

THE FORGOTTEN REGIMENT:

The Seventh California and the Spanish-American War

by *Louis A. Di Donato*

With the poor of this earth
I want to share my faith;
The streams of the mountains
Pleases me more than the sea.

José Martí, Cuban patriot

In the late 1890s America at last was forced to come to grips with the Cuban issue and answer a much broader question of whether the United States should become a world power. Cuba had long been a highly emotional issue even in a place as isolated from world politics as southern California. It is true some Americans were motivated to “liberate” Cuba for strictly out of self-economic interests. Some were motivated by a desire to build a world empire. Looking back in hindsight 1898 might very well be called “Year One of the Empire.” Inasmuch as there maybe some truth in this, many ordinary Americans saw the war with Spain as a crusade to set Cuba free. In the final analysis it was not the Hearsts, the Morgans, or the Rockefellers who went off to fight. In the words of the *Pomona Daily Progress*, “the men who fight the battles of the country and bear its burdens in times of peace are not found on Wall Street, but on the farms, in the workshops, in the stores and places of business throughout the land engaged in useful avocations.”¹

After the mysterious sinking of the battleship *U.S.S. Maine* in Havana harbor on February 15 relations between the United States and Spain deteriorated. Both nations attempted to avoid war. The issue was Cuba. Spain had ruthlessly put down Cuban uprisings for independence throughout the cen-

ture. Many Americans had backed the Cuban cause. In the beginning of April Spain asked the Holy See for Pope Leo XIII to serve as mediator between the United States and Spain with regard to the differences over Cuba. This seemed to be a promising avenue to pursue. However, because of internal American politics, President William McKinley could not accept a papal brokered settlement regardless how advantageous it might be. While diplomatic moves were being played out Congress began debate on the Cuban Resolution. There were three main points to the resolution: First, the United States recognized Cuba as a free and independent nation. Second, Spain would have to relinquish all control over the island. Third, the president be authorized to use all military and naval forces "and to call into actual service of the United States the militia of the several States to such extent as may be necessary to carry these resolutions."² While the resolution was being debated the *Los Angeles Evening Express* counseled its readers to be patient that the war would come. "It is now the last scene in the last act of her bloody drama in the New World. . . ," the newspaper editorialized, "when the curtain is rung down it will be on the Western hemisphere cleansed of Spanish presence on any portion of American soil."³ The Cuban resolution passed both houses of Congress by April 19. President McKinley gave Spain until noon of April 23 to withdraw from Cuba. When Spain refused to do so, the United States went to war.

So it had finally come down to war. The *Los Angeles Times*, on the same side of the issue as its rival the *Evening Express*, called for war made so terrible that Spain would make peace in a very short time. In an editorial on April 20, the *Times* wrote:

If we are going to fight with the haughty dons of Spain, we trust our government will overestimate the strength of the enemy rather than underestimate it, and that we will go into this thing with determination to make slaughter and destruction so terrific at the outset that the war will be one of the shortest in history. . . War means kill, and there is wisdom in making the killing so terrible as to strike terror to the Spanish heart. We can sweep Cuba as a housewife dusts off a bit of bric-a-brac on a mantel, and it should be our particular business to dust the troops of Spain out of that island with a rush and a roar.⁴

Young men all over the country began to gather at National Guard armories or to enlist in the United States Army. Civil War veterans wished they could also enlist. The *Times* suggested veterans of Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans be given the sacred duty of guarding Washington during the war. A man named Edward Bouton sent a

telegram to President McKinley on behalf of five thousand Union and Confederate veterans offering their services.⁵ The services of the old soldiers was politely turned down. The veterans of both the blue and the gray did send their best wishes to Company I of Pasadena in an open letter in the *Pasadena Daily News*.

In Los Angeles, San Diego, Pasadena and other southern California communities men not in the army or National Guard nevertheless answered the call to arms. "Home guard" units were spring up all over the Southland. In Los Angeles men could enlist in the "Los Angeles Battalion of Volunteers" or an outfit calling itself "First Southern California Cavalry Regiment." In San Diego a home guard "Committee on Permanent Organization," as they styled themselves, had hopes of raising an army of 500 volunteers.⁶ Out of these would be a bicycle corps with the wheelmen carrying rifles. In Pasadena the Americus Club discussed the creation of an "independent company" which would be made up of men with knowledge of how to use firearms.⁷ They could serve as a home guard to defend southern California or be called into active military duty. Some Pasadena businessmen and merchants organized their own home guard. The *Daily News* did not think much of these amateur armies made up of stay-at-home soldiers. In May 10 editorial the newspaper stated:

. . . we have but little respect or consideration for that secret spirit which might be voiced in this way: "It is the popular thing to have military bearing. We will organize a nice, select company and drill to perfection. We will be the admiration of the town. Our blue suits will set us off to perfection and our silver and bronze will sparkle in the sunlight of the street or in the electric ballroom. Oh, we will be the admiration of the girls of the town. But we will not go to the front. Oh no! We are rich. We will let those poor fellows go to the front."

Away with such snobbish, spurious patriotism! It isn't fit for America. Yes, organize home companies. But organize in a manner and a spirit that will be prepared to go to the front when needed. Our National Guard boys [Company I] have set the example.⁸

Wednesday evening, April 20, the first train of soldiers bound for Cuba stopped at River Station in Los Angeles. They were Batteries C and F, Third Artillery United States Army, 153 strong, stationed at the Presidio in San Francisco. They were one of the first units to be called up.⁹ According to the *Times* "thousands of patriotic citizens" turned out to see the boys in blue. Although the train did not arrive until 7:30 p.m., the crowd began to gather late in the afternoon. While officers and men were going about their duties civilian well wishers poured on to the train. Captain Ramesey D. Potts, the

most senior officer aboard the train, received a delegation of Los Angeles officials, which included Mayor Meredith P. Synder, General Charles List and Harrison Gray Otis, the publisher of the *Times*. It was only a brief stop, however. Women and children threw flowers into the railroad cars. The Chamber of Commerce gave out two boxes of oranges for each of the several cars. There were many heart-warming scenes. One little girl broke free of her mother to hand an officer a bouquet of roses. The officer was attending to other duties at the moment and had not noticed her. Finally she threw the flowers at his feet. The officer lifted her up, gave her a kiss and told her "God bless you little one!" An eight-year-old boy asked another officer, "say mister can't you take me with you. I'll fight the Spanish." The officer took time out from what he was doing and explained to the boy that the journey on which he was going on was not one which little boys could go. Finally at 9:05 p.m. the troop train pulled out of River Station. Every locomotive in the yard gave a blast with their whistles along with the cheers of the multitude assembled; the sound was deafening.

