

Southwest Missouri's Role In The Spanish-American War

By Todd Wilkinson

Though Many Volunteered, Few Served In Cuba

2008 will mark the 110th anniversary of the Spanish-American War. While many Americans are very familiar with Teddy's Roosevelt's 1st US Volunteer Cavalry, the famous "Rough Riders" who saw action in Cuba, the majority of volunteers during the war did not see such martial glory. In fact, very few ever got to Cuba, let alone saw action against the Spanish.

On February 15th, 1898, the U.S.S. *Maine* exploded in the harbor at Havana, Cuba, and many in the United States suspected Spain, engaged in a ruthless colonial war for over 30 years against Cuban *insurrectos*, as the chief culprit. The whole nation would soon respond angrily to the supposed Spanish treachery with the war cry, "To Hell with Spain, and Remember the Maine!"

Pent-up feelings about the independence of Cuba, which America had supported openly at times, since the late 1860s, would soon manifest themselves, although President McKinley, himself a veteran of the Civil War, tried in vain to settle the dispute peacefully. By April, the U.S. and Spain were at war.

President McKinley would call for volunteers, and many answered the call across the nation. Many volunteers came from state National Guard and militia units, who had the advantage of being trained in the military arts, as well as being armed and equipped. One such unit was the 2nd Missouri Infantry, from

Southwest Missouri.

The 2nd was "the largest and most efficient organization" of the Missouri National Guard, and was commanded by Col. W. K. Caffee of Carthage who was a "very efficient officer" who took great pride in his command.

Southwest Missouri joined in the "war fever" sweeping the country. In Marshfield, a Cuban flag was raised alongside the Stars and Stripes on the courthouse square, and in Jasper County, on March 4, 1898, three attorneys in Avilla "pulled all the tail feathers out of the American eagle...making him scream against Spain and everything Spanish" at a war rally at the Methodist Church, complete with a packed house and a ladies choir singing patriotic songs. As a result, 53 young men volunteered for a new military company which would be known as the Avilla Zouaves, a

name sometimes given to units in other armies which imitated the dress or drill of the elite and romantic French zouaves. The Avilla boys would later be designated as Company "G" of the 5th Missouri Infantry Regiment.

The 2nd Missouri was composed of the Carthage Light Guard, the Butler Rifles, the El Dorado Springs Guard, the Sedalia Rifles, the Pierce City Guard, the Springfield Rifles, the Mitchell Light Infantry of Nevada and the Joplin Rifles. Because of Federal regulations that required all federalized National Guard Regiments to have 12 companies, two additional units, one from Sedalia, and one from Springfield, were added to become Company "M" of the 2nd Missouri. Company "M" was commanded by Captain Ernest C. McAfee, who left an interesting account of his service in Jonathan Fairbanks and Clyde Tuck's



A photograph of the 2nd Missouri with the following inscription: "Co. K — arrival near Albany (Ga.) — "A Long Drink" 2nd Mo." (photo: courtesy of the Springfield-Greene County Library Local History & Genealogy Department)



Company M, 2nd Missouri Infantry. The photo may have been taken in late 1898 or 1899, as the men are carrying .30-40 Krag-Jorgensen rifles, which were not initially issued to National Guard units. We know the 2nd Missouri began its service carrying the .45-70 "Trapdoor" Springfield rifle. (photo: courtesy of the William P. D. Smith family, in the care of Pamela Diane (Smith) Bobila, grand-daughter of William P. D. Smith)

Past and Present of Greene County Missouri.

On May 4, the order came for the units of the 2nd to proceed to Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis to be mustered into Federal service – when they arrived; the place was “in confusion.” Several of the 2nd’s companies had no uniforms, tents, rations or arms, which had to be procured in haste. Company M and Company I, the other company from Sedalia, had to provide for itself at Jefferson Barracks, while established units already had uniforms, equipment and arms.

At Jefferson Barracks, regimental camps were established and the routine of army life began in earnest. However, the stay in St. Louis would be short-lived, as the 2nd was soon ordered to Camp Thomas at Chickamauga National Military Park in North Georgia. They started their adventure with some

unlucky omens: They were scheduled to arrive in Georgia on May 13; there were 13 trains that moved the regiment; 13 cars for each train; one engine was numbered “413” and one sleeper car had 13 officers! When a St. Louis newspaper boy tried to stowaway on one train, it was soon discovered that he was 13 years old! Removed from one train, he got on another the next day; the first train wrecked, while the second train made it through unharmed.

