honor Society website, accessed September 2016.



Artist's rendition of one of the cable-cutting launches at Cienfuegos.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



Marines and sailors of the USS *Nashville* (PG 7) who were all awarded the Medal of Honor for gallantry in action during the cable-cutting operation at Cienfuegos.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



Typical tent quarters for Marines at Camp Sampson, Key West. A piece of the wooden flooring that LtCol Huntington demanded for all tents can be seen in the lower right of the picture.  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

Goodrell described the position as “an exceptionally strong one, and, if properly fortified, could be held by the Marine battalion against any force that could be brought against it.”<sup>49</sup> Goodrell’s discussion with Huntington was very brief as he found him leaving the ship to report to McCalla on the *Marblehead* a short time before the battalion was to move ashore.

At 1300, the battalion was ordered to land. The Marines were loaded in boats and rapidly towed to the beach by steam launches. Within an hour, four companies had landed, with two companies remaining on board the *Panther* to offload supplies and equipment (Companies A and F would move ashore on 11 June). Company C, under Captain George F. Elliott, was the first to land and quickly moved inland beyond the hill to relieve Captain Goodrell’s skirmish line, allowing the initial landing party to return to the *Oregon* and the *Marblehead*. Right behind Elliott’s lead elements came several war correspondents. The most famous of them was well-known journalist and author Stephen Crane. Crane stayed with the Marines during the heaviest fighting and was a key figure in documenting and reporting their exploits at Guantánamo Bay.

Commander McCalla was adamant that one of the first orders of business for the Marines ashore was to burn anything that had been utilized or left behind by the Spanish. This included all huts and houses on Fisherman’s Point. In the nineteenth century, disease was still the predominant killer on the battlefield. This action was taken as a precaution against the chances of con-

tracting yellow fever. As medical science in 1898 had yet to establish the connection between the deadly disease and the mosquito, it was believed that this scourge of the tropics was predominantly passed by human contact. Fire was considered an effective way to eradicate potential sources of contagion.

The focus of the battalion for the remainder of the day was the ship-to-shore movement of all the logistical material required to sustain them for the foreseeable future. The work was laborious and exhausting. Coupled with a blistering Caribbean summer sun, it was extremely arduous. By nightfall, Huntington had established a camp on the crest of the hill overlooking Fisherman’s Point. Tents were erected and supplies and equipment brought up from the beach. The position was christened Camp McCalla, and on this spot, the American flag would be officially raised over Cuban soil for the first time on the morning of 11 June.

In his report to the Commandant on 17 June, Huntington expressed his dissatisfaction with the position Captain Goodrell had selected for the battalion:

The hill occupied by us is a faulty position, but the best to be had at this point. The ridge slopes downward and to the rear from the bay; the space at the top is very small, and all the surrounding country is covered with thick and almost impenetrable brush. The position is commanded by a mountain, the ridge of which is about 1,200 yards to the rear.<sup>50</sup>

If this was indeed Huntington’s initial assessment of his assigned position, his actions and decisions in the first 24 hours ashore are puzzling. Captain Goodrell had asserted that the position “if properly fortified could be held against any force.”<sup>51</sup> Fortifying and improving his position against potential enemy attacks was not Huntington’s initial priority of effort for the battalion. In establishing camp McCalla, the term *camp* was the operative word. Tents were erected at or near the top of the hill, clearly in sight of potential enemy forces and silhouetted against the sky and bay. First priority was given to offloading supplies and equipment rather than focusing on establishing and improving a strong defensive position. Huntington’s position had more the air of an armed camp in a low-threat environment than the defensive position of an outnumbered force that had just projected itself onto a hostile shore where the enemy force in the immediate area was believed to number several hundred, with the ability to be reinforced fairly quickly from Caimanera. After the war, when reflecting on the initial hours ashore, Private Frank Keeler of

<sup>49</sup> Goodrell, Report of 6 October 1898, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 115.

<sup>51</sup> Goodrell, Report of 6 October 1898, 3.

Company D noted in his memoirs, “While we were stacking arms and unloading ship the Spanish had every chance in the world to close in on us. . . . To think of the risk we went through makes me angry with our Commanding Officers every time I think of it.”<sup>52</sup>

As the sun set on 10 June, the First Marine Battalion was firmly established on Fisherman’s Point in terms of men and materiel. Camp McCalla was established, adequate supplies of food and ammunition had been offloaded, and four rifle companies were ashore. Three main outposts of approximately 15–25 Marines each were established to provide early warning if the Spanish approached that night. Between 2000 and 2100, pickets reported enemy activity to the front. The battalion was quickly formed up and moved forward. A sweep of the area to the immediate front found no enemy, and the rest of the night passed without incident. This night would prove to be the last restful one for the Marines for the next three days.

On 11 June, Companies A and F were brought ashore, completing the landing of the entire battalion. Unfortunately, Huntington had more problems to deal with than just the tactical deployment of his battalion. His acrimonious relationship with Commander Reiter of the *Panther* came to the fore again as the Marines were struggling to offload supplies and equipment. As the Marines labored in the Cuban heat, the crew of the *Panther* stood by and watched. Huntington’s complaints on this issue to Reiter were met with indifference. When the issue was raised to McCalla as the overall commander of the Guantánamo operation, his reaction was swift and pointed. He issued the following directive to Commander Reiter: “Sir, break out immediately and land with the crew of the *Panther* 50,000 rounds of 6-millimeter ammunition. In future do not require Colonel Huntington to break out or land his stores or ammunition with members of his command. Use your own officers and crew for this purpose and supply the commanding officer of Marines promptly with anything he may require.”<sup>53</sup> McCalla was so incensed with Reiter’s actions, he enclosed a copy of this directive to Admiral Sampson.

By the afternoon of 11 June, the initial tactical disposition of the battalion was set. Four rifle companies were arrayed in front of Camp McCalla. The right flank on the southwest side of the landing area along the eastern edge of the bay was manned by Captain Spicer’s Company D. To their left in the center of the line facing south was Company B under Captain Benjamin R. Russell. The left flank was held by Company C under Captain Elliott and Company E under First Lieutenant James E. Mahoney. Company F (artillery) under Captain Francis H. Harrington occupied the



Cdr B. H. McCalla, naval force commander for the 1885 Panama expedition and naval force commander for the seizure of Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. He was a strong advocate of Marines being trained and equipped for a primary mission as expeditionary landing forces rather than guarding naval installations and providing ships detachments afloat. His strong opinions on the subject led to conflicts with Marine Corps leadership in the prewar years.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

hilltop of Camp McCalla proper, and Company A under Captain Allan C. Kelton was at the foot of the ridge along the beach protecting the battalion logistics stores. Three major outposts were continuously manned forward of the main line. Even after 24 hours ashore, there had been no concerted effort to clear away heavy brush to create fields of fire or any significant effort made to dig in or fortify defensive positions. Huntington was focused on offloading supplies and equipment, which consumed most of the battalion’s manpower.

The routine nature of the battalion’s activities abruptly changed at about 1700 on 11 June, when a flurry of rifle fire was heard forward of the outpost near the crossroads held by Lieutenant Wendall Neville of Company D. This was a Spanish ambush of a forward picket post manned by Privates William Dumphy and James McColgan. A brisk exchange of rifle fire ensued between the Spanish and Neville’s outpost of 25 Marines. After approximately 30 minutes, the Spanish withdrew. Investigating the fate of the picket post, Neville’s Marines found the bullet-riddled bodies of their two comrades, the first Marine casualties of the battle.

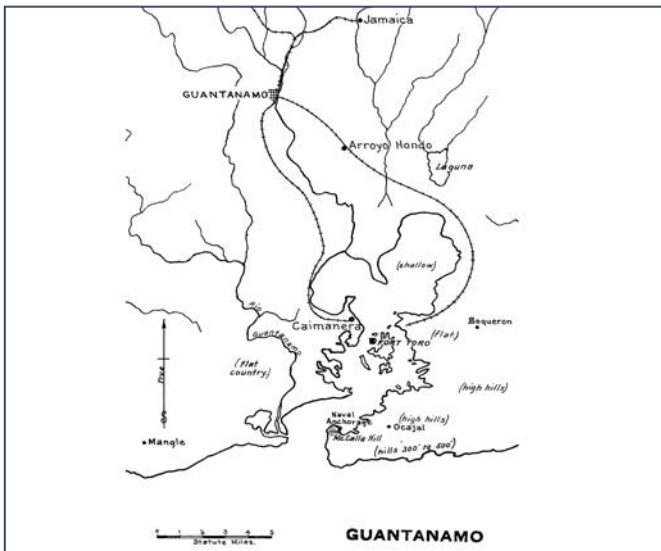
Shortly after nightfall, the Spanish were back in force. At about 1900, the Spanish brought rifle fire to bear against the Marine positions from multiple directions. Camp McCalla itself proved to be an easy target. *A New York Journal* correspondent reported:

The attack caught the Marines by surprise, most of them busy with their tents and baggage and a number bathing in the bay about a quarter of a

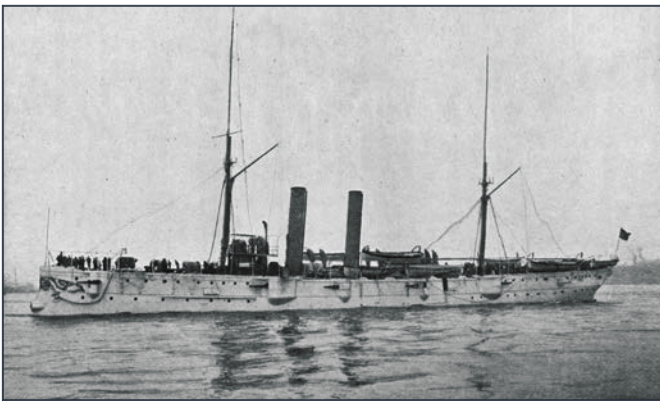
<sup>52</sup> Frank Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba, 1898: The Journal of Frank Keeler*, Marine Corps Papers Series no. 1, ed. Carolyn A. Tyson (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Museum, 1967), 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Naval Operations of the War with Spain*, 491.





Hand-drawn map of Guantánamo Bay.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



The cruiser USS *Marblehead* (C-11), commanded by Cdr B. H. McCalla.  
Naval History and Heritage Command

mile from the camp. . . . Up from the sea came running a line of naked men, grabbing their carbines and falling into place as Lieutenant Colonel R. W. Huntington issue [*viz*] his orders, getting a formation below the brow of the hill, and waiting to see how much forces would develop against him. . . . After a while a charge was ordered down the hill. There was no fun in this for naked men but they held their places and charged with the others.<sup>54</sup>

The First Marine Battalion journal records five separate small attacks on the camp between nightfall and midnight, and

a larger attack with heavy supporting fire coming from the south and southwest at 0100.<sup>55</sup> The tentage area of the camp received heavy fire from multiple directions during this period. When the early morning attack commenced, Stephen Crane was on his way to see the battalion surgeon, Dr. John Blair Gibbs, with whom he had established a friendship. He wrote,

I went in search of Gibbs, but I soon gave over in active search for the more congenial occupation of lying flat and feeling the hot hiss of the bullets trying to cut my hair. For the moment I was no longer a cynic. I was a child who, in a fit of ignorance, had jumped into the vat of war.<sup>56</sup>

As Crane lay prone to escape the bullets passing through the tents in large numbers, Crane's friend Dr. Gibbs was breathing his last. Several eyewitnesses reported that "Dr. Gibbs had just risen from his camp chair, and walking to the door of his tent and stretching his arms, said: 'Well, I don't want to die in this place.' " These were the last words he spoke as a bullet struck him in the temple.<sup>57</sup>

The fighting during the night of 11–12 June can best be described as a series of probing and harassing attacks. The Spanish kept consistent pressure on the Marine outposts, while bypassing them with small groups to bring the main Marine defensive positions under fire. In a post-battle letter to his parents, Second Lieutenant Melville J. Shaw describes the all-night action on the eleventh as he led a 25-man detachment from Company D on outpost duty far in front of the battalion's right flank:

I was attacked toward evening and driven back several hundred yards by a demoralizing fire from the hills and bush, but I rallied my men and we deployed through the bush, and soon worked our way back to our original position. We held this for an hour or more and were masters of the situation. . . . At about seven o'clock, Lieut. [Lewis C.] Lucas of Co. C came out from camp with two squads, sixteen men, deployed on each side of the road. It is to his excellent scouting and judgment that we owe our escape. For his men found that we would soon be surrounded completely by three times our number, and it was at the critical moment he gave the order for us to cut our way back to camp.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Daley, "The Taking of Guantánamo."

<sup>57</sup> Daley, "The Taking of Guantánamo."

<sup>58</sup> 2dLt Melville Shaw, letter to his father, 29 June 1898, Spanish-American War papers, folder 1 of 5, Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

<sup>54</sup> Larry Daley, contr., "The Taking of Guantánamo," Spanish American War Centennial Website, accessed 1 August 2016.

In this all-night sequence of back-and-forth maneuvering and exchanging fire with Spanish forces, Lieutenant Shaw's detachment would suffer no casualties, which was illustrative of the true nature and lack of intensity of the fighting on the night of 11–12 June.