In the Pomona Valley of southern California the news of the outbreak of the war was greeted with enthusiasm. On Monday night April 18, while the Cuban Resolution was being debated, a crowd of a few hundred people surrounded the Western Union office in downtown Pomona. The town's telegraph operator, Ida Shutt, had agreed to remain on duty until word came through from Washington whether the resolution had passed. As the evening went on a collection was taken up for Miss Shutt's services. The crowd, anticipating passage of the resolution, wanted to show the world where Pomona stood on the issue. Some thought of sending up fireworks for the occasion, however, there was none at hand. Constable Frank Slanker made the mistake of mentioning he had several sticks of dynamite at his home near Chino. The crowd urged him to go home and fetch the explosives without delay; it wasn't fireworks, but it would do. When Slanker returned it was just after midnight. At 12:15 a.m. Miss Shutt received word Congress had passed the resolution. The dynamite was immediately taken to an empty lot across from the railroad tracks and exploded. This display of patriotism rocked the entire valley. Those residence of Pomona not already awake hurried from their beds and out into the streets to see what the commotion was about.¹⁰

The standard bearers of this noble crusade from the Pomona Valley were the men of Company D, Seventh Regiment, California National Guard. Company D was organized in April 1886; at the time it was known as the Pomona City Guard. The leading businessmen and professionals men filled its ranks.



Pomona, Thursday morning, May 5, 1898: Company D board their train surrounded by well-wishers.

Courtesy Pomona Public Library, Pomona.

Their uniforms were a collection of old Civil War garb. In November 1887, the Pomona City Guard was formally accepted as a unit of the state militia. For years the social life of the community centered on the Guard unit. During the anti-Chinese disturbances at Redlands in the summer of 1893, the company stood by awaiting orders to go into active service. Those orders never came. Until 1895 the company's armory was the Pomona Opera House. In November of that year the Opera House burned down taking the company's uniforms, equipment, banners and trophies with it. A new Opera House was built, however, the company rented a small building on Second Street to serve their needs. When the war broke out in April 1898, the company consisted of forty-five men from Pomona, nineteen from Ontario, twelve from Chino, eleven from Lordsburg (La Verne), six from North Pomona, two from Los Angeles, and one each from Covina, Claremont, Puente and Spadra.

After the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* the captain of Company D, Terrell

B. Thomas, took prudent action by stepping up drill and target practice instruction. While the nation prepared for war Company D waited to be called up.

In the early morning hours of Friday, April 22, a troop train of United States Army soldiers passed through Pomona bound for Key West. The early hour did not discourage a mob of well wishers from descending on the Pomona depot. Nagged by the crowd all evening long with the question "what time will the soldiers go through," drove the station attendant to hide under his desk.¹¹ Down the line in Ontario the Model Colony gathered fruit baskets for the troops in hopes the train would stop there. The train did make a brief stop in Pomona, but continued on passed Ontario.

On Monday evening, April 25, a reception was held for Company D by the Fruit and Flower Mission Girls at the new Opera House. The Opera House was decked out in red, white and blue. Pomona's most prominent citizen's were in attendance. The program began with a drill squad of the company marching down the center aisle. After the squad went through its routine they were followed up by singing and patriotic readings from such notables as Russell Pitzer. The evening's festivities were concluded by the singing of *America* by all those present.¹² When the celebration was over the company returned to civilian pursuits to wait for orders of their anticipated call-up.

As the days passed the wait was become disappointing. In early dispatches it appeared Company D would not be going to Cuba, but remain in California to protect the coast against and/any surprise attack. Then on Monday, May 2, a telegram came through which suggested the company might be sent into action in the Philippines to aid Commodore Dewey.¹³ A day after this Captain Thomas received orders to have the company prepared to move out at a "moment's notice." Already a citizens committee was planing a grand send off. Kerchoff-Cuzner, a Pomona lumber company, donated lumber to build bleachers around the bandstand at Main and First streets. The bandstand would be lit up by electric lights. Finally orders arrived. On Wednesday, May 4, the company went through a drill on Second Street outside their armory; a thousand school children lined the street waving American flags. That evening four thousand people jammed the area around the bandstand. The *Daily Progress* described the scene:

It is once in a life time that citizens of Pomona have the opportunity of giving a hearty and rousing send off to volunteers going to the front to protect the nation's honor and flag, and the demonstration last evening strongly indicated that everyone present realized that fact as was there to make the most of it.¹⁴

Just after 6 p.m. a cannon boomed alerting everyone that the evening's activities had begun. Company D began a short march north from the armory up Gary Avenue then west on First Street to the bandstand. When they reached the bandstand they could not help but see a large banner with the slogan "Remember the Maine." Frank Rayner, a member of the city council, served as master of ceremonies. The skies were cloudy, but a full moon managed to break through. There were again patriotic readings and singing of songs. The boys of Company D were given advice on the military way of doing things by Civil War vets. One speaker, Sidney M. Huskel, set the tone for the evening. "America occupies today," he said, "a more majestic position among nations than ever before; and her unselfish aid of Cuba, to put an end to her horrors in the name of humanity and secure for her the precious boon of liberty, our country is giving the world an object lesson as it never before witnessed."¹⁵ The proceedings again closed with the singing of *America*. The company marched back to the armory for the next day they were to board the train for Los Angeles and join the rest of the regiment.