The 2nd passed through Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and then on to Chattanooga. Local citizens turned out with sandwiches and coffee served up by hundreds of pretty girls, in every town that the train passed through. The loyalty of the Southern people was proven to Missourians on this trip, who had known all too well the brutal sting of the Civil War themselves.

The regiment disembarked at Lytle,

Georgia, which consisted of a depot, post office, blacksmith shop and a few odd stores. It was so small it became known as “Fake Town.” There, a scene of mass confusion developed as arriving regiments competed with one another as they disembarked.

The 2nd camped about 3 miles inside Chickamauga National Military Park, on terrain very similar to the Ozark hills: on a slope, with rocky ground that made driving tent pins next to impossible! Recent rains made the ground muddy, and the camp itself was a “wet camp,” established in the shade of the forest where no sun could dry out the camps or the men. McAfee blamed this for the sickness that soon ensued, as well as the change in diet for the soldiers, and the local water supply.

As the Park began to fill with regiments, the 2nd was assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division of the First Army

Corps. By the end of May there were some 80,000 soldiers in camp at Chickamauga, waiting for action. After an inspection by regular army officers, it appeared that the 2nd would be off to Cuba, but it was not to be. McAfee believed that the Colonel of the 2nd was a “Free-silver Republican,” and that political connections caused the 71st New York to be sent in its place.

In June, the typhoid epidemic began, and thousands of soldiers caught the disease, mostly from the numerous flies that always follow an army. Sanitary regulations were neglected or ignored during the establishment of the camps, and hospitals were not able to deal with the outbreak effectively, although the 2nd’s infirm and sick stayed at their own regimental hospital or in their own quarters.

Many illnesses were caused by the soldier’s poor adjustment to army rations—from the good fare of civilian life to hardtack, bacon and army coffee, which had a terrible effect on their stomachs.

Also, many of the soldiers received “care packages” from home, and the richness of the food, along with the odd times that it was consumed, only contributed to the stomach ailments and illnesses. The government supplied the camp with fresh beef (packed in ice),

potatoes, cabbage, coffee, sugar, fresh milk, butter, bread, both hard and soft, but officer inexperience with logistics, supply and distribution caused delays in the issue of rations.

The government also contracted through local sources for firewood. One Georgian, who delivered wood to each regiment, stated that he “was glad to get around a Missouri camp. A Missourian knows a cord of wood...but these damned New Yorkers want to count every stick!”

The Missourians soon became objects of attention for their Eastern counterparts camped nearby. Springfield’s Company “M” had received the nickname “McAfee’s Guerillas” due to their lack of uniforms, but the name stuck, and soon, a story began to circulate that Jesse James’s son was in the Company. Eastern soldiers soon came visiting each Sunday afternoon to view the son of the famous outlaw, who would stand in a conspicuous place to be viewed. The Easterners were warned that he was very sensitive and didn’t like to meet strangers, so they stood afar. Some even snapped photos with the new “portable box camera.” In reality, the son of Jesse James was actually a Private Yandell of Webster County, who was the “company cut-up.” McAfee wondered, “How many Eastern homes now cherish Yandall’s

picture as the son of Jesse James?”

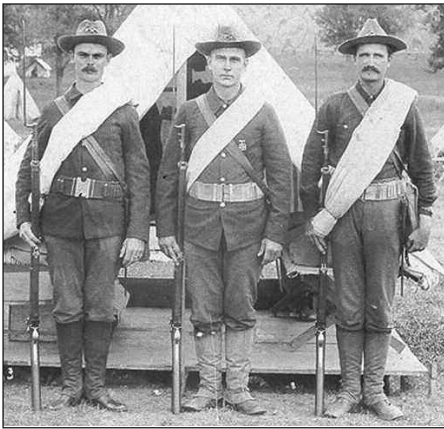
Throughout June and July, the men of the 2nd drilled constantly, five hours each day and worked on various fatigue details. The camp was eventually moved to an open plain, and the sick list began to shrink.

