

CHAPTER II SANTIAGO

The Company was as yet unbloodied. They had never heard a shot fired in anger nor fired one, but with the coming of the Spanish-American War in 1898 this slight oversight would be remedied.

Cuba stepped on the world scene in 1492 when a confused sailor named Columbus first blundered into her. Since 1511, Cuba had been firmly locked into the Spanish New World empire. As the years passed, however, the once glittering empire deteriorated and one by one the colonies began to drop away and became independent. Cuba tried to follow via bloody revolution in 1868, but was eventually defeated after a ten-year struggle. Fed by oppressive Spanish rule, heavy taxation and a strangling commercial policy, the smouldering embers of revolt were again fanned into flames in 1895. For three long years, the Cuban rebels battled Spanish troops in a cruel civil war. The clamor for American intervention reached a crescendo in April of 1898 when as a result of increasing public pressure, the Congress declared war on Spain on the 25th of the month.

Under the active leadership of Under Secretary Theodore Roosevelt, the American Navy had been built into a first class fighting machine. It proved this to the world on April 30, when a squadron under Admiral Dewey steamed into Manila Bay and completely destroyed an opposing Spanish fleet. This action was fought a mere five days after the Declaration of War, and aptly demonstrated that the American Navy had been well prepared. Unfortunately, such was not true of the Army.



Throughout the years prior to the war the Regular Army had been held to a strength of 25,000 troops, mostly used as Indian fighters on Western Plains. It was hardly an adequate force to oppose the 155,000 better trained, and superior equipped Spanish forces on Cuba. With the Declaration of War the American Regular Army was expanded to 61,000 troops and President McKinley issued a call for 125,000 volunteers. ¹

Michigan responded to the President's call, by assembling 40 Companies approximately 3,400 men, Of the Michigan National Guard at Camp Eaton, Island Lake, Michigan near Brighton. From these units four twelve-Company Regiments with the designations of 31st through 34th Michigan Volunteer Infantry were formed.

The 5th Michigan, with Company D of Calumet, was mustered into Federal service on May 20, 1898, as part of the 34th Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The Company at the time of the muster consisted of three officers (Captain Julius Fliege in command), six sergeants, two musicians, one artificer, one Wagoneer, and 73 privates. Each of the new Regiments was raised at a strength of 1,026 officers and men which was later increased to 1,326. A fifth Regiment, the 35th, was eventually also organized. ²

In late April, before the President's official Call for volunteers, the units of the 5th Regiment began to prepare themselves for service. Drills were increased to weekly and public interest soared. It wasn't uncommon to find several hundred spectators present at the armory just to watch the troops drill. At Calumet, 30 men. were on a waiting list to join, should there be a vacancy or change in the units authorized strength. ³

Throughout the United States the call-up of the troops was anything but orderly. The Army had simply been too badly neglected for too many years. Logistically and from a purely management standpoint it was plainly unable to handle effectively the vast influx of volunteer troops. Those volunteer troops already organized were woefully short of equipment. In fact, not a single Regiment was ready for the field!

All supplies were in short supply, especially the recently accepted Krag-Jorgensen magazine rifle using the new smokeless powder. Many volunteer units, 11) including the 34th Michigan, were forced to use the antiquated 1873, breechloading, single shot, side hammer, .45 caliber Springfield rifles with black powder cartridges left over from the Indian Wars. Black powder was especially undesirable since every time the rifle was fired, the trooper's position was plainly marked by the billowing clouds of dense, black smoke.

On April 23, the expected order came and the Companies of the 5th Regiment assembled at home stations to prepare to move to Island Lake. From all over the Midwest members of Company D flocked in to join their comrades. Private Weir returned from Big Rapids where he was a student, Private Light from the university at Ann Arbor and Private Kennedy from Chicago. ⁴

The actual telegraphic order, addressed to Colonel John P. Petermann, the Regiment's Commander, read 'Have your command ready to move in heavy marching order to Island Lake not later than Tuesday, April 26. Every available blanket and overcoat must be taken. Do not bring stoves or provisions, except rations to be used enroute. The men will find use for private blankets for a few days. Extra overcoats and blankets will be issued at camp. Mounted officers can take horses.' In turn the wires out from Calumet crackled with messages as each Company Commander and Staff Officer was notified of the orders contents by telegram. ⁵