The next morning the troop train departed from Pomona. Some of the Ontario men had boarded earlier in Ontario; others joined the rest of the company and got on in Pomona. Already the train was carrying Company G (Redlands), Company K (San Bernardino) and Company M (Riverside). Two train cars at the Pomona station had been sidetracked, these had been set aside for Company D. The Fruit and Flower Mission Girls had decorated the cars. When the train pulled into Pomona the two cars were coupled to it; the boys of the company made ready for their departure. This departure was not accomplished without tearful farewells from families and friends. The well wishers provided the boys with oranges, nuts and cigars for the trip. The scene reminded the old vets of their departure long ago in 1861.¹⁶ So Company D joined the rest of the Seventh Regiment and began an odyssey which they hoped would carry them to the battlefields of the Philippines.

In Los Angeles the armory on Eighth near Main had been a beehive of activity since the early morning hours. Officers had been up all night checking and re-checking to be sure that men and equipment were in readiness. Their corporals were summoning members of the Los Angeles companies who had not checked in. In the middle of all of it Company B, who had come up from San Diego the day before, did what they could to get some sleep. At dawn a large crowd began to gather outside the armory to see what was afoot. Members of the Los Angeles Companies A, C and F had reported in; their baggage was sent ahead to River Station where the Seventh would be boarding a train to Oakland.



Redlands, Thursday morning, May 5, 1898: Company G marches down Orange Street on their way to the train depot.
Courtesy A.K. Smiley Public Library, Redlands.

The plans that morning was to parade up Main Street through downtown and arrive at the station for an 11 a.m. departure. By 9 a.m. companies from Pasadena and Santa Ana had arrived, but the train from Pomona was running late. The day had turned warm. Some of the men began to grumble over the delay while girl friends, mothers and wives used the opportunity to visit a bit longer. During the morning a group of employees from the Broadway Department Store, led by Mrs. Arthur Letts, arrived at the armory and asked to speak with General Charles List. The general was not available, however, Colonel John Berry who commanded the Seventh was. The Broadway employees presented him with a large American flag. "The employees of the Broadway," said Mrs. Letts, "wishing to show their appreciation for the brave boys who are so willing to fight for us, hereby lovingly tender this flag to you.

We are proud of our troops. May they return covered with glory.”¹⁷ Berry accepted the flag on behalf of the Seventh.

At 11 a.m. the train from Pomona at last arrived. The units on board marched to the armory so the parade could begin without further delay. Beside the Seventh Regiment the parade included a number of honor guards, there were members of the Americus Club of Pasadena and the Grand Army of the Republic, bands from Los Angeles High School and the Whittier Reform School. A man from the Jonathan Club dressed as Uncle Sam led the line of march. There were mounted police and the fire department contributed some fire engines. The streets were draped in red, white and blue. The *Evening Express* reported:

It was a kaleidoscope of color, and emotions of laughter and joy of devotion, lofty patriotism, and abnegation, the farewell to the citizen soldiers by Los Angeles this morning. From the lisping child in arms up, there was not a person there who can ever forget the scene. . .

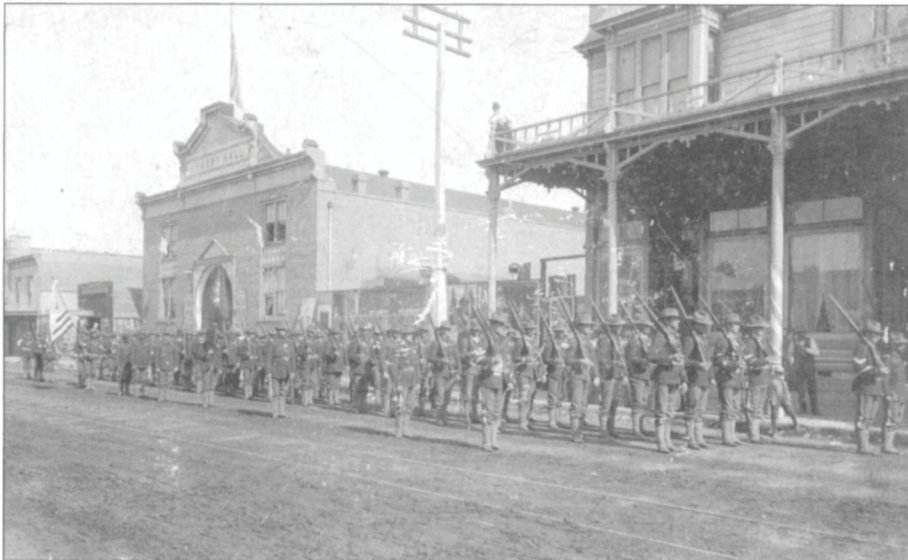
It is as impossible to paint the noise, the shouts, the transcendent enthusiasm that prevailed as it is to picture in words the overwhelming colors of masses of the red, white and blue, the myriads of people which filled the thoroughfares from building shoulders of the marching troops—the men, women and children all animated by the same sentiment that prompted the men they were watching to go forth to the ordeal of battle for their country .¹⁸

The *Times* estimated a crowd of 25,000 people lined the parade route. “Never has Los Angeles,” reported the *Times*, “seen a crowd so large, nor so enthusiastic.” At River Station large crowds gathered. An African American woman, “whose heart was as big as she was,” announced her intention to kiss all one thousand or so members of the Seventh. This simple heart felt comment was met with a good natured roar of laughter from those assembled and no doubt took some of the tension away from the moment. At 1 p.m. the train finally pulled out of River Station with the band playing *The Girl I Left Behind Me*.¹⁹

At Suaugus the Seventh was joined by Company E (Santa Paula) and Company H (Ventura). The train reached Mojave at 5 p.m. and was greeted by gusty winds and blowing sand. It was evening when they passed through the Tahachapi and crossed into the San Joaquin Valley. At every stop along the way they were greeted by crowds of people even at three in the morning when they passed through Tulare. At 10 a.m. Friday morning the Southland boys arrived in Oakland and were ferried across the bay; eventually arriving at the Presidio of San Francisco.