The main response of the Marines to Spanish pressure was a high volume of return fire at ill-defined or unconfirmed targets. In his 1899 post-war lectures at the Naval War College, McCalla would point out what he considered a lack of fire discipline by the Marines, contending that the battalion expended 45,000 rounds in the first night's fighting.<sup>59</sup> According to Lieutenant Colonel Huntington's post-operations reports, it appeared [as] if ammunition was being wasted for it was impossible to see anyone to fire at, so great was the darkness. But we all became satisfied afterwards that the cartridges were well expended for it convinced the enemy that we were well provided with ammunition and prevented him from attempting to get anywhere near us or in fact to show himself in the small open space to our front.<sup>60</sup>

Sporadic attacks continued on the Marine positions until near daybreak. For Huntington, the early morning of 12 June proved to be a period of reflection and doubt regarding the viability of his position and his ability to maintain it. Huntington and Major Henry C. Cochrane (battalion executive officer) discussed the situation, and Cochrane recommended repositioning the battalion closer to the shore using the hilltop as a fortified outpost.<sup>61</sup> Huntington conferred separately with some of the company commanders who were in the immediate area and then informed Cochrane he was going to the *Marblehead* to confer with Commander McCalla. Cochrane was later shocked to discover that Captains Russell and Spicer had already relayed to Huntington that it was their belief that the position was untenable and the battalion should be withdrawn. Cochrane would later learn that his commander's purpose in meeting with McCalla was to recommend the battalion be withdrawn.<sup>62</sup>

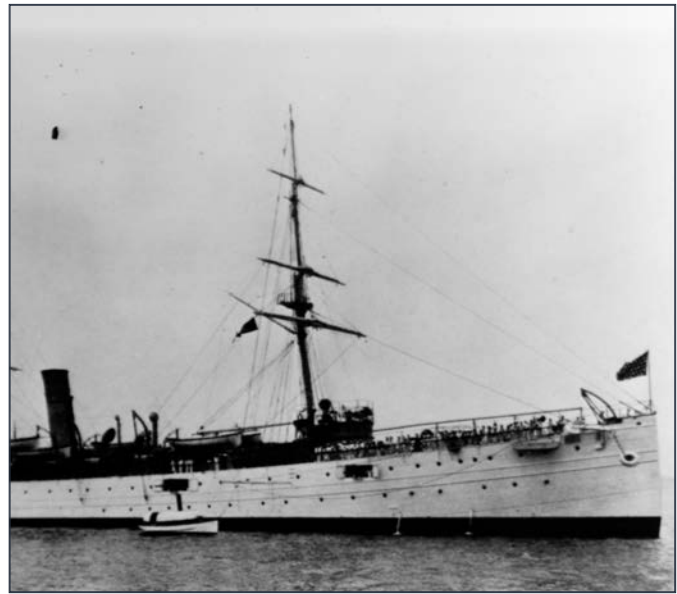
Huntington found McCalla aboard the *Texas*, where the two had what could only be described as a far-less-than-congenial professional exchange of ideas. McCalla flatly and vociferously rejected Huntington's proposal to consider withdrawing the Marines: "Leave this camp? No sir, that camp is named for me. Never, my family would suffer. You were put there to hold the hill and you'll stay there. If you are killed, I'll come out and get your dead

<sup>59</sup> McCalla, "Lessons of the Late War."

<sup>60</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 73–74.

<sup>61</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 71.

<sup>62</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 71.



The USS *Yankee* (1892) supported the initial operations to secure Guantánamo Bay by driving the Spanish off their positions on Fisherman's Point. Naval History and Heritage Command



The USS *Oregon* (BB 3), the most modern battleship in the U.S. Navy at the outbreak of the war. The *Oregon's* Marine detachment under Capt Mancil C. Goodrell of the USS *New York* made the initial landing on Fisherman's Point on 10 June. The *Oregon* is most famous for its transit from California around South America to Florida to reinforce Adm Sampson's forces blockading Cuba in the opening days of the war. The voyage of the *Oregon* became a driving argument for the eventual construction of the Panama Canal. Naval History and Heritage Command

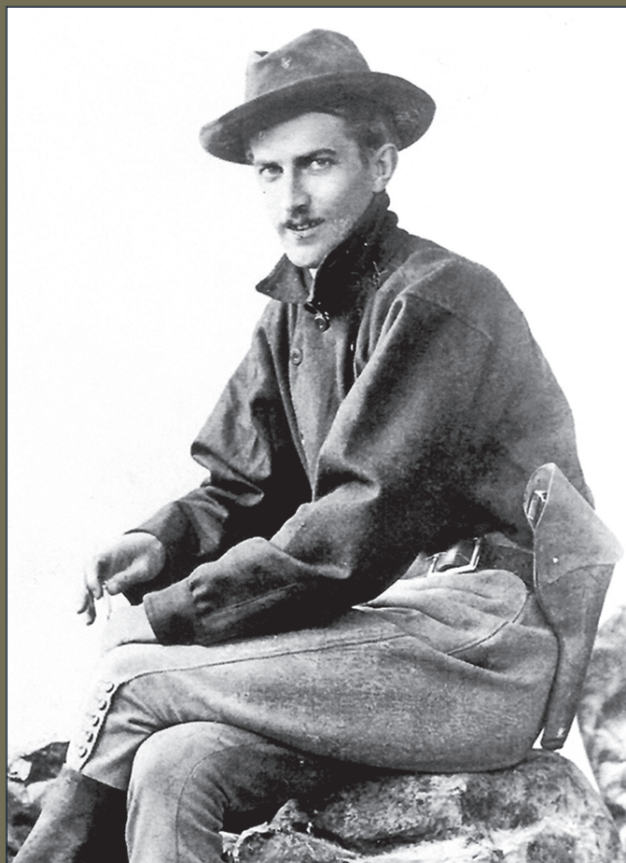
## Stephen Crane

Stephen Crane (1 November 1871–5 June 1900) was an American novelist recognized by modern critics as one of the most innovative writers of his generation. He is best known for his groundbreaking Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War* (1895).

On 10 June 1898, Crane went ashore with the Marines in Guantánamo Bay as a war correspondent for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*. He accompanied the Marines during the action at Cuzco Well on 14 June, volunteering his services as a messenger and aide. He was recognized by the Marines for his "material aid in the fighting."<sup>1</sup> His eyewitness accounts of the First Marine Battalion in action at Guantánamo Bay were captured in several published accounts that covered events such as the death of battalion surgeon Gibbs, the fighting at Cuzco Well, and two separate articles describing the bravery of Marine signalmen under fire.

<sup>1</sup> W.A.M. Goode, *With Sampson Through the War: Being an Account of the Naval Operations of the North Atlantic Squadron during the Spanish American War of 1898* (New York: Doubleday and McClure, 1899), 296.

Journalist and novelist Stephen Crane.  
Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries



body.”<sup>63</sup> One can easily make the case that McCalla's concern for his family's reputation had no relevance in this discussion, but his position was clear and unambiguous. The Marines were there to stay. A thoroughly rebuked Huntington returned to shore.

What caused a man of Lieutenant Colonel Huntington's years of experience to seemingly lose heart in the ability to accomplish his mission after what, in his own personal combat experience, would be described as a series of brisk skirmishes is a mystery. There were no instances during the night when the Spanish mustered anything resembling a concerted effort to bring any of the Marine elements into a decisive engagement. The total Marine casualties of four dead and two wounded attest to that. Huntington certainly was no coward. There were numerous eyewitness accounts of his presence during the night at multiple points of danger in which he exhibited a cool, calm demeanor under fire.

Huntington later recorded, “I do not know why I did not expect a night attack for we had a flurry in the P.M. and two

men were really assassinated.”<sup>64</sup> Huntington's failure to seriously consider the possibility of the Spanish conducting night attacks on 11 June seems to have left him in a state of surprise by the unanticipated actions of his adversary. As commanders often have done in that situation, Huntington second-guessed his decisions and exhibited a lack of confidence in the plan of operations. His recommendation to extract the battalion in reaction to the Spanish attacks brings to mind the well-known quote of General Alexander A. Vandegrift, 18th Commandant: “Positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but almost invariably because the leader has decided in his own mind that the position cannot be held.”<sup>65</sup>

Immediately upon his return to shore, Huntington proceeded to rectify some of the tactical shortcomings inherent in his position. Tents were taken down and relocated toward the base of the hill. Those that were too bullet riddled to save were piled up in front of trenches now being dug on the top of the hill to fortify the position. Up until that point, only one of the 3-inch

<sup>64</sup> Coletta, *Bowman Hendry McCalla*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Warfighting*, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1997), 1.

<sup>63</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 71.





Fisherman's Point and the initial landing site of the Marine battalion. The top of this prominent hill was the location of Camp McCalla.  
Library of Congress



A rare action photo showing the smoke from the Marines burning the huts and other structures on Fisherman's Point on 10 June 1898.  
Library of Congress

Hotchkiss guns had been unloaded, and it had seen little action for fear of hitting their own outposts. The other three guns were brought ashore that morning. Several newspaper correspondents did more than just cover the battle—they assisted with the camp fortifications. The *Chicago Tribune's* H. J. Whigham observed, "We found the Marines so weary that we all turned in to help carry supplies to the camp. . . . We also helped to get two three-inch field guns to the top of the hill."<sup>66</sup> The lack of mules to move the guns was now having an impact.

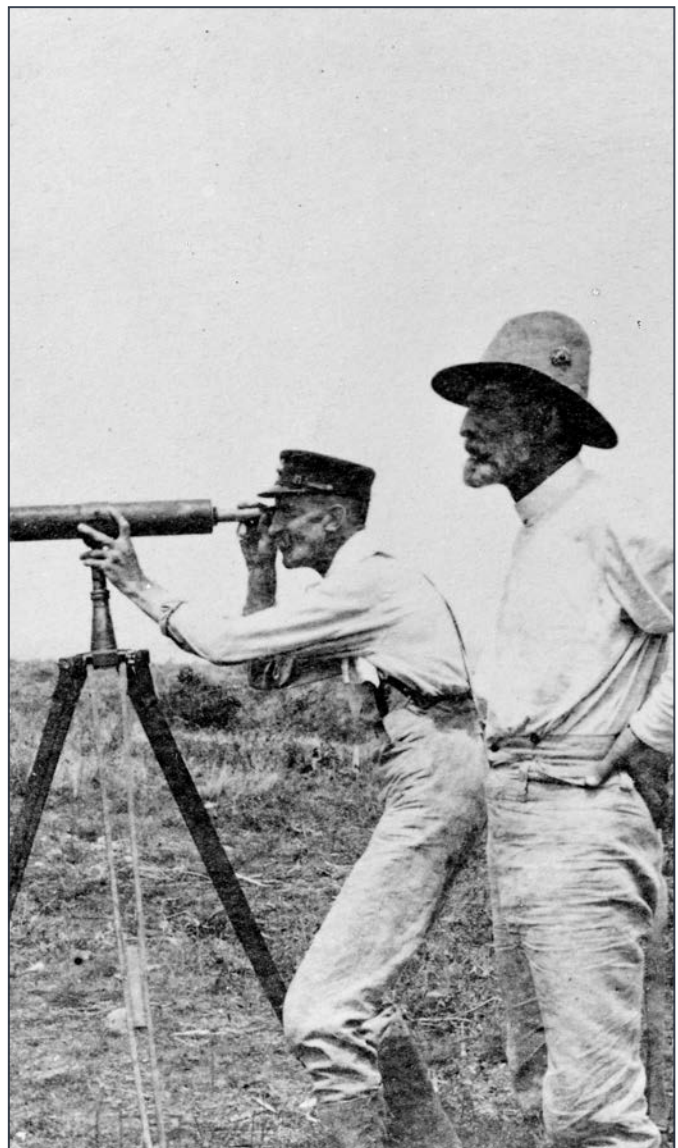
As actions on Fisherman's Point began to take on a more serious tone for the Marines, there was no shortage of willing volunteers to help. Lieutenant Cyrus S. Radford, a member of the Marine Corps detachment on board the *Texas*, requested permission to take the ship's 41 Marines ashore to render assistance to Huntington's battalion. Permission was granted, and the Marines were ordered to board boats for Camp McCalla. They would bring with them two Colt machine guns, doubling the number of those weapons at Huntington's disposal. Additionally, the ship's chaplain, Harry W. Jones, volunteered to go ashore to assist with the dead and wounded.

Upon arrival, Chaplain Jones found himself standing next to Lieutenant Colonel Huntington and presiding over the burial service for Dr. Gibbs and Privates Dumphy and McColgan. As the burial detail under the direct eye of Huntington stood at parade rest, Chaplain Jones recalled,

I took out my Bible, and was about to commence the service when I heard a whistle. Turning to the Colonel, I said: "Sir, what is it?" thinking he had whistled. He said: "Nothing." I said: "I thought I heard a whistle, sir." He said: "No, Chaplain, I did not whistle; that was a Mauser [rifle] bullet; we are [being] attacked."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> LtCol Robert Huntington personal papers.

<sup>67</sup> Rev Harry Jones (USN), *A Chaplain's Experience Ashore and Afloat: The Texas under Fire* (New York: A. G. Sherwood, 1901), 202.