Petermann, a strapping six-footer, was a young man of only 34 when he brought his Regiment to Island Lake. A resident of the Keweenaw town of Allouez, he was a merchant in civilian life. Later he would be appointed as the Commander of the 3rd Brigade, Provisional Division, 5th Army Corps. ⁶

When the marching orders for the 5th came a day later, the, home towns gave their local units riotous send-offs. The celebrations were highlighted by parades, fiery oratory and much loud cheering.

When the Calumet Light Guard marched smartly out of the armory enroute to the train station, they stepped out to a lively tune from the 5th Regimental Band. Thousands of people lined the flag draped streets cheering and waving. After the tearful farewells were bade at the station, the train pulled out bound for Houghton to pick up Company F.

Another riotous celebration was in progress when the Light Guard train reached Houghton. After a massive parade down Shelden Avenue, the Houghton unit, known as the Houghton Light Infantry, was honored by speeches from Lt. Governor Thomas B. Dustan and a local favorite Mr. A. J. Scott. It was Scott who drew the

loudest cheers when he hoped 'the war would go on until every bow-legged, crooked-eyed, onion-eating Spaniard was wiped off the face of the earth!'

After the citizens of Houghton presented the unit with a silver bugle and the Hancock Fire Department gave them a silk flag, the Company marched to the station and joined the Calumet unit. The soldiers from Calumet were not forgotten in the turmoil over Company F. The 'Ladies from Lake Linden' presented each trooper with a colorful flower bouquet! When the troop train pulled away from the station it was to the cheers of what was estimated to have been the entire population of both Houghton and Hancock. ⁷ It is interesting to note that the Houghton Company was composed almost wholly of students from the Michigan School of Mines. (today's Michigan Technological University). ⁸

When the train reached Chassell, the entire town was on the platform, along with a local band and the fire department. An old cannon boomed while school children lined the railroad embankments singing and waving flags.

At Baraga, the townspeople cheered while three old Indians did a war dance on the depot platform. Not to be outdone, another large crowd cheered at L'Anse.

When the train reached Champion, the Sault Ste. Marie Company joined the Regiment amid the cheers of thousands. At Republic, the train halted briefly for more speeches and cheering. Although the train was under orders not to stop, it was hard not to halt when requested by town officials.

When the train reached Iron Mountain and the local Company and the Ironwood Company climbed aboard, the entire town was at the station to bid farewell to their men. The troops remembered the Iron Mountain celebration as being a real 'monster.'

The Ironwood Company, after being given a rousing home town send-off, was cheered all along the route of their special train. At Bessemer, Wakefield, Watersmeet, Iron River, Florence and finally Iron Mountain, thousands of citizens had turned out to wish them Well. ⁹

Finally reaching Menominee shortly after midnight, the men on the train were greeted by yet another tumultuous demonstration. Band played and thousands of people cheered their arrival. ¹⁰

At seven the next morning, the troops boarded the car ferry ANN ARBOR NO.2 and proceeded across Lake Michigan to Frankfort. But the celebrations were still not over! When the car ferry reached the Frankfort harbor, it was greeted by a barge filled with school children singing patriotic songs. All the vessels in the harbor flew their holiday flags to the loud accompaniment of their steam whistles. Disembarking, the troops boarded another train for Island Lake. All along the route crowds continued to cheer and cannons boom their greeting. In the evening, fireworks splashed across the sky. ¹¹

From the time they left Calumet, the men had received numerous gifts from the crowds. Company D had 1,000 cigars donated by various Houghton benefactors and Sam Stephenson, the legendary lumber baron, presented them with still more before they left Menominee. A Calumet liquor company provided each man with a bottle of medicinal brandy with the words 'Remember the Maine' written on the label. ¹² Local ladies donated countless pies, cakes and other sweet goods.