Ironically the Presidio was originally founded as an outpost of the Spanish Empire in the late eighteenth century. The Seventh would be the first of many regiments to pitch their tents there since there were no barracks for Guard units. The Seventh was given a site on a gentle sloping hill overlooking the northeast corner of the city. The men were issued two blankets each and a supply of hay to serve as a mattress. They were given rations of canned meat and crackers which was a step above the sandwiches they had for three meals aboard the train.²⁰ Once the Seventh had their tents set up there was nothing left to do but wait.

In a few days the Seventh Regiment took physicals which turned out to be a disaster; over 150 men failed to pass the exams and were sent home. In spite of this the *Daily News* did not want the efforts of those sent home to go unsung. "The boys coming home . . . deserve the same credit as those who go to the front," the newspaper announced. "They displayed the same grit and patriotism as those who were accepted." Company D lost nine enlisted men and two officers, Captain Thomas and Lieutenant George Phillips. They were replaced by Captain Harry T. Matthews of Santa Ana and Lieutenant John A. Eason of Riverside. The company resented the way their officers were



Ventura's Company H marching outside of their armory on Main Street.
Courtesy Ventura County Museum of History and Art.

treated. They were under the impression Governor James Budd used the opportunity to pay off a political debt. When Thomas and Phillips were relieved, Lieutenant Ernest Reynolds resigned in protest.²¹ In Pomona some of the upset citizens sent telegrams of protest to the governor. State Senator S. N. Androus went to Sacramento on behalf of his Pomona Valley constituents to conduct an investigation. Androus, satisfied with the answers to his inquiries, told the *Daily Progress* that "nothing has been done at which exception can be taken." "All officers of the company," he continued, "as well as a good many of the enlisted men failed to pass the board of examining surgeons."²² Meanwhile the Seventh was sworn into the United States Army, which meant that it would take an order from the president to change things. Captain Thomas did appeal to Washington, but nothing came of it. The last hope for the company to have a local man as an officer was in the hoped for promotion of Sergeant Charles Dudley to second lieutenant. Samuel Crawford of Los Angeles, however, was chosen instead. Most of the men accepted the situation. Private W. Thomas Scott wrote in a letter to his brother, "I didn't join the company for the officers' sake." The vacancies created by those enlisted men that failed the physical were quickly filled by new recruits from the Pomona Valley.

The men did the best to make the most of the situation they found themselves in. It was difficult to adjust. A curfew line went up around the camp that was manned by army regulars. Only a few were allowed to leave the Presidio at a time. Any soldier attempting leave without permission was subject to arrest. The cooking was not what the men expected either. Alba Hartt wrote home to his mother, "the army ration is too rough for any one to break in on at once after home cooking."²³ Hartt and some of his friends were able to take in some of the sights of San Francisco. A woman in Chinatown who they claimed had feet two and a half inches long fascinated them.

Back home a citizens group raised enough money to send Company D sixty pounds of butter, sixty dozen eggs and one hundred boxes of oranges. In Ontario the Sunset Telephone Company offered a direct connection to the Presidio for anyone who wanted to call. The *Daily Progress* set aside a column on the front page for letters or news from the company. Newspapers from other Southland communities did the same. The *Evening Express* devoted two columns ever few days with news about the Seventh and in particular the Los Angeles companies.

The Seventh passed its time by drilling six times a day. While not drilling the men were left to their own devices to fill their time. Archie Price of Com-

pany I was employed by *Colyer's Weekly*, a magazine published in New York, as a photographer. Price was given a new camera and was paid quite well by the publisher for his photos.²⁴ The much popular Captain Robert Wankowski of Company A became the master of a card game known as whist (later as bridge) and was known to be the best in the entire camp.²⁵

On one dark and stormy night Major Frank C. Prescott tried to take a short cut back to his tent. However, a sentry from Company H outflanked the major's plans. The major was stopped at bayonet point by a private who turned out to be Frank C. Prescott, Jr.²⁶ Perhaps the most interesting story belonged to Linton Weeks of Company L (Santa Ana). While walking around the camp one day he encountered a sentry from a Kansas regiment. Weeks quickly recognized the man as his long lost brother who he had not seen since childhood.²⁷ Neither man knew the other was in the same camp.

Elsewhere in California the home front was not sitting ideal. While the Cuban Resolution was still being debated the Los Angeles Theater was staging a series of tableaux depicting the events in Cuba along with its regular fare of entertainment. These tableaux could be compared to the newsreels of a later era. Just a few days after the Seventh Regiment left for San Francisco a patriotic concert was held at the theater. Speeches were delivered by Rev. Burt Estes Howard and William Harris with introductions made by Harrison Gray Otis. The Seventh Regiment band, conducted by George Cann, performed an original piece, *The General Rosecrans March*. William Rosecrans, the Civil War general, a long-time resident of Los Angeles and state senator, had passed away only recently. Mary Linch sang an aria from Verdi and was given a standing ovation. There were, of course, patriotic tunes as well. The real show stopper was when Miss Linch, joined by a chorus, sang the *Star-Spangled Banner*, which was not yet the national anthem. The show closed with the band playing John Philip Sousa's *Stars and Strips*.²⁸ Other theaters helped to whip up patriotism as well. The Burbank Theater staged a children's play, proceeds for which would go to help the Navy buy a new battleship.