LtCol Huntington and SgtMaj Henry Good at Camp McCalla. SgtMaj Good was killed in action on the night of 12 June 1898.  
Library of Congress

Jones quickly found cover by joining several Marines who were in the act of returning fire against the Spanish from a nearby shallow trench. In a very short space of time, the chaplain noticed that Huntington and the burial detail were still standing at parade rest by the grave site. The somewhat chagrined Jones dusted himself off and returned to Huntington's side, where the Marine commander asked,

"Chaplain, do you feel like continuing the service?" I said: "Yes, sir, with your permission." Then he said: "Go ahead." So, taking my place where I had stood a few moments before, I commenced the service, and was just uttering the words: "Man that is born of woman—" when up rushed three Marines with one of our Colt's automatic guns, and some others with a three-inch field piece, planting them on either side of me, and all through the service those two guns seemed to chant the prayers with me.<sup>68</sup>

The conclusion of the burial service was not the end of Chaplain Jones's adventures that day. As he was walking to the beach to return to the *Texas*, he was accompanied by two news correspondents whose names he recorded only as Coffin and Duaide. As bullets whistled by their heads, Coffin suggested they make a run for the boats as "my name is altogether too appropriate for this business."<sup>69</sup>

Additional reinforcements arrived as a detachment of Marines and bluejackets (sailors) from the *Marblehead* came ashore and were placed in support of Company D on the right flank. Approximately 60 Cuban insurgents under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Enrique Thomas landed to assist the Marines. The insurgents brought much more to the battalion than many had supposed. Their knowledge of the area and extensive experience in fighting the Spanish made them invaluable as scouts and advisors to the Marines.

During the afternoon, many Marines were allowed to go down to the beach to wash. Shortly after a large number of naked Marines were in the water, the Spanish opened long-range rifle fire on the beach area. The fire proved intense enough to quickly end any desire for swimming and washing. Naked men scrambled out of the water to grab clothing and weapons, seeking cover wherever they could find it.

Sporadic firing continued through the day with groups of Spanish bringing Marine positions under fire and the Marines responding with heavy return fire. The 3-inch guns were employed

frequently in the afternoon with good effect in dispersing groups of enemy soldiers. The battle was still predominantly an outpost fight between small groups without any sustained engagements. The battalion journal recorded the fighting on the night of 12 June as "many persistent and trifling attacks . . . in reply to which we used a good deal of ammunition."<sup>70</sup>

The most significant action that day occurred after dark on the battalion's far right flank. First Lieutenant Neville of Company D was in charge of an outpost of approximately 50 men. To his front, the Spaniards had occupied what was described as the ruins of an old Spanish stone fort on the east shoreline of the bay, west of Neville's position. From this area, the Spanish were able to bring fire on the battalion logistics area along the beach and the main Marine position on the hilltop. Neville maneuvered his men forward and assaulted the fort. The Spanish were forced out of the position, leaving 15 dead behind.<sup>71</sup> The Marines of Company D who held that position throughout the night under what they described as "almost constant fire" certainly did not see their action as trifling.<sup>72</sup>

That night, a major shortcoming in Huntington's defensive scheme was revealed. As Navy ships moved up and down the shore attempting to acquire targets with searchlights and bring fire to bear in support of the Marines, it became clear that the Navy did not know where the Marine positions were actually located. Around midnight, in an attempt to engage the Spanish forces taking Neville's outpost under fire (Lieutenant Neville already occupied the old stone fort), the *Marblehead* put half a dozen 6-inch shells on the Marine position. As Private Keeler recorded, "a shell passed so near that the wind from it took off my hat. . . . The exploding shell sent scrapnel [*sic*] in amongst us. One of our men was struck."<sup>73</sup>

The Marine signalmen on the hill at Camp McCalla ordered the ships to cease fire. Commander McCalla sent men ashore from the *Marblehead* to determine the exact location of the Marine positions, but there would be no more close fire support from naval gunfire that night. McCalla came ashore himself in the morning to apologize for the close call, explaining that he had no idea the Marine outposts were so far forward of the camp.<sup>74</sup>

Signalmen atop the hill of Camp McCalla kept continuous communications flowing between the Marines and the ships off shore. This was particularly dangerous work at night when the Spanish were able to work close enough to the Marine position to

<sup>68</sup> Jones, *A Chaplain's Experience Ashore and Afloat*, 202.

<sup>69</sup> Jones, *A Chaplain's Experience Ashore and Afloat*, 202.

<sup>70</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 9.

<sup>71</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1899*, 72.

<sup>72</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba, 1898*, 15.

<sup>74</sup> J. F. Holden-Rhodes, *Smart and Faithful Force: Henry Clay Cochrane and the United States Marines Corps, 1861–1905* (Tucson, AZ: Fireship Press, 2012), 24.

bring the hilltop under accurate fire. The signalmen used lanterns to signal the ships at sea, making them prime targets for Spanish snipers. Stephen Crane was impressed with the cool heroism of these Marines and stayed close to their station at night as they performed their vital mission. He wrote,

How, in the name of wonders, those four men at Camp McCalla were not riddled from head to foot and sent home more as repositories of Spanish ammunition than as marines is beyond all comprehension. To make a confession—when one of these men stood to wave his lantern, I lying in the trench, invariably rolled a little to the right or left, in order that, when he was shot, he would not fall on me. . . . Whenever the adjutant, Lieutenant [Herbert L.] Draper, came plunging along throughout the darkness with an order such as: “Ask the Marblehead to please shell the woods to the left”—my heart would come in to my mouth for I knew then that one of my pals was going to stand up behind the lanterns and have all of Spain shoot at him. The answer was always upon the instant: Yes, sir.<sup>75</sup>

In the major action of the night around the stone fort, the Marine casualties included one killed and four wounded. The single Marine who was killed was Private Goode Taurman. He was reported as missing at roll call the next morning. It was soon discovered that he had been shot during the night and fell from the cliff into the sea, where his body was recovered that morning by a Navy launch. The other significant casualty for the battalion that night was the death of Sergeant Major Henry Good, killed while directing the return fire of Marines in Company C.

The Spanish again opened an attack on Marine positions on 13 June at 0800. It was “subdued without loss or difficulty.”<sup>76</sup> The remainder of the day would prove to be quite uneventful as compared to the previous two days. This gave Huntington a respite to confer with his officers and address what needed to be done. The major concern weighing on Huntington was that constant harassment by the Spanish was taking a toll on the physical stamina of his men. Although casualties had been relatively light, most of his battalion had been without any significant rest for more than 48 hours. In a letter to his wife on 19 June, Huntington wrote, “This kind of thing had gone on for three days and had it not been for the Cubans might be going on now.”<sup>77</sup>

The Cuban insurgents who had joined the battalion on

11 June now showed their real value. They possessed in-depth knowledge of the local area and solid intelligence on how the Spanish were operating. This information was a critically important element in the future course of the battle. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas, the leader of the insurgents attached to the battalion, informed Huntington that the Spanish forces operating in the area were approximately 500 strong and utilizing a point known as Cuzco Well as a base from which to launch attacks against the Marines. The Spanish base was less than five miles southeast of Camp McCalla across a chain of hills. The Cubans contended that the water supply at Cuzco was essential to sustaining enemy operations in the area, as this was the only source of drinking water for Spanish forces south of Caimanera. The Cubans recommended an offensive strike at Cuzco to destroy the well, the loss of which would force the Spanish to withdraw to Caimanera, thus relieving the pressure on the Marine position. Huntington accepted the recommendation and made the decision that evening to go on the offensive to destroy the Spanish base.

Huntington developed his plan to strike at Cuzco the following morning. The Spanish did not harass the Marines that night, giving them a much-needed rest and allowing Huntington time to focus on finalizing his plan of attack. The Marine advance on Cuzco on 14 June proved to be the decisive engagement in the Guantánamo Bay operation.

## Cuzco Well

Huntington’s decision to go on the offensive on the morning of 14 June is in marked contrast to his state of mind just 48 hours earlier when he proposed evacuating the Marines from Fisher-man’s Point. The arrival of the Cubans under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas most certainly helped to lift some of the fog of war regarding the enemy. With the Cubans’ firsthand knowledge of the area and up-to-date intelligence on the dispositions and capabilities of the Spanish forces to his immediate front, Huntington now had a much clearer picture of his situation.

Logically, Huntington only had two courses of action to consider. On one hand, he could choose to remain on the defensive. To stay on the defensive would surrender initiative to the Spanish, who had so far used that initiative to effectively keep the Marines pinned down in a nearly continuous firefight. In the 72-plus hours that had passed since the Marines landed, the battalion’s total casualties had been relatively light, with five killed and six wounded. But this period had also been physically taxing on Huntington’s men with continuous alerts and little or no rest. Huntington knew he could not continue to operate this way indefinitely. The Spanish also had the luxury of employing what force they needed to harass the Marines and resting others, while Huntington’s Marines, in their constricted battlespace, could

<sup>75</sup> Daley, “The Taking of Guantánamo.”

<sup>76</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 9.

<sup>77</sup> LtCol Robert Huntington personal papers.



not do the same. Staying on the defensive would also allow the Spanish to pick and choose the time to possibly bring significant reinforcements south from Caimanera in an attempt to destroy the landing force. On the other hand, the Marines had an ample amount of naval gunfire support available to offset disparities in numbers, but this advantage was negated during the hours of darkness.

Huntington's second alternative was to attack. Taking the offensive had its risks, but also the potential for significant rewards as well. If the single source of water for the Spanish forces in the area could be destroyed, this would eliminate the immediate Spanish threat to the Marines and their landing area. The major problem Huntington faced in launching an offensive was his need to provide an adequate force to protect the landing area, which in turn limited the amount of combat power he could employ in any attack. If the Cuban intelligence on the size of the Spanish forces operating in the Cuzco area was accurate, Huntington's assault force would be facing a numerically superior Spanish force defending their base. Huntington's major asymmetric advantage over his adversary was naval gunfire. As long as the Marines were operating close to shore, they possessed the potential to employ a powerful fire support asset that the Spanish had no ability to counter.

Huntington chose to go immediately on the offensive to destroy the Spanish base at Cuzco Well and eliminate the enemy's ability to sustain themselves in the area. He quickly finalized his plans with execution scheduled for the morning of 14 June. The main assault force consisted of Companies C and D under the overall command of Captain Elliott, the Company C commander. The two companies would total 160 Marines augmented with three Colt machine gun crews and 50 Cubans. Colonel Alfredo Laborde of the Cuban Army was also present but had no command.<sup>78</sup> Laborde had served as a pilot for the *Marblehead* during the initial operations in Guantánamo Bay, and had come ashore with the Marines on 11 June to act as an advisor.

The USS *Dolphin* was assigned to provide fire support for the assault force. With all the firepower available from the fleet at this time, the extent of naval gunfire support assigned for this critical Marine operation was an aged dispatch boat, one of the original four White Squadron ships of 1884, which had marked the start of the Navy's modern ship building program. Still, the *Dolphin* mounted a main armament of two 4-inch main guns as well as four smaller Hotchkiss rapid fire guns of 2- and 3-inch caliber which was still a significant amount of firepower.

Stephen Crane was given permission to accompany Elliott's assault force. Elliott had originally declined to take an additional

officer along as adjutant, but upon learning that Crane would be with them he requested Crane act as an aide if necessary. Crane accepted, and in Elliott's report of the battle he mentioned that the correspondent was "of material aid during the action, carrying messages to fire volleys, etc., to the different company commanders."<sup>79</sup>

The plan called for Elliott's route to Cuzco to utilize a coastal path through the old Spanish stone fort that had been the scene of Lieutenant Neville's all-night action on 12 June. His column would then proceed along the coast to what is now known as Windward Point, where the column would have to cross over steep ridges directly toward Cuzco Well, which was situated in a narrow valley near the shore. The *Dolphin* would keep pace on the flank in case its naval gunfire support was needed.

In addition to the main assault force, Huntington established three platoon-size outposts of approximately 50 men each to screen the Marine position at Fisherman's Point and to be prepared to reinforce Elliott if required. On the right flank was a platoon from Company B under First Lieutenant Clarence L. Ingate. Ingate's platoon was to screen along the coast and link up with Elliott's force when it passed, taking orders from Elliott from that point forward. First Lieutenant James Mahoney was assigned to hold the trail crossing (referred to as the crossroads) south of Camp McCalla with a platoon of his own Company E. Second Lieutenant Louis J. Magill's platoon of Company A established an outpost northeast of Mahoney's position.

The assault force assembled at 0730 on 14 June in the logistics area along the beach, where final equipment inspections were held before moving out. At 0800, the Spanish made another attack on the battalion that was easily beaten back and that had no effect on the preparations of Elliott's force. At 0900, Elliott's column commenced its movement. Thomas's 50 Cubans were in the lead, followed by Company C and then D. The three Colt machine guns were with Company C near the head of the column.

The first thing to go awry in Huntington's plan was the failure of Lieutenant Ingate to make contact with Elliott's force. Ingate was on his first mission outside the battalion's main defenses and he seemed to be lacking navigation skills. He failed to get to his assigned position on time and consequently missed the linkup with Elliott's marching column. Ingate would eventually make his way back to the main defensive area and report his failure to meet Elliott about the time the fighting at Cuzco commenced.

At a point approximately halfway to his objective, Captain Elliott detached First Lieutenant Lewis C. Lucas with a platoon of Marines and half the Cubans in a swing through the mountains to the left of the column, in an attempt to cut off the ene-

<sup>78</sup> Goode, *With Sampson Through the War*, 294–96.

<sup>79</sup> Goode, *With Sampson Through the War*, 296.