It would not be unreasonable to assume that when they finally reached Island Lake, a much needed rest was in order. All told, 678 men and 33 officers of the 5th Regiment reported to Island Lake on the original contingent. ¹³

At Island Lake the 5th joined the other Regiments in establishing a proper camp not unlike the annual encampments the men were used to. After pitching tents and organizing the daily ritual of guard mount, the priority was to reorganize the old Regiments into the new ones and the official mustering of the volunteers into Federal service. Before any trooper could be accepted into Federal service, however, he was subjected to a rigorous physical exam. Approximately a quarter of the men, including in one case a Regimental Commander, failed to pass and were given a train fare home. One of those failing was the Regimental Surgeon, Major P. McNaughton. Colonel Petermann immediately wired Dr. J.A. Bobb of Calumet, offering him the vacated position. Bobb quickly accepted. It was a fateful decision. While returning home with the Regiment from Cuba aboard the steamer OLIVETTE, he would die of fever and be buried at sea. ¹⁴

It was important to realize that there was a critical difference between the Michigan National Guard of 1898 and the Guard of today. Today the Guard can be Federalized and shipped of to war in literally the 'twinkling of an eye.' This was not true in 1898.

At that time, the Governor could order the units of the Guard to assemble at Island Lake and offer their services to the President for Federal service, but each man was required to personally volunteer. Not until he actually signed the muster rolls was he bound to go into Federal service. Of an estimated 3,400 men in camp, only 34 indicated that they would not volunteer for duty, a remarkable showing!

Before the Federal muster, while the troops were still on State Duty, the enlisted men were paid at the rate of \$2.00 per day, less 75 cents for board. When they were mustered into Federal service, the pay was \$16.00 a month, or approximately 52 cents a day, a cause of much grumbling. ¹⁵

By all accounts, Camp Eaton was a maelstrom of activity. As the supplies trickled in, the Michiganders were slowly equipped with the required tents, uniforms, blankets and associated equipment. What time remained was spent in training, but with the problems of organizing the new 34th Regiment, and moving to the front, time was short indeed.

The weekends were usually left free and visitors were common. Special trains brought sightseers from GRAND Rapids, Detroit and other major cities. Up to 20,000 people visited the camp on a single weekend. ¹⁶

During the approximate month between their arrival at Island Lake and the Federal muster, each Regiment was ordered to increase its strength as well as replace its losses from the physical exams. Consequently each Company dispatched an officer back home to enlist additional men. The task was easy. Volunteers were plentiful and home town support still. ¹⁷ Menominee, for example, raised a large contingent of men, as did several other U.P. towns. Major Cox (later to become the Adjutant GENERAL OF Michigan) of the 34th Regimental Staff, made a special trip north to inspect the new troops. ¹⁸

The Companies of the 5th Regiment started to be mustered into Federal service on May 17 when Company H of Ironwood was accepted. The last Company was mustered in on May 23.

Although the Regiment was planned to have 12 Companies, the 34th entered service with only eleven. The official Muster Rolls list the Companies as:

UNIT	HOMETOWN ¹⁹
Company A	Big Rapids
Company B	Manistee
Company C	Muskegon
Company D	Calumet
Company E	Iron Mountain, Crystal Falls
Company F	Hancock, Houghton
Company G	Sault Ste. Marie
Company H	Ironwood
Company I	Downstate General
Company K	Downstate General
Company L	Marquette, Negaunee, Ishpeming



The Regiment was further broken down into three Battalions, the 1st Battalion with Companies A, B, C and F; 2nd Battalion, Companies D, E, G and H; and the 3rd Battalion with Companies I, K and L. ²⁰ Later, apparently in Camp Alger, an M Company was added to the 3rd Battalion.