On the home front there was concern over the defense of the West Coast. Los Angeles, Santa Monica and Orange County, in spite of the "home guards," were defenseless if attacked by sea. The *Times* pointed this out during the first days of the war:

Of all cities in America, there are none more exposed than Los Angeles, and although an attack is merely a remote possibility, should a well manned privateer come sneaking along the coast some night and disembark her crew at San Pedro or Santa Monica, situated as we are today, there would be little defensive force

available except a levy of citizens as might be called together, with a few hundred kinds of firearms, of little account and very little ammunition. It is not too much to ask the government to at once detail a force of troops for the garrisoning of this city commensurate with our position, exposure, and needs.²⁹

The entrance to San Diego Bay was mined to ward off any surprise attack. As the *San Diego Sun* put it, "the enemy will have to make his way over a maze of lurking death."³⁰ The only ship this "maze of lurking death" came to close destroying was the yacht *Annie Laurie* which strayed too near a mine buoy. After warning shots were fired from an on shore battery the yacht's skipper changed direction.³¹

In Los Angeles a German employee of a downtown restaurant committed the indiscretion of stating his opinion about the war too openly in a cigar stop. The other patrons took matters into their own hands, leading the man outside to a nearby fire hydrant. They turned on the hydrant and gave him a good dunking.³²

Then there were the cases of the Spanish spies. Two men, who were acting suspicious aboard the steamer *Santa Rosa*, were kept under surveillance and turned over to authorities in San Diego.³³ A similar incident took place aboard a Southern Pacific train. Two men were held for question for supposedly plotting the assassination of Governor James Budd. In neither case could anything be proved.

An interesting consequence of home front patriotism effected the few remaining Californio families. Throughout the decade the press had referred to the *Californios* as being "Spanish" or of "Spanish blood." With the onset of the war these noble descendants of Castile-Leon were now known as "Spanish-Americans." Any suggestion of disloyalty on the part of the *Californios*, what few remained, would border on the ludicrous. The flag of Spain had vanished from California almost eighty years before. Their cultural identity was more Mexican than Spanish.

As for the war the American armed forces were indeed sweeping the Spanish "as a housewife dusts off a bit of bric-a-brac on the mantel." On May 1 American naval forces, under the command of Commodore George Dewey, destroyed the Spanish Philippine fleet in Manila Bay. Naval forces also captured Guam. Under Admiral William T. Sampson the Navy was able to bottle up the Spanish fleet in Santiago Bay, Cuba. The Army, under the command of General William R. Shafter, laid siege to Santiago with the capture of the hills outside of the city. On July 3 the Spanish fleet tried to break free and run the American blockade. This resulted in the destruction of

another Spanish fleet and on July 17 the surrender of Spanish land forces in Santiago. On July 25 General Nelson A. Miles began the invasion of Puerto Rico which would fall in a matter of days.

In San Francisco the enthusiasm in the ranks which had been so plentiful in April had by July completely disappeared. Day after day the companies of the Seventh Regiment remained waiting while other outfits sailed out of the Golden Gate. "To sit idly by and watch expedition after expedition sail from San Francisco composed of men who enlisted later and not as well equipped is enough to make the Pomona boys denounce their treatment as an outrage with a very strong adjective in front of it," commented the *Daily Progress*. Governor James Budd appealed to the secretary of war to send more California regiments into action as a "special favor." Senator Stephen White and Congressman James Maguire both telegraphed the president specifically requesting the Seventh be sent to Manila.³⁴ So did the businessmen of Los Angeles through the Merchants and Manufacturers Association.

This renewed talk of being sent to the Philippines lifted the spirits among the men of the Seventh. Privates Christy and Pomeroy of Company C bought a camera so they could capture the adventure in photos. Harry Johnson of Company K, perhaps the only man in the regiment to have been in the Philippines, spoke well of the women of Manila.³⁵

By May 31 the regiment had been moved to Camp Merritt in Golden Gate Park. Shortly after their arrival they were hit with an out break of German measles; an ominous foretaste of what was to come. Because of the haste and disorganization, which so characterized life at the Presidio, the Seventh was forced to live under appalling conditions. The new site had previously been occupied by a regiment from South Dakota who mercifully been ordered out. A New York regiment then camped there. However, their commanding officer, Colonel Barber, ordered his men out after just one day. "It was not fit place for men to live," said Barber. The San Francisco Board of Health demanded the site be closed down. "The place was a stench in the public nostrils," reported the *Times*, "and its foul odors were carried blocks into the city."³⁶ It was referred to by many as a "sand hole." The site had also been used as a cemetery for paupers, a discovery made after remains were unearthed. On top of the refuse left behind by other regiments the Seventh was ordered to make camp; unsanitary would be only a mild term to describe the situation. The frustration and anguish suffered by the Seventh was best summed up in a letter written by Private J.F. Pressnall of Company I which was printed

in the *Daily News*. Pressnall wrote with amazing clarity and articulation for a man whose profession was listed in the company roster as a “laborer:”

In addition to the distinction of having been the first volunteer regiment encamped at the Presidio . . . and among the first to be sworn into the United States service, it was an acknowledged reputation of having rendered an unquestioning obedience to military discipline upon all occasions, to a greater degree than any other command in San Francisco, of being the best drilled, the best equipped regiment on the ground. This is only victory won by the Seventh, these bloodless laurels alone save us from returning empty-handed and unadorned. . . . Still on the whole, in view of these six expeditions which have carried troops to duty and glorious service at Manila, up on every one of which we have been promised a place upon none of which we have received one. Upon two of which we have even had a guard upon the boats [the *Arizona* and the *Scandia*], only to be subjected at the last minute to the humiliation of having the transport that was to be ours taken from us and given to another and inferior command. In view of the encampment for these months in the sand and amid the utterly unsanitary and unhealthy environments of Camp Merritt, when there were every day of that time accommodations in the barracks and at the Presidio for the entire regiment, a process which has resulted in the death of at least fifteen men in the regiment. In view of all this, I am confident that I represent the sentiment of the Seventh in saying that in mustering us out of the service the war department is doing about the only thing it ever did or could do to please the regiment.³⁷

Perhaps a most telling incident took place on Thursday, July 14. The regiment had just completed a drill and was standing at attention as the band was playing the *Star Spangled Banner*. A loud cheer went up from where regiments from the Montana and South Dakota were camped; it was clear to the men of the Seventh they had been passed over again. They marched back to their tents in the silence of anger and disappointment.³⁸ Adding to their misery was they had not been paid on time, a grand sum of \$13 a month. “Well, I’m hanged if I don’t think Uncle Sam is a funny kind of business man,” one corporal told the *Evening Express*, “but I suppose it has to go.”