The bodies of Pvts James McColgan and William Dumphy and the battalion surgeon, Dr. John Blair Gibbs, lying under tarps and awaiting burial on the morning of 12 June 1898 at Camp McCalla.  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

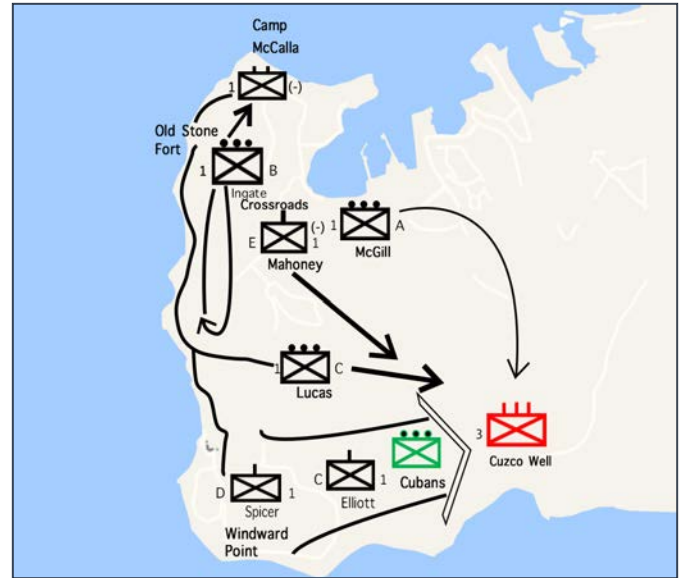
my pickets and prevent the Spanish from being warned of their approach. Elliott noted in his battle report, "In this we failed, and our force was discovered by the Spanish outposts, which retreated immediately and gave the alarm to the main body."<sup>80</sup> As the Spanish pickets rapidly retreated toward Cuzco Well, Elliott's main force was right on their heels.

At this point, Elliott's force and the Spanish main body were separated by an unoccupied high hill. Elliott rapidly pushed his force up the hill, looking to gain a positional advantage. The physical exertion of the march in the intense heat was taking a toll on the Marines. Men were succumbing to the heat, including Captain Spicer, commander of Company D. As a member of Company D looked up at the hill looming before him, he exclaimed, "We never will get up there." His platoon leader, First Lieutenant Neville responded, "No you won't if you stand there and look at it."<sup>81</sup>

The opening minutes of the battle had come down to a race to seize the key terrain, with the Marines climbing the west side of the hill and the Spanish the eastern slope. The Marines of Company C and their Cuban allies won the race to the top by the slimmest of margins. They immediately began pouring deadly fire at the Spanish, forcing them back down into the valley. Elliott's decision to place the Colt machine guns forward in the column now paid huge dividends. Private Keeler of Company D would attest, "It was the machine guns that held back the enemy until all the Americans were up and in the

<sup>80</sup> Goode, *With Sampson Through the War*, 294.

<sup>81</sup> Clifford, *History of the First Marine Battalion of the U.S. Marines*, 16.



The First Marine Battalion scheme of maneuver against the Spanish at Cuzco Well, 14 June 1898.  
Courtesy of the author



The temporary graves of Gibbs, Dumphy, and McColgan. This was the site where Chaplain Harry W. Jones and LtCol Huntington presided over the burial service under fire on the morning of 12 June 1898.  
Library of Congress

fight."<sup>82</sup> Elliott's force had not only gained the key terrain but had immediately established fire superiority over his adversary.

The hill that Elliott's Marines now controlled was described as a horseshoe-shaped ridge encircling two-thirds of a small valley, with Cuzco Well at the open end of the shoe on the valley floor. Within minutes of seizing the ridge, Lieutenant Lucas arrived from his cross-mountain march, having already lost nine men as heat casualties. Lucas deployed his 32 Marines and 25 Cubans into position and extended the left flank of the line to the north. Shortly after Elliott's force was fully arrayed on the ridge, Lieutenant Magill of Company A arrived from the north and occupied the far left of the ridgeline beyond Lieutenant Lucas's left flank. Magill had established his 50-man outpost that morn-

<sup>82</sup> Clifford, *History of the First Marine Battalion of the U.S. Marines*, 16.



One of the Marine signalmen at Camp McCalla. Several Marines of the battalion were trained as signalmen and kept communication flowing between Camp McCalla and ships in the bay. The signalmen used flags by day and lanterns after dark. Library of Congress

ing not far to the northwest of Cuzco Well. When the battle was joined, Lieutenant Magill marched on his own initiative toward the sounds of the guns (capturing an intact Spanish heliograph station on the way) and arrived in an ideal position to put the Spanish forces around the well in a cross fire.

The fight had settled into a long-range exchange of fire at 600–800 yards. The Marines' positional advantage forced the Spanish into cover around the well and a wooden blockhouse. As the Marine fire took a toll, the return fire from the Spanish grew more sporadic and ineffective. Elliott noted in his battle report:

By the use of glasses and careful search by the men, individuals were discovered and fire being opened upon them, they would break from cover to cover and we were thus enabled to gain targets at which to fire. . . . Many of the men fired as coolly as at target practice, consulting with each other and their officers as to range.<sup>83</sup>

Having clearly established fire superiority over the Spanish forces, Elliott decided it was time to conclude the fight by bringing naval gunfire to bear on the enemy position.

Captain Elliott called for a signalman, and Private John Fitzgerald twisted around from where he lay in a prone firing position and saluted, acknowledging that he was a signalman. Fitzgerald acquired some cloth that would suffice as a makeshift signal flag and attached it to the end of his rifle. He positioned himself slightly below the crest of the hill away from the enemy and wig-wagged the message to the *Dolphin*. It soon became clear that with the ridge as a backdrop, Fitzgerald and his flag could

not be seen by the *Dolphin*. The signalman now repositioned himself on the crest of the hill where he was clearly visible to both the *Dolphin* and the Spanish.<sup>84</sup> As Stephen Crane later recorded:

As soon as the Spaniards caught sight of this silhouette, they let go like mad at it . . . the situation demanded that he face the sea and turn his back to the Spanish bullets. This was a hard game, mark you—to stand with the small of your back to volley firing . . . We all cleared out of his neighbourhood [*sic*]. If he wanted sole possession of any particular spot on that hill, he could have it.<sup>85</sup>

Private Fitzgerald stoically stood to his post until his message was sent and an acknowledgment was received from the *Dolphin*. He then dropped to the ground and returned fire with the makeshift flag still affixed to the end of his rifle.

The message Private Fitzgerald had delivered requested that the *Dolphin* open fire on the blockhouse and the immediate area surrounding it, where the Spanish were taking cover. The *Dolphin* opened fire and “the first shell went wide of its mark, but the second struck the block-house and it flew a part like a fire-cracker [*sic*].”<sup>86</sup> As the 4-inch shells from the *Dolphin* landed on their positions, the Spanish were clearly faced with two distinct but undesirable choices. First, try to hold onto their position, which was rapidly becoming untenable; or second, run a gauntlet of fire in an attempt to escape the valley. Whether by command or spontaneous reaction, many of the Spanish chose the latter. Crane described the scene:

Then the quality of the battle suddenly changed with the shout of: There they go! See 'em! See 'em! Unable to withstand the pelting bullets longer, the Spaniards broke from the cover of the manigua (bush) and began running . . . the battle became a “most extraordinary game—of trapshooting—and coveys of guerrillas got up in bunches of five or six and flew frantically up the opposite hillside.”<sup>87</sup>

It was now approximately 1400 as the Spanish began a “straggling retreat” to get out of the valley.<sup>88</sup> The Marines kept up a controlled deliberate fire on the retreating Spanish. Officers were

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Crane, *Wounds in the Rain: A Collection of Stories Relating to the Spanish-American War of 1898* (London: Methuen, 1900), 185–86.

<sup>85</sup> Crane, *Wounds in the Rain*, 186.

<sup>86</sup> Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba*, 1898, 18.

<sup>87</sup> Daley, “The Taking of Guantanamo.”

<sup>88</sup> Goode, *With Sampson Through the War*, 295.

<sup>83</sup> Goode, *With Sampson Through the War*, 295.



directing volley fire at target areas beyond the ranges at which the average rifleman could hit a point target but “where large bodies of the enemy could be seen.”<sup>89</sup> The Marines delivered controlled volleys, saturating the target area with bullets. According to Private Keeler, “We set our sights on the rifles at 1,200 yards and fired volley after volley.”<sup>90</sup> By all eyewitness accounts, the Marines’ long-range fire was very effective. The technique of controlled volley fire at extended ranges had been a key part of Lieutenant Colonel Huntington’s battalion training regimen aboard the *Panther* and at Key West. This training now paid off.

The *Dolphin*’s fire had an immediate significant effect on the enemy, but it also produced some unintended consequences. Due to the limitations of communication, closely coordinating actions on the ground with the ship offshore was tremendously difficult. The *Dolphin* had moved farther up the coast to the east than was desirable. Now, instead of firing across the front of the Marine positions, the *Dolphin*’s gun target line was pointed straight at Lieutenant Magill’s position on the far left flank. As some of the ship’s rounds impacted on the ridge to his front, Magill was forced to disengage and withdraw his platoon to the back side of the ridge for protection.

Captain Elliott now recognized that the critical moment of the battle was at hand. He sent orders to Magill to launch an attack down the valley to his front and drive the Spanish toward the coast. Elliott was no longer just looking to drive the Spanish out of their position; he now thought he might bag the entire lot of them. Before he could put Magill in motion, Elliott needed to get the *Dolphin* to cease fire. Once again, the call went down the line for a signalman, and Sergeant John Quick stood up. Stephen Crane again described the scene:

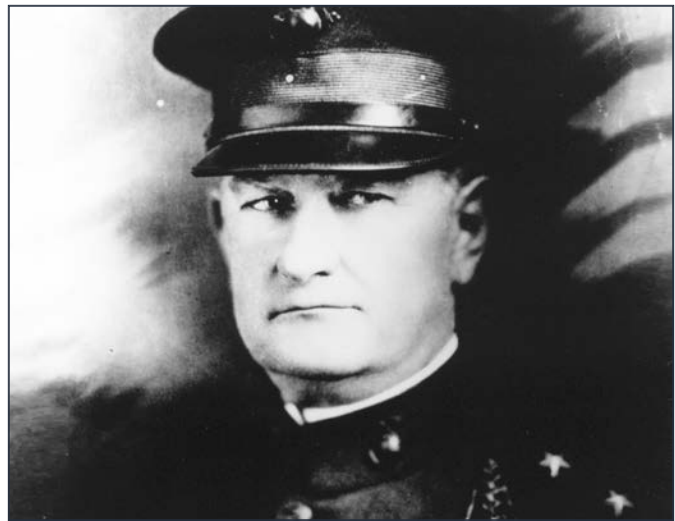
He produced from somewhere a blue polka-dot neckerchief as large as a quilt. He tied it on a long, crooked stick. Then he went to the top of the ridge, and turning his back to the Spanish fire, began to signal to the *Dolphin*. Again we gave a man sole possession of a particular part of the ridge. We didn’t want it. He could have it and welcome. If the young sergeant had had the smallpox, the cholera, and the yellow fever, we could not have slid out with more celerity.<sup>91</sup>

The *Dolphin* received the message and ceased its bombardment. Lieutenant Magill was ordered forward, but for some reason the *Dolphin* opened fire again, once more forcing Magill to retreat to the lee of the ridge. In the time it took to resend the

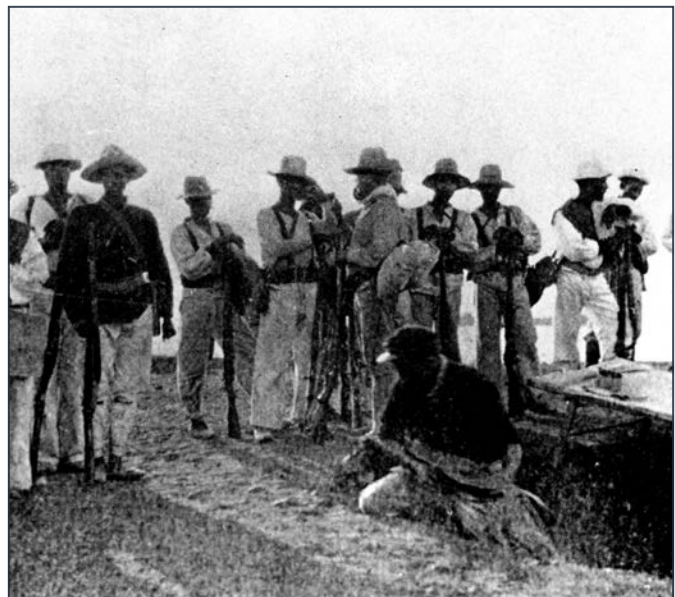
<sup>89</sup> Goode, *With Sampson Through the War*, 295.

<sup>90</sup> Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba*, 1898, 18.

<sup>91</sup> Crane, *Wounds in the Rain*, 188.



MajGen Wendell C. Neville, future 14th Commandant of the Marine Corps, was a platoon commander in Company D. He had to take command of the company during the fight at Cuzco Well after Capt William F. Spicer succumbed to the heat on the march to the battlefield.  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division



Some of LtCol Enrique Thomas’s Cuban insurgents who reinforced the First Marine Battalion at Camp McCalla. The Cubans’ knowledge of the area and their extensive experience fighting the Spanish made them invaluable as scouts and as a source of intelligence.  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

signal and for the *Dolphin* to finally cease fire for good, the opportunity to capture the Spanish was lost. By the time Magill’s platoon swept down the valley from the north, the majority of the Spanish force had already fled over the hills to the northeast and out of the valley.