While it can be readily seen that the 34th was primarily composed of Upper Peninsula units, it was only the 2nd Battalion that was a 'pure' U.P. organization. ²¹

The make-up of the Regiment was a mirror image of society. Calumet's Company D, for example, had men with an entire galaxy of occupations, including teamsters, laborers, clerks, students, tailors, cigarmakers, firemen, salesmen, timbermen, miners, butchers, painters, farmers, teachers, a dentist, electrician and newspaperman. Nor were they native born Americans. Many hailed from countries such as Norway, Finland, Germany, England, Ireland and Denmark. ²²



On June 6, the much awaited orders came and the 34th departed Camp Eaton by train for Camp Russell A. Alger, Virginia, arriving there on June 8. Governor Pingree of Michigan was on hand for their departure and sent his men off with a rousing speech.²³

When the Regiment arrived at Camp Alger the first order of business was to cut a campsite from a hundred acres of forest. Although the work was hard and the temperature soared to over 100 degrees, the task was quickly done.

At Camp Alger, both training and the issue of equipment was stepped up considerably. Included in the training were 20 mile marches on the shores of the Potomac River and overnight tactical bivouacs. Camp Alger must have been a busy place a total of 29 Regiments were in the camp! Representing every State in the Union.

The 34th was quickly brigaded with the 33rd Michigan and 9th Massachusetts, known as the Irish Regiment, into a Provisional Separate Brigade under General Duffield.

Even at Camp Alger, recruiting took a major role. Company strength was increased from the original 86 to 106 men, so new recruiting details were sent back home for volunteers. Again, men were plentiful.

The days at Camp Alger were long and tiring. Diversions of any sort were important to morale. It was common for the bands of the various Regiments to spend evenings Serenading other Regiments. The 34th Band, formed from the old 5th Regiment band of Calumet, was reportedly a cut above the rest. It was especially remembered for a very clever rendition of Sousa's 'Swanee River.'²⁴

Early in the morning of June 24, the men of the 34th Michigan doffed their romantic wide-brimmed campaign hats, slung their heavy Springfields and marched two miles to nearby Dunn Loring. There they boarded a waiting train for Newport News, arriving at the seaport on the following morning.

At the pier, the 1st Battalion of the 34th Michigan, together with the 33rd Michigan, boarded the steamer YALE. The remaining two Battalions of the 34th and the entire 9th Massachusetts, boarded the U.S. Auxiliary Cruiser HARVARD (formally the CITY OF NEW YORK). The YALE departed Newport News first, making a rendezvous with the U.S. Blockading Squadron off Santiago early on June 27, the HARVARD arriving on the 30th.²⁵

The overall American plan for the Cuban Campaign called for the encirclement of the city of Santiago (located on the southern tip of the island) by the Army, and the blockade of the trapped Spanish fleet in the harbor by the Navy. The combination of the capture of the city and destruction of the Spanish Army and Navy would force a surrender.

Accordingly, the landing of 17,000 American troops east of the city began on June 22. Slowly, the Americans forced their lines around Santiago and advanced on the city, but only after fierce and bloody fighting. Opposing the Americans were 36,500 Spanish troops armed with superior Mauser rifles using smokeless powder cartridges. Deadly at 1,000 yards, the Mauser made life indeed difficult for the Americans.

The 1st Battalion of the 34th Michigan, together with the 33rd Michigan, went ashore near the squalid mining town of Siboney, ten miles east of Santiago on the afternoon of the 27th. The remainder of the 34th landed on the 31st. Siboney was the sight of the original American landings and the crucial supply point. As no dock facilities were available, the troops were loaded into the transport's lifeboats and towed by steam launches to the shallows near shore, where they leaped into the surf and waded to the beach. The Regiment's horses were unceremoniously dumped overboard from the steamer and left to swim for the beach. Surprisingly, most made it.



Initially the Regiment was assigned the task of guarding the Siboney beachhead, but this dull duty wasn't to last too long. Ten miles up the road from Siboney to the front was a group of hills known collectively as San Juan Heights. The capture of the hills could be the key to the capture of Santiago. On July 1, the fight for San Juan Heights began in earnest. In a battle that lasted most of the day, close to 16,000 American troops successfully stormed the heights, but at a fearful cost, more than 4,000 becoming casualties.