Life at Camp Merritt became more boring with each passing day. To pass their time Companies C and F rigged up a telegraph line between their tents. A bulletin board was erected near the cook tent of Company I where all kinds of reports were posted. “It is rumored that the supposition,” read one bulletin, “that the Seventh will remain behind to clean up various camps is incorrect.” William Scott, Harry Parsons, Oscar and Howard Marshall of Company B found time to form a barbershop quartet. In spite of the dull monotony of camp life the Seventh had many friends. The families of San Francisco

opened up their homes to the troops. The Catholic Ladies Aid Society provided a place where the men could go to read, write and get their uniforms mended regardless of religious affiliation.

The sweetheart of Company B was a San Diego girl named Louisa Heilbron. So thankful was the company for her many acts of kindness they bought her a gold watch which was engraved with her initials and below the words "Company B, Seventh Regiment California Infantry, USA, June 30, 1898."³⁹

Perhaps the greatest tribute to comradeship took place among the men of Company D. Captain Matthews had taken command under difficult circumstances. He proved, however, to be not only a good officer, but also a good friend. The men of Company D expressed their gratitude by presenting him with a sword.⁴⁰

The Seventh's last hope of seeing action was in the person of Harrison Gray Otis. The publisher of the *Times* was given a commission as a brigadier general and was given orders to leave for the Philippines. Surely Otis would be taking southern California's own Seventh Regiment into action? The editor of the *Times*, L. E. Mosher, sent a telegram to the president on behalf of his boss asking the Seventh be placed under Otis' command.⁴¹ The feelings among the men of the Seventh toward General Otis grew ambivalent in a very short time. Although he might be the regiment's last chance to see action in the war, his orders were greeted with disbelief and rage. Before Otis arrived up to twenty-five passes were issued to each company a night so men could go into the city. After taking command he gave new orders that only five passes were to be issued and imposed a 10 p.m. curfew. On Sunday, July 17, a delegation of men from the Seventh went to the general's headquarters in hopes of meeting with Otis. The general did not make an appearance and his staff officers ordered the men to return to their tents.⁴² When Otis sailed for Manila without the Seventh all hope of going into action was gone.

On August 13 the fighting between the United States and Spain came to an end. The future military service of outfits such as the Seventh was in doubt. The men were told to keep their opinions about their current situation to themselves or face disciplinary action. This did not keep them from expressing their feelings. The Associated Press conducted interviews with one hundred enlisted men in the Seventh; they all told the AP they should be sent home.⁴³ A similar poll was conducted by the *Times* with the same results. Colonel Berry was furious such polls should be taken considering them "unmilitary." He ordered his men not to take part. In a letter to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, printed in the *Times*, Tuesday, September 6, Berry

said "agitation among the men to be mustered out was the work of a few malcontents."⁴⁴ He was obsessed by the fact that regiments from northern California had already seen combat, although the Seventh had been called up first. He suggested California be split into two states. He accused the San Francisco newspapers of "misrepresenting the facts" about the sickness that was spreading through the Seventh. Berry was not making too many friends among the military establishment either; at one point he referred to Secretary of War Russell A. Alger as a "small man."

The fighting might have been over, but now the men of the Seventh Regiment were contending with typhoid fever. By the end of August ninety-seven members of the regiment were in the hospital, twelve had died.⁴⁵ None of the boys of Company D were lost, although Private Herman Hiles of Ontario, Private Charles Johnston and Corporal William Stevens, both of Pomona, were hospitalized. The hardest hit unit was Company H of Ventura; four men from Ventura died and many were so sick they could not report for roll call. Senator White sent the following telegram to the War Department.

Conditions Seventh Regiment something awful. Sickness from grossly inadequate arrangements is fast accomplishing what enemy bullets can not do. Company H, from Ventura, especially suffering. In humanity's name urge these unfortunates, citizen and soldiers, be mustered out or relieved from present unspeakable distress, for which someone other than themselves must be responsible.⁴⁶

General Marcus P. Miller carried out an investigation for the War Department. He admitted he knew nothing about the outbreak of typhoid until he was told by visiting members of the Red Cross. On September 2 the following telegram was sent to the adjutant-general in Washington:

Following is summary of General Miller's report upon telegram of August 30-31, about sickness in Seventh California. Condition September 1: Typhoid, 19; recovering from measles 12; malaria, 5; bronchial, 16; surgical cases, 5; pneumonia, 6; sick in quarters, 10. Enlisted strength of regiment 1,260; total sick 73; 6 per cent sick; per cent of typhoid, 1 1/2. Deaths during the month of August, 6. Remedies: clean camps, liberal disinfectants, removal of garbage, kitchens placed further from latrines. Medical board making exhaustive inquiry into origin and spread of disease. Chief surgeon holds percentage not excessive, no deaths occurring at present.⁴⁷

Once made aware of the problem Miller took action immediately. Companies A and H were ordered to return to the Presidio at once; the rest of the Seventh was ordered back the next day. He later suggested they all be sent

home. There appears to be more to the story. The army had recognized the unhealthy nature of the Seventh's encampment and had ordered they be moved a month before. These orders were ignored by the regiment's commanding officer, Colonel John Berry. There is also a hint that Berry may have been responsible for the disappearance of Red Cross supplies.⁴⁸

Colonel Berry incurred the wrath of many when he told the *San Francisco Chronicle* the regiment should remain on active duty.⁴⁹ This remark drew heated criticism from the families and friends who wanted the men sent home. A Los Angeles citizen's group, the War Board, demanded Berry be discharged. In a letter written by a Ventura citizen's group Berry was told, "If you had been the man of force you would not have allowed your regiment to languish and die in that rotten fever dumping ground and graveyard in San Francisco." The indignation is understandable. Like other communities Ventura willingly sent her sons off to fight for their country and four of them died needlessly of typhoid.