While Elliott’s fight was in full swing, the sound of the battle was clearly audible to Huntington at Camp McCalla. With-



George F. Elliott, future 10th Commandant of the Marine Corps, commanded Company C of the First Marine Battalion at Guantánamo Bay. He led the offensive strike against the Spanish at Cuzco Well, which proved to be the decisive engagement of the Guantánamo Bay operation.  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

## George Frank Elliott

George Frank Elliott was born in Eutaw, Alabama, on 30 November 1846. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1870 and was appointed as a second lieutenant of Marines. As a junior officer, he served in duty assignments at seven different Marine barracks and on five ships detachments. He was the fleet Marine officer on the USS *Baltimore* (C 3) when the ship was sent to China to guard American interests during the war between Japan and China.

During a strike of railway employees of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Elliott was detached with a Marine guard to protect and defend the property of the railroad. In 1885, he was with the Marine battalion sent to the Isthmus of Panama.

In April 1898, Elliott was assigned to the First Marine Battalion and landed at Guantánamo Bay as commander of Company C, where he distinguished himself in the battle of Cuzco Well. In 1899, he commanded the Second Marine Battalion in the Philippines, eventually commanding the 1st Marine Brigade (comprising the First and Second Battalion of Marines).

In October 1903, he became the first Marine officer promoted to the permanent rank of brigadier general and assigned as 10th Commandant of the Marine Corps, relieving Colonel Charles Heywood.

Source: BGen George Frank Elliott biographical file,  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division.

out any knowledge of how the fight at Cuzco was progressing, Huntington decided to send Elliott reinforcements. Lieutenant Ingate, who had reported from his failure to link up with Elliott as planned that morning, was ordered to take his 50 Marines and join with Lieutenant Mahoney's 50-man outpost at the crossroads and then for the combined force to move to Elliott's aid. Even though Mahoney's location was only about a mile forward of the main defensive line, Lieutenant Ingate again failed to get to his assigned position on time. Mahoney eventually moved to join Elliott without Ingate, but the delay caused him to arrive at Cuzco at 1600, too late to take part in the fighting.

By 1515, the fight was essentially over. Lieutenant Lucas was ordered to take his platoon down into the valley to the abandoned Spanish camp to destroy the well and anything else that might be of use to the Spanish. This was quickly accomplished. Unfortunately, most Marines had emptied their canteens, and the lack of water was now a major issue for Elliott's force. Elliott ensured that the officers stuck to Huntington's policy on clean water and protecting the health of the men. Private Keeler recalled, "We destroyed their well of fresh water. Although nearly dying for a drink, our officers would not allow us to touch a drop of it. We

had to wait until they could send some from the U.S.S. *Dolphin*."<sup>92</sup>

The Cubans under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas were pushed beyond the valley to provide security for Lucas's Marines while they were engaged in the destruction of the Spanish camp. The final action of the battle was a short engagement between Thomas's Cubans and guerrillas (Cubans loyal to Spain) in which Thomas's men suffered two killed and two wounded while killing five guerrillas.

The end results of the fight at Cuzco could not have been more lopsided. The total casualties for Elliott's force in the main battle was only three wounded (one Marine and two Cubans). One of the wounded Cubans was actually shot by Colonel Laborde, who multiple witnesses attested was wildly firing his pistol during the entire engagement. The greatest number of casualties for Elliott's force occurred in the short follow-on fight between the Cubans and guerrillas in which the Cubans lost two killed and two wounded. Ultimately, the largest cause of casualties for the Marines on this day was the oppressive temperature. Approximately a dozen Marines were heat casualties, including Captain Spicer, the Company D commander. The Marines took 18 Spanish prisoners, including a lieutenant. The total Spanish casualties

<sup>92</sup> Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba, 1898*, 18.

were 60 killed and an estimated 150 wounded. The Spanish base and its associated water supply was completely destroyed.

By 1730, Elliott had moved all of his casualties (heat related and wounded) to the *Dolphin*, had resupplied his men with fresh water from the ship, and had his prisoners ready to move. The return march to Camp McCalla was completed by 2000 without incident. That evening, for the first time since the landing on 10 June, the Marines enjoyed a hot meal and an uninterrupted night's rest. On 17 June, in his report on the Guantánamo Bay operations to Colonel Heywood, Commandant of the Marine Corps, Huntington gave the Cubans credit for planning the operation, but also noted that it was "the coolness, skill, and bravery of our officers and men, by which alone its success was achieved."<sup>93</sup>

## Final Operations

The morning of 15 June offered the first quiet and peaceful dawn since the Marines landed on Fisherman's Point five days before. The First Marine Battalion journal entries for that day were in stark contrast to those preceding: "The usual pickets and patrols were posted. This day was devoted to obtaining a much needed rest. No alarms were given."<sup>94</sup>

On 15 June, the Marines had a stadium-like view of ongoing naval actions in Guantánamo Bay. At this point, Commander McCalla decided it was time to move his ships up the bay to destroy the fortifications on Cayo del Toro that protected the channels leading to Caimanera. Assuming that the channels and waters of the upper bay were heavily mined, on the night of 14 June, McCalla sent a launch into the channel to sweep for mines. This was dangerous work, as the men in the launch had to bring up the mines by grappling with the mooring cables. The sweeping operations were less than successful. The launch penetrated the channel to the edge of Caimanera but was only able to locate and remove two mines. Undeterred, McCalla ordered the *Marblehead* and the battleship *Texas* to move up the channel to firing positions, while launches, supported by the *Suwannee* (1897), continued to sweep for mines.<sup>95</sup>

The Marines crowded the hilltop above Fisherman's Point and watched the grand display of firepower as the *Texas* and *Marblehead* laid waste to the Spanish fortifications, the major damage being inflicted by the 12-inch guns of the *Texas*. As the two ships opened fire, silhouetted against a dark sky and the smoke of their own guns, "cheers went up from the ships as well as from

the Marines."<sup>96</sup> Once again the Spanish defenses were no match for the firepower of modern warships. The Spanish guns were quickly silenced and their fortifications and surrounding structures received severe damage. The only meaningful response the Spanish could muster came in the form of small arms fire from the northwest shore of the bay directed against the Navy launches that continued their mine sweeping operations. This fire was quickly suppressed by the guns of the *Suwannee*. McCalla narrowly escaped disaster when both the *Texas* and the *Marblehead* had their propeller shafts fouled by mine mooring cables; the mines failed to detonate and were quickly cleared away by the supporting launches.

For the next 10 days, the activities of the Marines on Fisherman's Point took on the semblance of a daily camp routine as the specter of combat with the Spanish and Cuban loyalists dissipated. Pickets and patrols were sent out during the day and larger outposts were established at night. During daylight, an average of 15 Marines plus Cuban scouts provided security, and the night outpost duty consisted of multiple outposts with up to 75 Marines each. The recurring entry in the battalion journal for night security operations was "all quiet." However, there was a single exception to the dull routine. When Private Robert J. Burns of Company C was assigned to picket duty on a dark, moonless night, he heard movement to his front and issued a challenge. When the challenge went unanswered and the movement continued, he executed his standing orders and fired in the direction of the noise. Daylight revealed that Private Burns had effectively dispatched a wild hog.

Occasionally the Cuban scouts would report the sighting of or find indications of the presence of Spanish scouts near the outposts, but none were engaged or captured. On 18 June, the battalion journal noted, "The fight on the 14th inst. [14 June] seems to have made them (the enemy) vacate this portion of the country as no signs of them can be found."<sup>97</sup> The only exception to this was a periodic lone Spanish deserter surrendering to the Marines at Camp McCalla. The prisoners all came over with stories of not being paid for months and not having anything to eat for days.

The threat of imminent combat was replaced with a more mundane routine of security patrols, improvement of camp defenses, and the establishment of daily drill and parade formations. Huntington expressed it in a letter home: "Things have gotten very structured since Elliott's fight and all we do is to lie in the dirt and cut a few bushes to see a little farther from our breast

<sup>93</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1898*, 116.

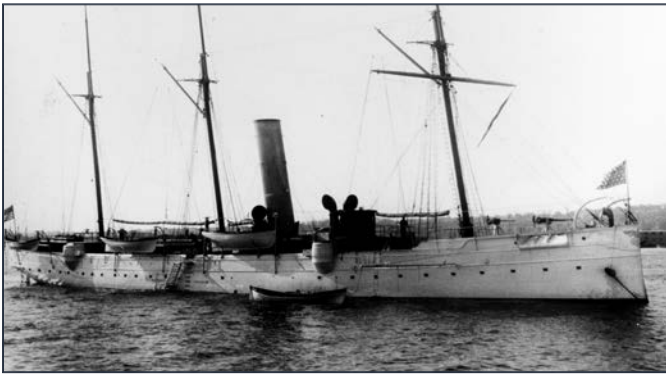
<sup>94</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 10.

<sup>95</sup> *Suwannee* was an old lighthouse tender that was turned over to the U.S. Navy for use as an auxiliary cruiser in 1897–98.

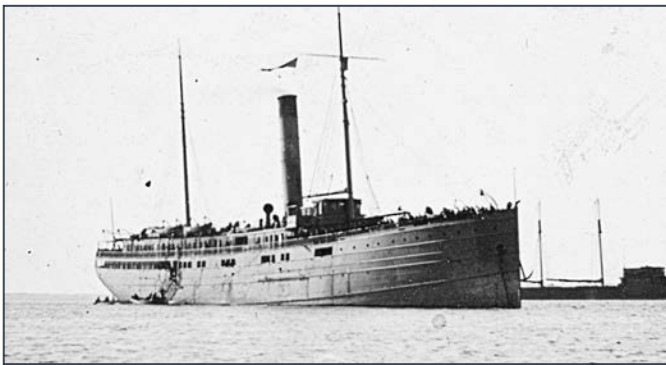
<sup>96</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo. The term *inst.* is an abbreviation for *instant* or *instante mense* (in the current month), which was commonly used to mean *a day in the current month*.





The USS *Dolphin* (PG 24), one of the four ships of the White Squadron built in 1883 that started the Navy's modernization program. A dispatch boat that was designed for speed to carry messages for the fleet, its 4-inch guns were used to good effect in supporting the Marines at Cuzco Well. Naval History and Heritage Command



The USS *Resolute* (1894) was originally designated as the transport ship to carry the First Marine Battalion to war. It was loaded and ready for embarkation of the Marines when it was reassigned to other missions and replaced by the *Panther*. In the rush to transfer supplies and equipment from the *Resolute* to the much smaller *Panther*, some of the cargo had to be left on board the *Resolute*. Naval History and Heritage Command

works.<sup>98</sup> The major threat to the Marines transitioned from enemy bullets to self-inflicted injury. "There has been an epidemic of accidents in camp," the battalion records note, culminating in two Marines (Private Albert E. Halvoas of Company D and Private John J. Reardon of Company C) being injured by the accidental discharge of their own rifles.<sup>99</sup>

The daily routine of the camp was broken on 19 June when a detail of 50 Marines and 30 Cubans was formed under Lieutenant Lucas to revisit the Cuzco battlefield. This expedition was formed at the request of the battalion surgeon, Doctor John Edgar, for the purpose of examining Spanish dead and to document the casualty-producing effects of the Lee rifle. At the time, there were doubts expressed among certain Navy and Marine leaders

as to the effectiveness and killing power of the Lee 6mm bullet at extended ranges. Edgar saw this as an opportunity to gather empirical data through firsthand examination of the enemy dead still on the field. Edgar was accompanied by three hospitalmen to assist him in his examinations of the Spanish corpses. Acton Davies, a correspondent for the *New York Sun*, also accompanied the group and later published a detailed account of the rather grisly mission.

The detail left Camp McCalla at 0900, following the same route that Captain Elliott's force had taken on 14 June. The march was a laborious effort in the intense heat. As one would expect, as the column approached the area of the well and the destroyed blockhouse, they noted "the rocky brush covered hillsides all about us with the vultures circling and circling about and then settling out of sight. They told the story, and the scent that the varying winds blew down upon us from all sides only served to intensify the most disgusting of all of warfare's many phases."<sup>100</sup>

As the battalion surgeon performed his examinations, the Marines went souvenir hunting. The Cuban scouts had previously done a thorough job of collecting abandoned weapons and machetes immediately after the fight on 14 June, so the pickings were lean. An account of the expedition related, "One find was a Spanish officer's field cot. It was much nicer than any in use in our army, having steel legs and steel head and foot boards. The marine who found it was the envy of all his comrades. They threw the yellow fever scare into him, but he wouldn't drop it and sweated all the way back to camp with it."<sup>101</sup>

After examining several corpses in the area of the well and blockhouse, where the effect of the bullets could be seen in the bones and skulls of the dead, the surgeon was fully satisfied that the power of the Lee rifle at ranges of 700 to 800 yards was fully proven. Doctor Edgar's analysis and observations would eventually be widely printed in American newspapers. The mission was completed in short order and there proved to be no desire by the group to examine bodies in the area where the main fighting had taken place as "the intolerable stench from the dead made it impossible to continue to search."<sup>102</sup> With the doctor's scientific curiosity satisfied, Lieutenant Lucas moved his force out of this rather undesirable environment and back to camp McCalla, arriving shortly after 1600.

Late in the afternoon of 20 June, the USS *Resolute* (1894) arrived off Fisherman's Point and began unloading supplies for the

<sup>98</sup> LtCol Robert Huntington personal papers.

<sup>99</sup> Journal of Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 10.