All was peaceful in Siboney that day until 10 p.m., when a messenger arrived with orders for the men to immediately march to the front. Although the assault had carried San Juan Heights, the situation was still very much in doubt. The Spanish had withdrawn in good order and with freshly arriving reinforcements could counter-attack and drive the Americans off the heights. There were no American reserves at the front and the 34th Michigan and 9th Massachusetts were ordered to move forward and strengthen the lines. The 34th Band, however, was left behind to guard the beachhead and work as aides in the. ²⁶

All night long the Michiganders struggled up the narrow, winding path that served as the main supply route to the front. Burdened with blanket rolls, haversacks, three days rations, and a hefty 100 rounds of ammunition per man, they hacked their way through clinging jungle vines, climbed steep mountain passes, waded through thick swamps, and forded swiftly running streams. Sweating in their heavy woolen uniforms, they suffered in heat that men used to the primal cold of the far north found killing. For seven long, black hours, the green troops of the Regiment stumbled to the front, all the while to the accompanying shouts of 'close-up, close-up' by the officers and non-com. The long column was constantly delayed by enemy sharpshooters lurking deep in the jungle as well as by straggling lines of wounded returning.

At 3 a.m. Colonel Petermann reached General Shafter's Headquarters and reported the 34th ready for action. There Petermann received orders to continue forward to support General Wheeler. Wheeler, also known as 'Fighting Joe', was one of the true characters in the American Forces. An ex-General of Confederate Cavalry in the Civil War, during the height of battle in Cuba, he was heard to exhort to his men, with one arm waving in the air, 'Get them Yankees,' referring to the Spanish.

At 8 a.m., July 2, the 34th reached General Wheeler's position and was ordered to support the extreme left of his line against an anticipated Spanish counter-attack. Later in the afternoon, the 34th was shifted into the center. ²⁷

From their arrival, the men were under a deadly fire from Spanish positions varying from 200 to 800 yards distance. The position of the 34th was in an area of tall grass which afforded some concealment, but no protection. Slowly, shovels appeared and the Regiment began to dig itself in. Years later a veteran of the action would remember 'the unmerciful sun and bullets whizzing over our heads.' Regular shrapnel bursts only added further excitement.

During the next night, the Spanish made a determined assault on the heights, but were bloodily repulsed by the forward Regiment. On hearing the firing, Colonel Petermann prepared the 34th for a possible counter-attack and supported the defending Regiment. The 34th's heavy Springfields joined in with the newer Krags of the Regular Army and an estimated 800 of the attackers died. Because the 34th was armed with the black powder

Springfields whose billowing clouds of dense smoke clearly marked each firers position, the troops were not normally allowed to return fire. ²⁸

During the day an additional Regiment of American reinforcements arrived and the encircling lines were drawn tighter around Santiago. The casualties continued to mount as another 150 men were killed and over 1,000 wounded. By July 3, the American situation was still serious, but, with great audacity, they nonetheless called on the Spanish to surrender. The Spanish declined to reply.

The military attaches of many foreign countries were frequently present on the battlefield to observe the action. On several occasions, Colonel Petermann divided his rations with the German, Swedish and Russian attaches when they Visited the 34th. ²⁹ Although the 34th had only suffered light casualties due to enemy action, casualties due to various malarial fevers were increasing daily. To handle them, Surgeon Bobb established and manned a relief hospital directly behind the lines, while the full Regimental Hospital was located four miles to the rear. ³⁰

As in all wars, fate stalked the lines with a strange sense of humor. In one case, a Mauser bullet bounced harmlessly off a tunic button of a Staff Lt. Colonel, only to strike and badly wound a private. In another case, a man was sent. to the hospital with a severe injury after being run down by a stampeding mule! ³¹

Because of the thick nature of the terrain, enemy snipers were constantly slipping around the flank of the Regiment and firing at the rear. In one day, Lt. McDonald, using a detail of eight sharpshooters, managed to round up 21 of the Spanish snipers. ³²

Throughout this period on the lines, the 34th was at the end of a very long and very tenuous supply line Everything was in short supply including rations. When a load of hated sowbelly and hardtack finally made it through, the troops eagerly devoured it.