On Friday, September 2, funeral services were held in Ventura for Harry Flint and Gabriel Ruiz. Flint's was held in his home and Ruiz was given a Roman Catholic funeral and burial. The funeral processions for both men met in front of the old mission, San Buenaventura, a church built by Spanish priests, and proceeded to the cemetery east of town. Former members of Company H and the old soldiers of the GAR formed an honor guard. All flags in town were lowered to half staff; all social activities for the next week were cancelled.⁵⁰

Although the Seventh had moved back to the Presidio, finding rations had become a persistent problem. The situation was becoming so bad that Captain Matthews appealed to a company support group in the Pomona Valley to send more money so they could buy something decent to eat. The *San Francisco Bulletin* was quoted as saying, ". . . their complaints concerning lack of food are well founded and should attract the attention of the proper army authorities." One soldier, only identifying himself as "H.H.B.," wrote to the editor of the *Evening Express*:

I will ask you a question: Why are they keeping us here? We doing no good. Why not send us home? We came here expecting to fight for our country, but what has been the outcome? The first to come and the last to leave. Cannot the people of Southern California do something to get us away from here? . . . We had tonight for supper one small piece of bacon, cup of coffee (black and muddy at that) and a potato, no bread. This is a sample of our suppers. Sometimes we get better, but not very often. We ask you to appeal through your paper for some help for us. I will close at this time hoping to see something in your paper for our benefit.⁵¹

Ventura, Thursday morning,
May 5, 1898: Pvt. Harry
Flint, Company H, poses for
what might be his last photo-
graph before boarding the
train. Flint died in San
Francisco in August.
Courtesy Ventura County
Museum of History and Art,
Ventura.



In September it was finally announced the Seventh would be sent back home. Between the saying and the doing another month elapsed. The men of the Seventh must of felt as if they were hostages of their own government's red tape. Finally on Thursday, October 13, the Seventh said their farewells to San Francisco as they were ferried across to Oakland to begin the train trip home.

While the City of Angels and all of southern California were preparing for the arrival of their soldier boys the *Evening Express* reflected on the past several months:

The Seventh Regiment will be given a hardy greeting tomorrow. The people will remember the things that should be remembered and forget those that should be forgotten.

There is no braver, more willing, better disciplined volunteer regiment under the Stars and Stripes than the Seventh, but through no fault of its own it has seemed doomed to misfortune and trouble as the sparks fly upwards from the day its tents were first pitched in the accursed bone yard at San Francisco.⁵²

The train arrived in Los Angeles at 1 p.m. on Friday. Although people

were discouraged from greeting the troops at River Station, such a large crowd was on hand that the sixty policemen assigned to crowd control were helpless.⁵³ The first order of business was to aid those soldiers who were sick. They were sent home immediately; those not living in Los Angeles were put up in private residences until they were well enough to return home. The rest were served a fine dinner prepared by the ladies of the Red Cross. According to the *Times*, "The tables presented an exceedingly tempting appearance before the army descended upon them. They were loaded down with meats, salads, sandwiches, bread, cakes, pickles, cheese, fruit and vegetables." Colonel Berry tried to throw his weight around by demanding a pitcher of cream. He was told everyone was treated equally and if he had a problem he could go up town for his lunch. When the men had finished eating they marched down to the Los Angeles armory to turn in their equipment which took the rest of the afternoon.

Berry had wanted the men to put on an exhibition drill at Agriculture (Exposition) Park. They were suppose to march down to the Arcade Station and take a short train ride down to the park. However, for reasons unknown he changed his mind. When the Seventh reached the armory they lined up company by company along the street. When Captain Rev. Alfred Clark, regiment's chaplain, rode by a great cheer went up among the ranks and same for Major Dr. J.S. Choate and Dr. Robley, the military surgeons. When Colonel Berry rode by the men stood silent. He was not a popular man. When he left San Francisco \$1,000 in funds raised by the Red Cross, Native Daughters and the regiment itself were left with him. The money had been raised to cover expenses due to illness and hardship while fighting in the Philippines. It was the consensus among the soldiers of the regiment that the funds be returned to the Red Cross so as to be used by regiments serving overseas. Berry said he would contact the Red Cross, but as of October 15 he had not.⁵⁴ He spoke to each company after they had turned in their equipment. It was the same speech to each one with Berry trying to defend his actions.⁵⁵ The speech was received with total indifference on the part of his men.

The Seventh was technically on furlough and would not be officially mustered out of the United States Army until November 12, but being home was the only thing that mattered. For the Los Angeles companies the journey was over. However, for Company D home was still thirty miles down the line.

When the train left River Station on October 15 a cannon was fired in Pomona to let everyone know Company D was on their way.⁵⁵ On arrival in Pomona at 8 p.m. the scene was joyous pandemonium. As men exited the

train wild cheers went up from the large crowd. The streets were so filled with well-wishers it was nearly impossible for the company to remain in marching formation. When they reached the armory on Second Street they found another dinner waiting for them. Through it all, much to their credit, Captain Matthews, and Lieutenants Eason and Crawford had remained with the company. Captain Matthews was overwhelmed to tears by the greeting the men received. The party at the armory did not end until 11 p.m. with the men going home with their families. Those not living in Pomona were put up for the night at the Pacific Hotel and would return home the next morning. All the arrangements were made by the welcoming home committee chaired by Terrell B. Thomas. Some of the Ontario men were so anxious to return home they walked the remaining six miles that night.⁵⁷ There was one note of sadness. The family of Private Charles Johnston had not received word their son was in a hospital in San Francisco. The Johnston family waited in vain. Another soldier absent from the homecoming was Herman Hiles. Hospitalized in San Francisco, after a long illness he died in December.