<sup>100</sup> Patrick McSherry, contr., "The First Marine Battalion Revisits the Scene of the Fight at Cuzco Well," trans. by Robert Pendleton, Spanish American War Centennial Website, accessed 5 August 2016.

<sup>101</sup> McSherry, "The First Marine Battalion Revisits the Scene of the Fight at Cuzco Well."

<sup>102</sup> Journal of the Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 11.

## Signalmen at Cuzco Well

During the battle at Cuzco Well, Sergeant John Quick and Private John Fitzgerald, both of Company C, demonstrated great courage under fire. Both would stand atop a ridge, silhouetted against the sky, the object of intense Spanish rifle fire, and stoically wig-wag messages to the USS *Dolphin*. The incident was immortalized in the writings of Stephen Crane, who accompanied the Marines to the battlefield as a war correspondent.

Quick was awarded the Medal of Honor in December 1898. Crane's writings were instrumental in making Sergeant Quick a Marine legend. Quick would serve a long and illustrious career in the Marine Corps, ultimately achieving the rank of sergeant major.

Private Fitzgerald, even though he had been the first of the two to volunteer to stand in the open under fire and signal the ship, remained anonymous for many years. Part of the reason may well have been that Crane never knew his name and referred to him in his writing as "a red-headed 'm[ ]'—I think his name was Clancy [he was actually Private John Fitzgerald of Company C]—at any rate, it will do to call him Clancy."

Private Fitzgerald's heroism went officially unacknowledged for more than 10 years until the record was finally corrected and he was awarded the Medal of Honor in December 1910, five years after his discharge from the Marine Corps.

Source: Crane, *Wounds in the Rain*, 185–86, 188.



Sgt John Quick was awarded the Medal of Honor at the battle of Cuzco Well for his bravery in signaling for naval gunfire support while fully exposed to Spanish rifle fire. Quick would go on to a long and illustrious career in the Marine Corps, retiring as a sergeant major. Naval History and Heritage Command

Marines. The following day, the captain of the *Panther* was directed to transfer all of the battalion's supplies, equipment, and ammunition to the *Resolute*. The often acrimonious and certainly less than satisfactory relationship between the First Marine Battalion and the *Panther* finally came to an end. The Marines were now supported by the larger transport that was originally designated to carry them to war before it had been reassigned to other missions. The Marines also were at last reunited with their campaign hats, which had been left on board the *Resolute* during the rushed transfer of supplies to the *Panther* back in April.

After the reduction of the Spanish defenses on Cayo del Toro on 15 June, the Navy continued sweeping for mines in the channel in preparation for an eventual move up the bay to Caímanera. The only resistance the Spanish were able, or at least willing, to muster against the naval force was to harass the mine-sweeping operations and any other ships close by with small arms fire from the northwest shore of the bay. Although this fire was at most an irritant to the naval forces, it was something that Commander McCalla decided must be eliminated, and he once again called on Huntington and his Marines to do the job.

Contrary to the very ad hoc activities that typified the Marine landing at Fisherman's Point on 10 June, this operation was a model of detailed planning. Commander McCalla's operation

order for this action was precise and complete in laying out the timeline and sequencing of events, command relationships, the forces to be employed (naval and land), formations for movement by water, ship's supporting relationship to the landing force, and the objectives to be achieved. Lieutenant Colonel Huntington personally commanded the landing force, which consisted of Company C under Captain Elliott, Company E under First Lieutenant Mahoney, and a supporting detachment of 60 Cubans under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas. Huntington's force totaled approximately 240 men.

The operation was scheduled to commence at 0300 on 24 June. Huntington's landing force launched on time in three parallel columns of five boats each. The right column was made up of Cubans and the center and left columns of Marines. Each column of boats was towed across the bay by an armed steam launch. The cruiser *Marblehead* and the gunboat USS *Helena* (gunboat no. 9) were close in shore on the west flank of the landing force to interdict possible interference from an enemy force suspected to be about a mile west of the landing area. The predawn landing on the far side of the bay went off without incident. Huntington's force swept through the area and encountered no resistance. The battalion records show that, on 25 June, "Signs, which showed that about a hundred men had left the point about



This image shows Marines at Camp McCalla in full tropical uniform. The campaign hats the Marines are wearing were part of the equipment that was left on the *Resolute* in April. The Marines did not get this uniform item until the arrival of the *Resolute* at Guantánamo on 20 June 1898.

Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

a day previous were found, but no Spaniards.”<sup>103</sup> This would be the last tactical operation executed by the battalion during the war.

As the operational climate in the Guantánamo Bay area evolved fully into the category of dull routine, the exact opposite was occurring about 20 miles to the west. On 20 June 1898, the naval force carrying the U.S. Army V Corps, commanded by Major General William R. Shafter, had finally arrived off the southern coast of Cuba. Shafter and Admiral Sampson met that night to coordinate plans for upcoming operations. It was the beginning of a stormy relationship fraught with conflicting Service perspectives and priorities. The one thing not in dispute was that the port of Santiago was now the focal point of U.S. military operations in Cuba. Admiral Cervera’s flotilla was still perceived as the top military threat to U.S. operations in the West Indies. As long as Cervera’s ships were holed up in harbor, Santiago received the undivided attention of both the U.S. Army and Navy in Cuba.

With the landing of V Corps at Daiquiri and Aguadores east of Santiago on 22 June, the war in Cuba entered a new phase. Within 10 days, Shafter’s V Corps was able to move on Santiago,

capturing key terrain on the outskirts of the town in the battles of San Juan Hill and Kettle Hill. By 1 July, Santiago was effectively under siege.

With the likely prospect that Santiago would fall to the Americans, Admiral Cervera faced a dilemma. He could either attempt to run out of the harbor and engage the technologically and numerically superior enemy fleet in battle, or he could scuttle his ships in the harbor to prevent their capture. Cervera’s preference was to scuttle his ships and not needlessly sacrifice the lives of his sailors in a futile gesture. His ships were short on fuel and ammunition and badly in need of repair. Unfortunately for Cervera, since his arrival in Cuba, he was under the direct authority of Ramón Blanco y Erenas, the Spanish governor general in Havana, who was adamant that Spanish honor demanded he push out to sea and engage the enemy fleet in battle.

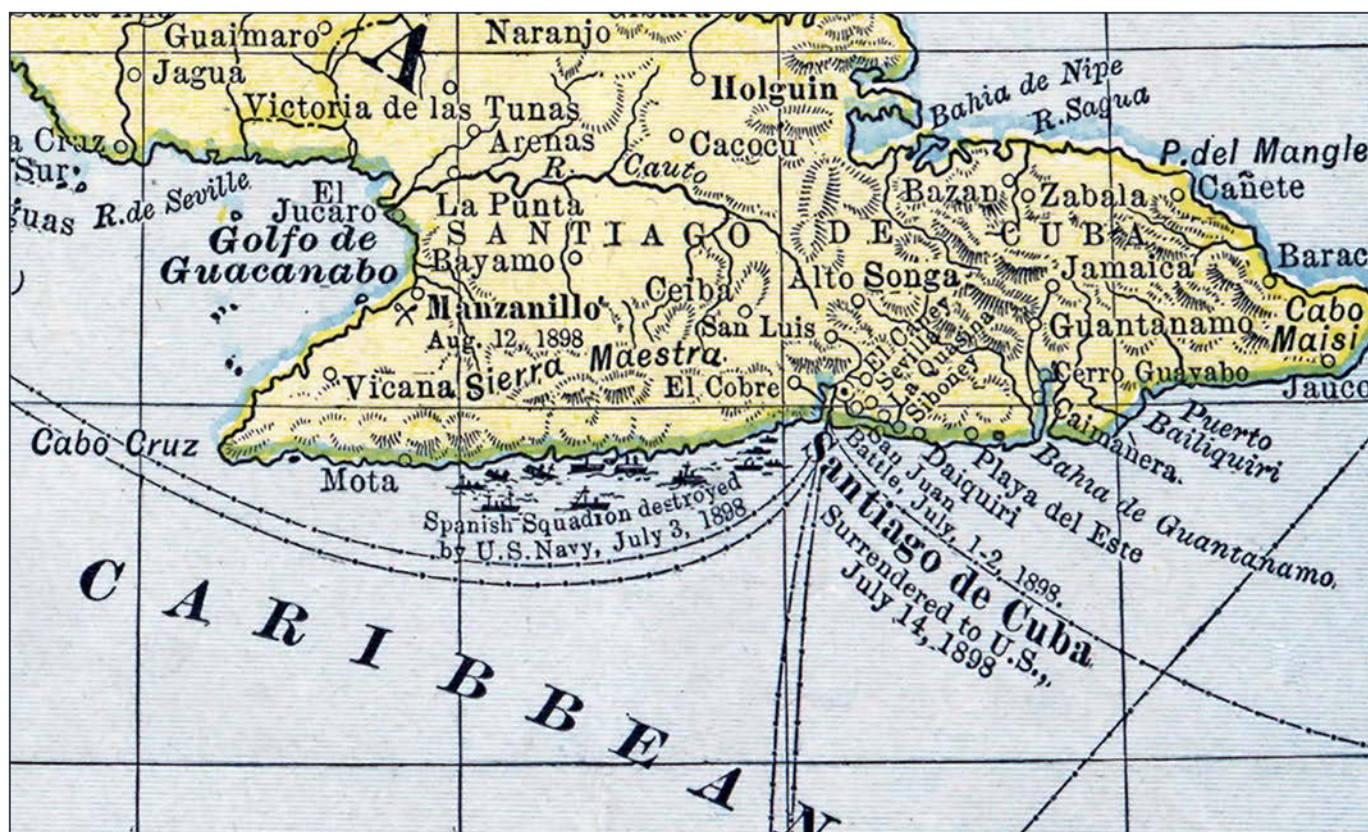
Cervera decided to attempt his escape from Santiago at 0900 on 3 July. He chose that time on the off chance that he could catch the U.S. ships by surprise during their routine Sunday morning inspections and church services. It was a forlorn hope at best. At the appointed hour, the Spanish flotilla moved out in column and the first ship, the *Infanta Maria Teresa*, cleared the harbor entrance about 0930. The U.S. ships were not caught off guard and moved quickly in pursuit. A running gun battle moving westward down the coast ensued, and in short order, the four Spanish armored cruisers and two fast torpedo boats were all sunk or run aground, too badly damaged to stay afloat.

As luck would have it, while Cervera prepared to make his dash out of the harbor, Admiral Sampson departed southeast with the *New York* for a planned meeting with General Shafter to iron out conflicting opinions and priorities on the final steps to ensure the fall of Santiago. In his absence, Sampson had left Commodore Schley in command of the blockading ships. When the alert went out that the Spanish were coming out, Sampson turned the *New York* around and raced full-speed back to the battle, arriving as the last Spanish ships were being run aground. This chain of events initiated a multiyear feud between Sampson and Schley about who should get the lion’s share of the credit for the destruction of Cervera’s flotilla. In effect, the two mighty hunters stood over the emaciated, half-starved deer carcass, both loudly claiming credit for having brought the mighty and dangerous beast down.

As the Marines of the First Marine Battalion celebrated the news of the naval victory off Santiago, they got a firsthand look at Spanish prisoners when the *Resolute* returned to Guantánamo on 4 July with 500 crewmen of the *Cristóbal Colón* on board. The remainder of July was characterized by the battalion suffering a series of transfers and detachments of Marines to other ships detachments or to guard prisoners being transported to the United

<sup>103</sup> Journal of the Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 12.





Contemporary map depicting the approximate positions of Cervera's destroyed ships in the battle of Santiago on 3 July 1898. Library of Congress

States, dropping the effective strength of the battalion to around 550 men.