On July 4, Company D, along with the remainder of the 2nd Battalion, was withdrawn from the lines and given the task of constructing a road for the movement forward of heavy siege artillery considered necessary for the reduction of Santiago., As the road wound from the depths of the jungle to the crest of the heights, it was hard, tough work, and required the building of a bridge over the treacherous San Juan River. In spite of the difficulties, the 34th was successful in accomplishing their mission. The mechanics, backwoodsmen and tradesmen did wonders in the Cuban wilderness.

The construction of the bridge is a tale in itself. It seems that the Regular Army engineers on the staff of Major General Shafter, the Army Commander of Cuba, told the General that the bridge was impossible to build. Lt. Thielmen, a 34th Staff Officer in charge of road work, was in the vicinity and after apparently overhearing the remarks concerning the impossibility of the bridge, commented to General Shafter he would have the bridge up by 2 p.m. Thielman was a timberman in civilian life and being used to handling millions of feet of lumber every year, just couldn't see the problem. With nothing to lose, General Shafter gave his approval.

Thielman found some suitable timber in a coconut grove two miles upstream from the bridge site. After cutting a sufficient number of the massive coconut palms, the men hauled them down the river, using telegraph wire since rope was not available. After the logs were trimmed to a standard length of 64 feet, they were carefully placed according to Thielman's plan and a lattice work of earth filled bamboo added as a roadway. The entire bridge was completed an hour early, but so as not to make the task look too easy, Thielman delayed reporting its completion to Shafter until five minutes before its deadline. ³³

After a week at the front, the 34th was withdrawn to the coast for a rest. The campground there was reportedly excellent, with a good stream only a hundred yards away and a cool ocean breeze. However, the land crabs were so thick that if a man laid down to rest, a comrade had to closely watch to keep them from literally crawling over his resting companion. ³⁴

In July the Spanish Fleet sailed forth from Santiago Harbor and was destroyed by the blockading American Fleet. The surrender of the city was now considered assured.

In the early evening of July 13, the 34th was again ordered to the front. After a long, hot, forced march up the same winding trails they climbed when they first arrived, the 34th reached the lines early in the next morning. But their long march was in vain. ³⁵ On July 15, the city formally capitulated and more than 12,000 Spanish troops laid down their arms.

The 2nd Battalion of the 34th was later used to guard a road into Santiago which necessitated a change of bivouac site. The new campground, located in swampy terrain, was literally a death trap. Within a week, ten men from Company D were dead of the fever. ³⁶

After the hostilities ended and before they left for home, the troops did what soldiers all the world over did. They explored the captured city of Santiago with illegal passes, made eyes at the pretty, dark-haired señoritas and drank large quantities of the local liquor!

The men reported the local rum gave the man the 'jaggiest kind of jag, and made one feel as if he had fallen into the Quincy Mine; been dragged through the murky waters of Portage Lake and mopped over the Mining College (Michigan Tech) campus.' ³⁷

Access to Santiago, a city largely placed off limits by the Army, was provided through the efforts of several unit members who were newspaper reporters in civilian life and used their old press credentials to obtain special military passes. These men simply rotated their passes through the units so everyone had a chance to see the sights. ³⁸

With the defeat of Spain, the 34th Infantry was withdrawn from Cuba, leaving on August 20 and arrived at Montauk Point, New York a week later.

On September 5, Company D arrived home at Calumet and mustered out on the 26th of November. The remainder of the 34th units reached home within a day of Calumet. For its participation in the war (through Company D), the Battalion flag proudly carries a battle streamer embroidered with 'Santiago.'

Company D paid a high price for its Cuban adventures. Seventeen men of the original strength of 106 lost their lives, most to deadly malarial fevers. Again, though, the fates were not always kind. Private Rowe, for example, survived not only Spanish bullets, but also jungle fevers only to be hit and killed by a railroad train in Calumet on his return! ³⁹

The Company was now blooded; it was a veteran unit and prepared for whatever the nation would require of it. In the years ahead, the nation would require much.

It's interesting to note that the Michigan volunteers were committed to action a bare 41 days after being mustered into Federal service. While the speed was evidently caused by the need for immediate troops, it nonetheless was an occurrence that would not happen again. The experience of the war had shown that the Army must be prepared to rapidly expand when necessary, and be able to adequately clothe, equip and train the required troops. This all would take time.