So the great odyssey was over. Although the Seventh Regiment did not exactly return "covered with glory," they could be proud of the fact they faithfully served their country.

As for the cause they were called on to fight for, Cuba was freed. As for not seeing action in the Philippines it perhaps turned out for the best. In February 1899, Filipino patriot Emilio Aguinaldo began a guerrilla war against American forces. It would be years before resistance to American rule came to an end. This brutal little war would cost the lives of 250,000 Filipinos and Americans. Company D was called up again in 1906 when they were sent to patrol the streets of San Francisco after the great earthquake and fire. In 1917 the company would see action in the First World War. After being discharged from service at the close of the war, the company was disbanded.

NOTES

¹*Pomona Daily Progress*, April 30, 1898, p. 2.

²"The Cuban Resolution," *Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States, 1898* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1899), p. 763

³"Let Us Be Patient, editorial, *Los Angeles Evening Express*, April 16, 1898, p. 4.

⁴"Make War Terrible," editorial, *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1898, p. 6.

⁵"Veterans Eager to Enlist," *ibid.*, April 23, 1898, p. 11.

⁶"San Diego County," *ibid.*, April 28, 1898, p. 13.

⁷"The Americus Club," *Pasadena Daily News*, May 9, 1898, p. 8.

⁸"Right Kind of Patriotism," editorial, *ibid.*, May 10, 1898, p. 2.

- ⁹⁴“Off to the Front,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1898, p. 9.
- ¹⁰⁴“At the Bulletins,” *Pomona Daily Progress*, April 19, 1898, p. 1.
- ¹¹⁴“More Troops Through,” *ibid.*, April 22, 1898, p. 1.
- ¹²⁴“Patriotic Evening,” *ibid.*, April 26, 1898, p. 1.
- ¹³⁴A former Pomona man, Frank Louck, served in the Philippines with the First Regiment, California National Guard.
- ¹⁴⁴“In Honor of Company D,” *Pomona Daily Progress*, May 5, 1898, p. 1.
- ¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁴“Departure of Company D,” *ibid.*, May 6, 1898, p. 1.
- ¹⁷⁴“Off to the Front,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1898, p. 8.
- ¹⁸⁴“God Bless the Gallant Seventh,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, May 6, 1898, p. 1.
- ¹⁹⁴“Off to the Front,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1898, p. 8.
- ²⁰⁴“At Camp Presidio,” *ibid.*, *Pomona Daily Progress*, May 16, 1898, p. 1.
- ²¹⁴“Eight of the Boys,” *ibid.*, May 14, 1898, p. 1.
- ²²⁴“Protest Too Late,” *ibid.*, May 11, 1898, p. 2.
- ²³⁴“From Company D,” *ibid.*, May 21, 1898, p. 1.
- ²⁴⁴“Are Jolly Under All Conditions,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, June 4, 1898, p. 3.
- ²⁵⁴*Ibid.*
- ²⁶⁴*Ibid.*
- ²⁷⁴“First Day at Camp at Richmond,” *ibid.*, May 31, 1898, p. 3.
- ²⁸⁴“Patriotic Concert,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1898, p. 7.
- ²⁹⁴“Defenseless Los Angeles,” editorial, *ibid.*, April 27, 1898, p. 6.
- ³⁰⁴*San Diego Sun*, May 11, 1898, p. 5.
- ³¹⁴*Ibid.*, June 7, 1898, p. 11.
- ³²⁴*Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1898, p. 4.
- ³³⁴“Spanish Spies on the Santa Rosa,” *San Diego Sun*, May 6, 1898, p. 7.
- ³⁴⁴*Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 755.
- ³⁵⁴“Are Jolly Under All Conditions,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, June 4, 1898, p. 3.
- ³⁶⁴“Col. Berry’s Bluff,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1898, p. 3.
- ³⁷⁴“A Letter From Company I Boys,” *Pasadena Daily News*, September 19, 1898, p. 6.
- ³⁸⁴“Camped on a Graveyard,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, July 19, 1898, p. 3.
- ³⁹⁴“Seventh and Its New Camp,” *ibid.*, July 5, 1898, p. 7.
- ⁴⁰⁴*Ibid.*
- ⁴¹⁴*Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States*, p. 755.
- ⁴²⁴“The Revolt Insignificant,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, July 19, 1898, p. 7.
- ⁴³⁴“Typhoid Breaks Out Among Members of the Seventh,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 1898, p. 9.
- ⁴⁴⁴“A Foul Conspiracy,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1898, p. 9.
- ⁴⁵⁴Beside members of the Seventh Regiment there were 76 men from Tennessee, 58 from Kansas, 52 from Iowa hospitalized. By the time the Seventh was officially discharged from service 20 died of disease, five deserted.
- ⁴⁶⁴*Papers Relating to the Foreign Policy of the United States*, p. 783.
- ⁴⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 785.
- ⁴⁸⁴“Col. Berry’s Bluff,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1898, p. 2.
- ⁴⁹⁴“Turned Down,” *ibid.*, September 3, 1898, p. 1.
- ⁵⁰⁴“Ventura in Mourning,” *Ventura Free Press*, September 2, 1898, p. 3.
- ⁵¹⁴“A Soldier’s Letter,” *Los Angeles Evening Express*, September 1 1898, p. 8. This was a letter to the editor by a soldier who was identified only as “H.H.B.”
- ⁵²⁴“The Seventh,” editorial, *ibid.*, October 13, 1898, p. 4.
- ⁵³⁴“Return of the Seventh,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1898, p. 10.
- ⁵⁴⁴“Whose Is It?” *ibid.*, October 16, 1898, p. 1.
- ⁵⁵⁴“The Return of the Seventh,” *ibid.*, October 15, 1898, p. 10.
- ⁵⁶⁴“A Memorable Night,” *Pomona Daily Progress*, October 15, 1898, p. 1.
- ⁵⁷⁴“Ontario Solider Boys,” *Ontario Record*, October 19, 1898, p. 1.