On 23 July, the Spanish garrison in Caimanera surrendered, ending all organized resistance in the Guantánamo area. On 26 and 27 July, the entire contingent of Cuban insurgents who had been with the battalion since 12 June left Camp McCalla for other missions. On 31 July, the battalion ended the daily security outposts and patrols. Camp McCalla had become just that: a camp in which the battalion sat and awaited its next assignment. Huntington had concerns about his own age and physical stamina and that of his senior officers and their ability to execute follow-on combat missions. After the fighting had subsided in June, Huntington had expressed his concern in a letter to his wife: "Six months of active campaigning would clear Huntington, Harrington, Spicer and Elliott from the rolls of the battalion. I am not so sure of Cochrane because he takes such selfish care of himself that he might last unless somebody killed him."<sup>104</sup>

On 3 August, the battalion was directed to commence loading supplies and equipment aboard the *Resolute*. Lieutenant Colonel Huntington was informed that the battalion was to be

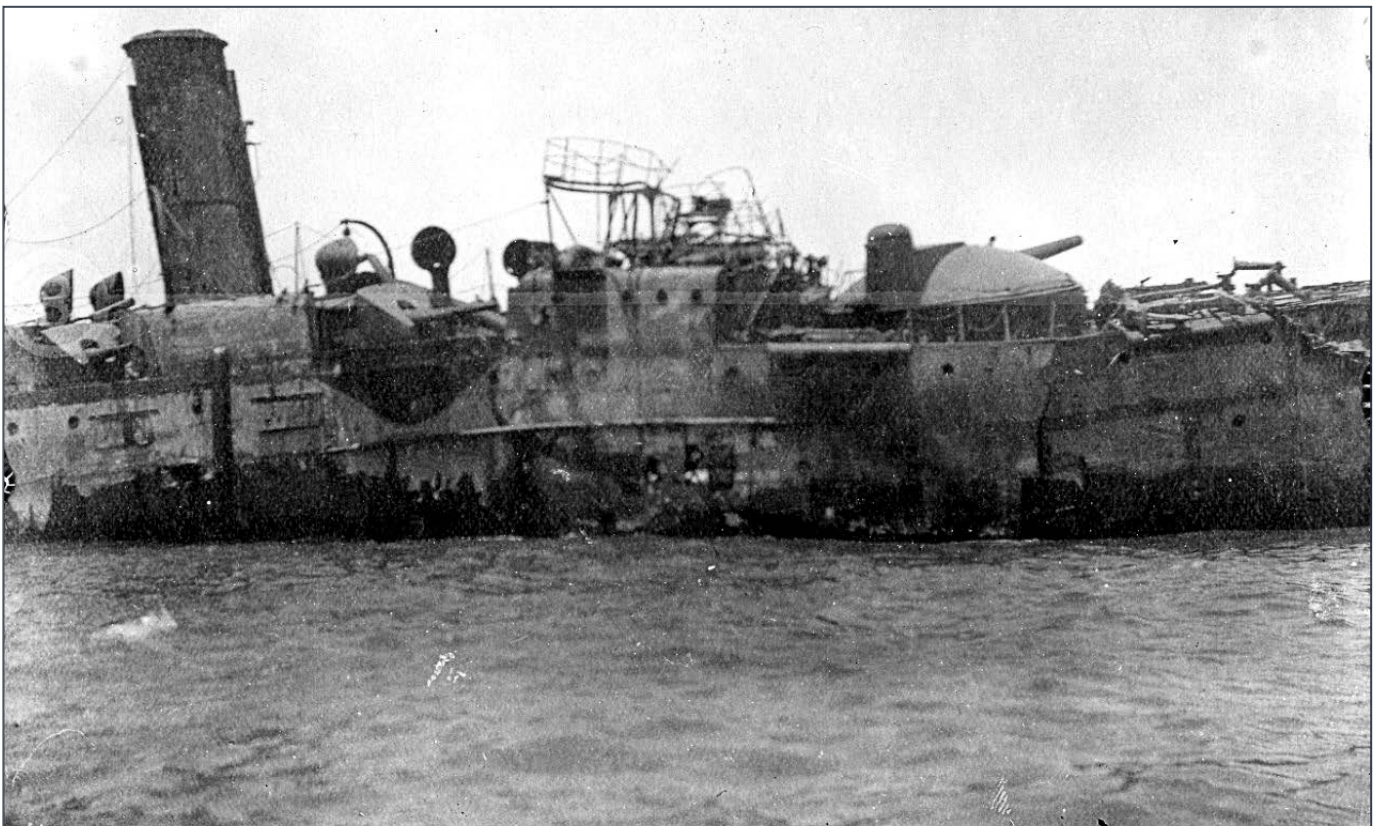
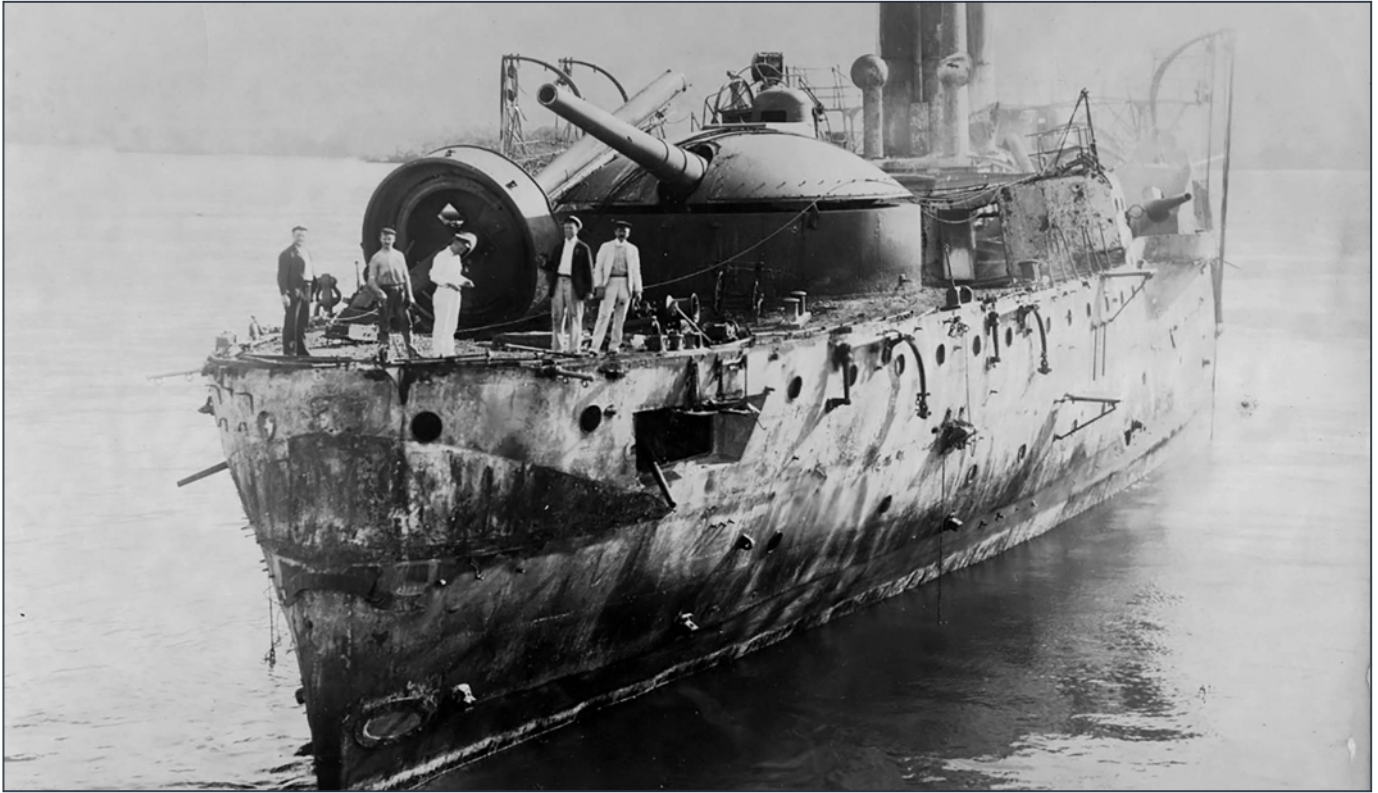
transported to the Isle of Pines, a large island off the southwest coast of Cuba. Their mission was to secure the island and its harbor as a safe anchorage for ships blockading the west coast of Cuba during the upcoming hurricane season. The mission was nebulous at best. After requesting any available military information on the island, Huntington was informed that a paper would be forwarded to him. Huntington later recorded, "This paper proved to contain general information relative to the island and the approaches to it. I had no information as to whether there was a hostile force in any part of the island."<sup>105</sup> By early evening the battalion was completely embarked on board the *Resolute* and ready to sail. The orders to move finally came late in the afternoon of 9 August when the *Resolute* left Guantánamo under the escort of the USS *Newark* (C 1).

As the *Resolute* cruised down the coast, they were afforded a close look at the wrecks of Cervera's ships west of Santiago. The *Resolute* and *Newark* soon linked up with a detachment of ships comprising the *Sumanee*, *Hist* (screw steamer), *Oseola* (AT 47), and the captured gunboat USS *Aharado* (1895) under the overall command of Captain Caspar F. Goodrich. En route to the Isle of

<sup>104</sup> LtCol Robert Huntington personal papers.

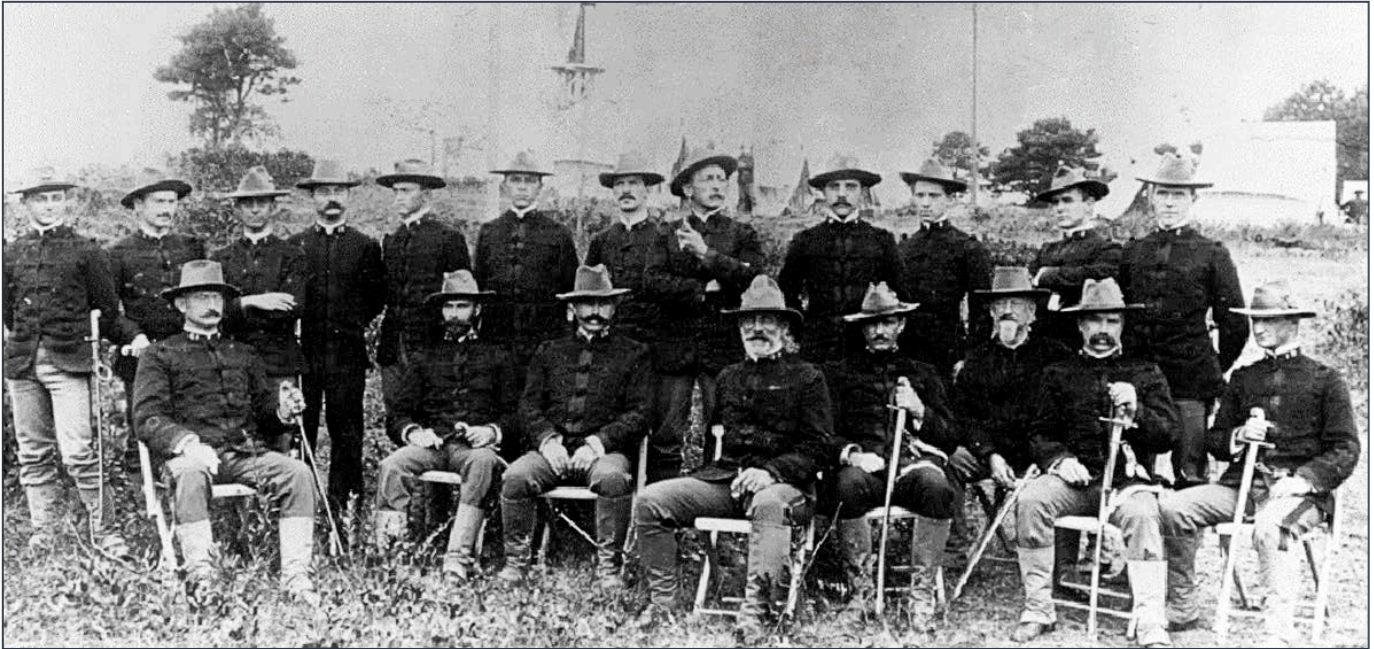
<sup>105</sup> Shulimson et al., *Marines in the Spanish American War, 1895–1898*, 119.



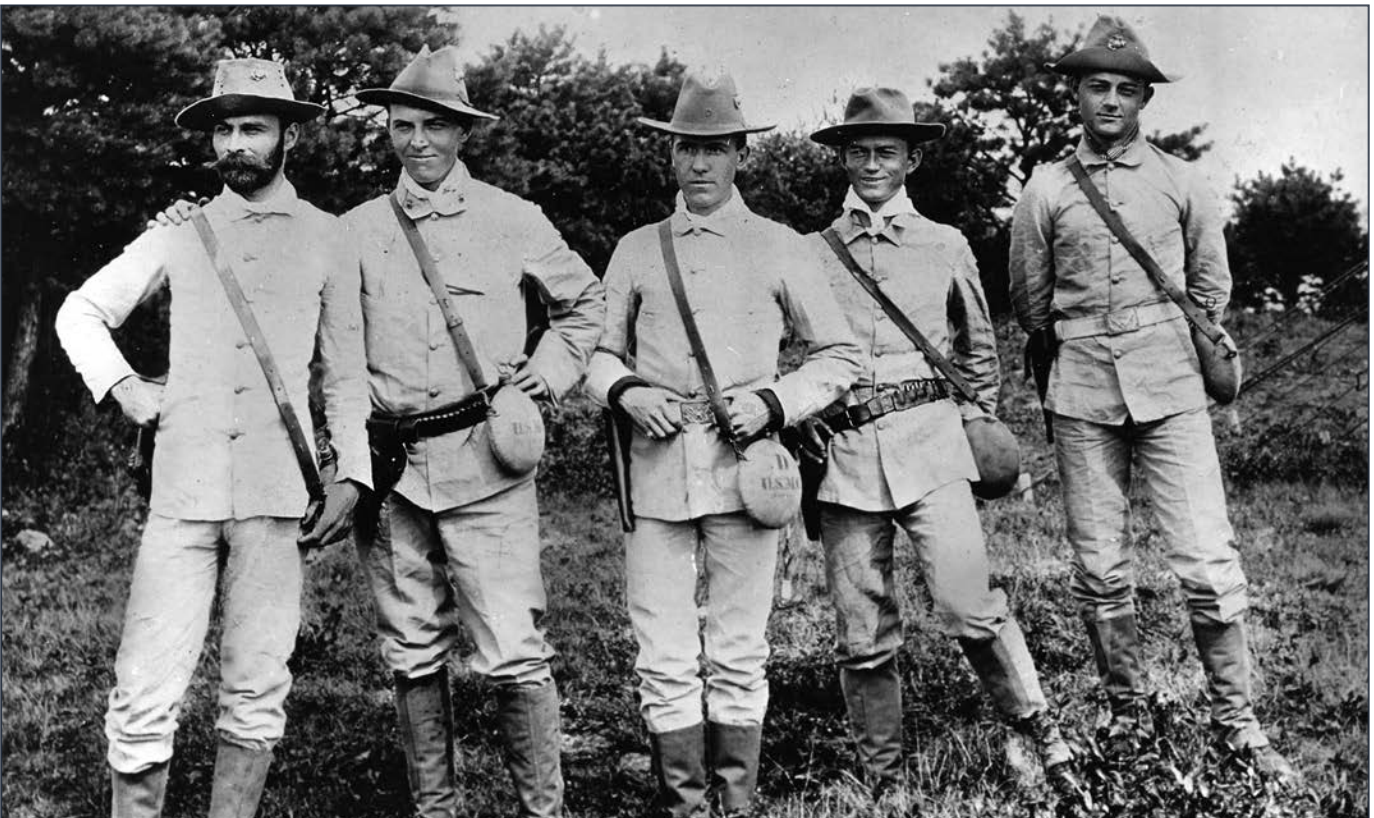


As the First Marine Battalion sailed west along the Cuban coast en route to the Isle of Pines off New Caledonia, they got a close-up look at the destroyed ships of Adm Cervera's flotilla. Shown here are two Spanish armored cruisers—*Cristóbal Colón* (bottom) and *Vizcaya* (top)—which were beached to avoid being sunk. Naval History and Heritage Command