However, on July 11, 1898, Sergeant Charles P. Wood of the Carthage Company died of the ever-present typhoid. Wood was an 1895 graduate of Carthage High School and a reporter for the *Carthage Press*. During his time at Camp Thomas, Wood wrote stories for the *Press*, telling Carthage residents about military life until June of 1898, when he filed his last story from the hospital. “We have the best care in the hospital, sleep on cots between real sheets and have a special mess of very decent food,” Wood wrote.

After his death, Wood’s body was brought back to Carthage, where it would lie in state within the east corridor of the first floor of the Jasper County Courthouse. Thousands of Jasper County Citizens filed past to pay their respects. Many attended the funeral, said to be the largest in Carthage. Wood was buried in Park Cemetery, and for many years afterward, the community Memorial Day Services were held at his grave. The local camp of the United Spanish War Veterans named their camp in honor of



A group photo of Company M, 2nd Missouri Infantry. (photo: courtesy of the William P. D. Smith family, in the care of Pamela Diane (Smith) Bobila, grand-daughter of William P. D. Smith)



From L. to R., J. E. Bays, James M. Symington, and William Perry Smith, Co. M, 2nd Mo. Infantry. (photo: courtesy of the William P. D. Smith family, in the care of Pamela Diane (Smith) Bobila, grand-daughter of William P. D. Smith)

him, and their camp flag still bears a fitting tribute to Sgt. Wood. In April, 2002, a monument was placed and dedicated on the courthouse lawn to the memory of Sergeant Wood.

By the middle of July, the fighting in Cuba ended with the surrender of Spanish forces. Soldiers, both officers and other ranks, began to question why they were being kept in military service with the war apparently over, and finally, orders came from Washington for some soldiers to receive their discharges. The

2nd was still held for possible service in Cuba for "occupation duty," but again, fate had other plans for the Missouri boys. Later in the summer, the regiment was moved to Lexington, Kentucky, and in October, orders came for the 2nd to prepare to embark for Mantanzas, Cuba, only to be ordered to move to a less exotic location, Albany, Georgia. They stayed in Albany through the winter of 1898-1899, and were mustered out on March 4, 1899, barely escaping being sent to the Philippine Islands, where an insurrection of Philipinos had begun against the American occupation forces.

While the men of the 2nd Missouri never fired a shot in anger against the Spaniards, they served their country bravely against just as formidable a foe as the "Dons" of Spain: the boredom, tedium and illness of camp what Captain McAfee refers to as "the monotonous restraints of an idle army." For these men of the 2nd Missouri, their service was no picnic excursion. Ultimately, while the U.S. gained new territories like Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippine Island from that "Splendid Little War," as Secretary of State John Hay called it, more importantly, the American people gained wisdom about the nature of war and the strength of its young men to serve in trying times and circumstances, whether in Cuba or northern Georgia. ☪

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Musician Glen E. Harcum, Co. K, 2nd Missouri Volunteer Infantry, holds a bugle. Note the painted backdrop of the photo. (photo: courtesy of the Springfield-Greene County Library Local History & Genealogy Department)

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A longer version of this article may be found on the Spanish-American War Centennial web site at www.spanamwar.com.



The dedication of the monument to Sgt. Charles P. Wood, Co. "A", 2nd Missouri Infantry (the "Carthage Light Guard") in April of 2002. Members of the Missouri Squad of Co. "C", 9th U.S. Infantry, Spanish American Re-enactment Unit, assist Roland Diggs of the 203rd Retirees Association in unveiling the monument. (photo: Todd Wilkinson)

The OZARKS MOUNTAINEER KINFOLK SEARCH

ALL POINTS BULLETIN!

I am searching for parents of Jonathan OWENS, born 1801, NC, married Elizabeth KNOX, 1819, Rhea County TN. The OWENS family was in Wright County, MO, by 1843, where Jonathan helped establish first Free-will Baptist Church there. He died 1877, Newtonia, Newton County MO. I need his place of burial. Can anyone help?

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•We have found that our readers are not only great sleuths and researchers but also that they have an abundance of contacts for genealogical research. We encourage such reader participation and helpfulness. "Kinfolk Search" costs \$20 per issue insertion. Send requests to Editor, 815 Lee St., Branson, Mo. 65616 or via e-mail to frpfister@suddenlink.net.