Final photograph of the officers of the battalion (minus Maj Henry C. Cochrane). Seated left to right: 1stLt James E. Mahoney, Capt Herbert L. Draper, Col Robert W. Huntington, Maj Charles L. McCawley, LtCol Francis H. Harrington, Maj William F. Spicer, and Capt Wendell C. Neville. Standing left to right: 1stLt George C. Reid; Capt Charles G. Long; 1stLt Edwin A. Jonas; Lt John M. Edgar, MC, USN; 2dLt Newt H. Hall; Capt Clarence L. Ingate; Capt William N. McKelvy; Maj George F. Elliott; 1stLt Smedley D. Butler; Capt Philip M. Bannon; and Capt Melville J. Shaw.  
Naval History and Heritage Command



Officers of the First Marine Battalion pose at Camp Heywood, Seavey Island, in 1898. From left to right: 1stLt Lewis C. Lucas, Company C; 1stLt Clarence L. Ingate, Company B; 2dLt Melville J. Shaw, Company D; 2dLt Newt H. Hall, Company B; and 2dLt George C. Reid, Company E.  
Naval History and Heritage Command





Company training was a daily routine at Camp Sampson, Key West.  
Historical Reference Branch, Marine Corps History Division

Pines, Captain Goodrich decided to alter the mission and demand the surrender of the port of Manzanillo about 80 miles west of Santiago.

On 12 August at 1530, the squadron opened fire on the shore defenses of the town. The *Resolute* participated in the bombardment with its 6-pounder guns, while three machine gun teams from the battalion manned stations along the rails to suppress enemy small arms fire from the shore if needed. The bombardment lasted a little more than an hour, and the ships broke off the engagement and withdrew after the Spanish declined to surrender.

On the morning of 13 August, Captain Goodrich was prepared to resume the battle, to include landing the Marine battalion with reinforcements from ships detachments to seize the town's shore defenses. After two initial shots from the *Newark*, white flags appeared on the shore defenses. A boat approached from the shore also displaying a white flag. The boat was carrying the French consul, who informed Captain Goodrich that an armistice had been signed between the United States and Spain. The war was over. All hostilities had ceased, and the Marine battalion would soon be homeward bound.

## Home Again

Early on 14 August, the *Resolute* was steaming east returning to Guantánamo Bay, where she arrived at midmorning the next day. The First Marine Battalion now received the official notification that they had been ordered home. Their return voyage was delayed until the arrival of four U.S. Army artillery batteries that

would share space on the *Resolute* for the return trip to the United States. On the morning of 18 August, with all Army units now embarked, the *Resolute* set sail for Montauk Point, New York.

The *Resolute* arrived off Montauk on the morning of 23 August. After a medical inspection of all personnel on board, the Army units were cleared to go ashore and were offloaded the next day. The *Resolute* continued its journey north to Seavey Island near the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, where the Marines were disembarked on 26 August. The battalion established Camp Heywood (named for Colonel Charles Heywood) on a site personally selected by the Commandant of the Marine Corps as the ideal place for the Marines to recuperate from their operations in Cuba.

The normal medical practice of the time was to quarantine units returning from the tropics. This requirement was waived by the Commandant due to the excellent overall health of the returning Marines. During the entire deployment to Key West and Cuba, the battalion's sick list had averaged less than 2 percent, without a single disease-related death during the operation. This was truly phenomenal for a nineteenth-century military operation, as deaths due to sickness often rivaled or exceeded those actually killed in battle.

The success in maintaining the health of the Marines was directly attributable to Lieutenant Colonel Huntington's stringent practices and policies on hygiene and sanitation and the strict adherence to those policies by the leadership of the battalion. Most important was Huntington's insistence on a supply of clean water for drinking and cooking. Throughout the operation, Huntington ensured that his Marines were continuously supplied with distilled water from the ships. The battalion quartermaster, Captain McCawley, had the foresight to acquire a large number of wooden casks in Florida prior to the battalion's departure for Cuba to ensure ample storage capacity for clean water would be available when the battalion was ashore. There is no better example of this insistence on clean water than at the fight at Cuzco Well. When the battle was over and most of the Marines' canteens had been emptied, Captain Elliott did not allow his men to drink from the captured well. He was adamant that the desperately needed resupply of water be brought ashore from the *Dolphin*.

Along with stringent sanitation policies the Marines were also the beneficiaries of a bit of luck regarding the maintenance of their health. The Marine area of operations on the southeast tip of Cuba is a semiarid region and therefore did not have the mosquito problems that plagued the Army units operating in the wetter jungle areas around Santiago just 50 miles to the northwest. As a result, the Marines avoided any cases of yellow fever, a disease that ravaged their Army counterparts. As medical science of the time had yet to make the

connection between yellow fever and the mosquito, the Marines and Navy attributed the lack of yellow fever cases to good sanitation and quarantine practices rather than the fortuitous medical environment in which the Marines were operating.

On 30 August, Commandant Heywood issued a congratulatory letter to the battalion extolling their accomplishments in battle and their invaluable service to the national war effort. Lieutenant Colonel Huntington and five other officers (Elliott, Lucas, Neville, Magill, and Second Lieutenant Philip M. Bannon) were promoted for gallantry. Lucas, Neville, Magill, and Bannon received brevet or temporary promotions, and Elliott was advanced three numbers on the lineal list for seniority in his current rank.<sup>106</sup>

The battalion participated in a celebratory parade through the streets of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, across the harbor, on 16 September, advertised as “Portsmouths welcome to the heros of 98 [sic].”<sup>107</sup> The Marines were the focal point of a parade that included all of the city’s major government organizations and was viewed by a crowd estimated to exceed 20,000. The parade concluded with the battalion marching across the footbridge to Pierce Island where they stacked arms and enjoyed a celebratory dinner. The sumptuous bill of fare was documented in Private Frank Keeler’s memoirs as follows:

- Forty-eight bushels of clams
- Twenty five hundred good large lobsters
- One thousand ears of corn
- Six barrels of sweet potatoes
- Eleven hundred rolls of bread
- About one hundred and ten loaves of brown bread
- Half a barrel of pickles
- Twenty five boxes of crackers
- Fifty watermelons
- One hundred gallons of very fine coffee
- Fifty cases of beer
- Fifteen boxes of cigars<sup>108</sup>

The official order to disband the battalion was issued on 19 September 1898, and on the 20th, Camp Heywood was completely broken down and disestablished. The men of the First Marine Battalion were immediately transferred back to the various barracks and ships detachments from which they had come five months previous. Subsequent to the disbanding of the battalion, President McKinley requested an additional parade of the battalion in Washington, DC. In typical ad hoc fashion, the remnants of the battalion that were now assigned to national capital area were

mustered one last time, and with the support of the Marine band executed the parade on a rainy day on 22 September. With the conclusion of the parade, the history of the First Marine Battalion was finally closed out, and in the words of Frank Keeler, “This ended the ‘Heros of Guantanamo’ [sic] and gave them needed rest.”<sup>109</sup>

When viewed against the totality of the battle history of the Marine Corps, the fight at Guantánamo Bay was in essence a four-day skirmish that will never be listed as one of the epic battles of the Corps. At the tactical level, this operation marked some significant firsts for the Corps. The Navy’s Lee rifle, employed by the battalion, was the first modern magazine-fed smokeless powder rifle used in combat by the U.S. military. Although it had a relatively short lifecycle as the Marine standard infantry rifle, the Lee rifle proved to be effective and reliable in the hands of well-trained Marines.

The battalion also was the first U.S. ground force to employ modern air-cooled, gas-operated machine guns in combat. The Colt-Browning machine gun proved to be somewhat temperamental, requiring frequent repair. Nevertheless, the machine guns were highly effective in battle and were a key element in the Marine victory at Cuzco Well. Most important, the landing at Guantánamo was the first employment in the history of the Marine Corps of a Marine unit specifically organized and equipped as a stand-alone, mission-specific landing force to perform that mission in a combat environment in support of a naval campaign.

The Marine landing at Guantánamo Bay was in effect the first practical application of the concepts and theories on the use of Marines in modern naval operations that were central to the reform movements of the 1880s and early 1890s. The theory of a Marine Corps organized as a larger stand-alone naval landing force was first put into application in 1885 in Panama. Although a peacekeeping and stability operation, it generated a great deal of debate on the future role of the Corps. In retrospect, the 1885 Panama intervention provided a workable template for organizing and employing a mission-based Marine landing force that was repeated in 1898 when the First Marine Battalion was formed.

The irony of this professional discourse on the possibilities of a potential new mission for the Corps was that it was predominantly Navy officers advocating for the reformation of the Marine Corps into an expeditionary arm of the Navy. In his after action report of the 1885 Panama expedition, Commander McCalla recommended that the Marines spend less time in barracks and more time in summer maneuvers drilling with machine guns and field pieces in order to become more proficient in landing operations. He also advocated the formation of naval expeditionary brigades with their own transport ships as

<sup>106</sup> Journal of the Marine Battalion at Guantánamo, 21.

<sup>107</sup> Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba*, 1898, 26.

<sup>108</sup> Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba*, 1898, 26.

<sup>109</sup> Keeler, *Guantanamo Bay Cuba*, 1898, 25.

an essential element of naval operations. Prior to the outbreak of the war, it was Admiral Sampson, in an April 13 letter to Secretary of the Navy Long, who called for the formation of up to two Marine battalions specifically for the purpose of holding key points ashore to support his naval campaign.

Conversely, the senior leadership of the Marine Corps steadfastly stuck to the status quo of a Marine Corps built around ships detachments and the barracks structure. The larger issues raised by McCalla in 1885 were predominantly ignored by Marine leadership. However, it should be noted that, due to prewar budgetary restraints, the possibility of resourcing a larger expeditionary-focused Marine Corps was extremely remote. Many in the Corps feared that an underfunded expeditionary focus was the first step to absorption of the Corps by the Army.

Even after the success of the Guantánamo operation, the Commandant of the Marine Corps continued to focus on the organization of the Corps around ships detachments and the barracks as the future mission of the Service. Marine manning of secondary batteries on ships was a point of emphasis in Colonel Heywood's annual report on the state of the Marine Corps to the secretary of the Navy in September 1898. In an effort to add empirical data to his argument for maintaining Marine gun crews on Navy ships, Colonel Heywood made an unsuccessful attempt to gather quantitative data on the effectiveness of Marine gun crews on ships versus their Navy counterparts during the naval engagements of the Spanish-American War. Heywood was convinced that the status quo was the best way to keep the Corps closely aligned with the Navy's core missions and thus ensure its future existence.

The most unanticipated factor raising the status of the Marine Corps in the eyes of the nation was the laudatory press

coverage given the Guantánamo operation. The Marine battalion had no shortage of war correspondents ashore, the most notable being journalist and author Stephen Crane. From 10 to 22 June, the Marines were the only U.S. forces on enemy soil. The picture painted by the correspondents of a small Marine contingent fighting against long odds captured the full attention and admiration of the nation. If the Guantánamo operation and the Army's much larger Santiago campaign had occurred concurrently, the exploits of Huntington's Marines most assuredly would have been overshadowed and gone largely unnoticed. The eyewitness accounts of Crane and his contemporaries made instant heroes of the Marines with the American public.

In the end, the Guantánamo operation greatly enhanced the public and professional stature of the Marine Corps. This enhanced standing was successfully leveraged by the Commandant to expand future Marine Corps budgets and end strength. In his 1898 annual report to the president, even the secretary of the Navy supported an increase of the Marine Corps strength to 5,000 men. This included a recommendation to establish the position of the Commandant as a permanent general officer for the first time in Marine Corps history. George Elliott would be the first Commandant to hold permanent general officer rank when he succeeded Colonel Charles Heywood as the 10th Commandant.

When viewed against the larger issues of roles and missions within the Navy, Guantánamo was truly a transformational event for the Marine Corps. The battle of Guantánamo was a significant institutional transition point between the traditional missions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of providing detachments afloat and guarding naval shore installations, and the twentieth-century missions of a self-contained naval landing force employed in support of naval operations and campaigns.







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## **About the Author**

Jerry A. Roberts is a graduate of Georgia Southern University in Statesboro. He retired after 38 years of U.S. government service that included 23 years with the Marine Corps, from which he retired as a lieutenant colonel, and 15 years of civilian service with the Joint Warfare Analysis Center in Dahlgren, Virginia.



