Iowa's First Overseas Expedition

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BRIG. GEN. JAMES RUSH LINCOLN and COL. JOHN C. LOPER
with Field and Staff Officers of Fifty-first Infantry
Spanish American War

Front Row: Dr. Fairchilds, Lt. J. D. Cady, Q.M.
Iowa's First Overseas Expedition

By Hermon Porter Williams, A.M., Th.D.

Chaplain of the 51st Iowa Vol. Infantry

The Spanish-American War

When Christopher Columbus, born in Genoa, Italy, conceived of reaching India by sailing westward across the Atlantic Ocean, the Spanish-American war was begun. Oh, not exactly that! But, this is the story.

On the third of August, 1492, the three vessels of Columbus were sailing westward, the Santa Maria and the Pinta and the Nina, from the port of Palos in Spain. At length, on the 11th of October, toward ten o’clock at night, Columbus was on the poop deck of his flagship and perceived a light on the western horizon. At 2 o’clock the next morning land was distinctly seen. It was the island he called San Salvador, now known as Watling’s Island, one of the Bahamas. A fort was built and garrisoned by 39 men.

But this was just a beginning. The Pope granted to the Spanish monarchs and their heirs “all lands discovered or hereafter to be discovered in the western ocean.” On his second and third voyages, Columbus visited other islands in the archipelago until he reached Cuba, which he believed was the shore of Asia. These islands, Mexico, and the areas of the South American continent were ultimately added to the holdings of Spain and Portugal. In 1521, Magellan, passing through the southern straits, discovered the Philippine archipelago in the far east, and was killed in a battle with
the natives. Thus, the empire of Spain was extended widely into the Occident and Orient.

When Maximo Gomez led the bloody insurrection against Spain in Cuba in 1895, the sympathy of the United States was aroused; and when the American battleship “Maine” was treacherously blown up in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898, the war with our own country was begun that brought an end to the Spanish empire in America and in the Philippine islands. Commodore George Dewey, in command of our Asiatic squadron, destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila bay and assisted in the capture of Manila. He continued to serve on the general board of the navy until his death in 1917. General Aguinaldo, born of Tagalog and Chinese parents, headed a rebellion against the American occupation of the Philippines. His capital at San Fernando de Pampanga was captured by the 51st Iowa infantry, and he was subsequently taken prisoner by General Funston. Under American auspices the Philippine archipelago was gradually transformed into a republic, and the new era of democracy challenged the communism of Asia.

Troops from all the states in our Federal Union were enlisted and joined in effecting this general result. A letter from the adjutant general’s department of the State of Iowa contains this record: “You are advised that research indicates that the 51st Volunteers was the last unit discharged after the Spanish-American war was over.” Its service had marked the close of a stupendous historic epoch.

And now, writes Comrade Lloyd Thurston of Osceola, Iowa, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief of the United Spanish War Veterans:¹ “My dear Captain: what a wonderful distinction! You are the only comrade surviving in the old 51st Iowa Volunteer infantry who is

¹ Senator Thurston was elected Commander-in-Chief of the United Spanish War Veterans, at the San Antonio encampment, September 22, 1934. He formerly served in the Iowa senate 1921-25 and in congress 1925-39.
entitled to carry the rank above mentioned. Please see to it that this rank survives for many years to come.”

REMINISCENCES OF THE CHAPLAIN

(My Most Effective Church Work)

The author began to preach for little rural churches in Iowa while he was a student in the State University, and thus supported himself through college. He participated in oratorical contests, played left tackle on the Varsity football team, trained in the University Battery and with the Bayonet Squad, and was captain of Company D, which won out in the competitive drill of his senior year. On graduation from Divinity course of Drake University in Des Moines he located as pastor of the Christian church in Ames, Iowa.

At the outbreak of the Spanish-American war he resigned this charge and enlisted as a private in Company A, Third regiment of the Iowa National Guard, Col. John C. Loper, commanding. His captain was John A. Hull, who had been a classmate in the University of Iowa and subsequently served with distinction in the national army. Capt. Hull promptly appointed Williams to be a sergeant. And then Gov. Leslie M. Shaw commissioned him to serve as the chaplain of the regiment, with the rank of captain.

Designated as the Fifty-first Iowa Volunteer infantry, this regiment had a total enrollment of 1344. On being inducted into the Federal service they left Des Moines for San Francisco by rail June 5, 1898, under telegraphic orders from the War department in Washington. Arriving at San Francisco June 10th, they pitched their tents the next day in Camp Merritt. But the location was unfortunate. There was so much sickness, aggravated by the cold winds and fogs at that place, that the regiment was removed July 20th to Camp Merriam, on the more protected slopes of the Presidio. On November 3rd, we were ordered to embark on the transport “Pennsylvania” for the Philippine Islands. Twenty-seven men had died of disease in San Francisco and a number more, under urgent necessity, were discharged from the service.
The transport arrived at Honolulu November 11th, where it remained four days. Thirty-three men were left in the military hospital at this port. Continuing the voyage, the regiment reached Manila bay on December 26, 1898. Then the order came to proceed to Iloilo, over three hundred miles to the south, where we watched for a month the menacing presence of a German vessel apparently looking for a strategic opening. Then returning to the Naval Base at Cavite, the regiment was disembarked to serve as guard, participating in the occupation of San Roque and in various battles to the south of Manila. But before that month was over, we were ordered into the main advance against the insurgents north of the city, which culminated in some eight battles for the capture of Aguinaldo’s capital, San Fernando de Pampanga.

Finally, the regiment was entrained for Manila and embarked on the transport “Senator,” to be brought back to San Francisco through a howling typhoon, and was mustered out of the Federal service on November 2, 1899. Colonel Loper’s report on these men and their service to the nation contains this statement: “They were gentlemen as well as soldiers, and they did not fail to uphold the honor of the regiment and the dignity of the state from which they were sent.”

Colonel Loper’s Death

Mrs. Loper and her two sons had visited the colonel while we were encamped in the Presidio. Afterwards she took passage on a ship for the Philippines, and fortunately could be with her husband while he was sick in the hospital. In a recent letter from the elder son, the Rev. Vere V. Loper, pastor of the First Congregational church of Berkeley, California, is the following information: “My mother passed away in 1927. My father died in 1931. During the last years of their lives they were at the Soldiers’ Home in Marshalltown. Dad was adjutant of the Home right up to the time of his death. He died in the harness, as he would have liked it.”

Thus, it has been with the regiment as a whole. When
mustered out, the men took up anew the various responsibilities of citizenship in this blessed country of ours. Over fourscore of the men of our regiment served in the First World War, in positions of special responsibility and leadership. And now, after a most notable half century in the history of our country, nearly three hundred are still living, and still contributing to the spirit and welfare of our beloved nation.

After my own three score years of ministerial experience in this great world of ours—a student preacher in Iowa, chaplain in the Spanish war, a pioneer missionary in the Philippines, a missionary visitor in China and Japan, a tubercular homesteader in New Mexico preaching to the Jicarilla Apache Indians and principal of their Indian school, pastor in Albuquerque emerging from frontier psychology, dean of Spokane University, pastor in Tacoma, preacher and lecturer assigned to troops in Europe during the First World War and detailed for the Easter sermon at Chateau Thierry after the battle and subsequently to the 91st and 77th Divisions, a Bible teacher on the State University campus at Seattle, a brother pastor with New Jersey Baptists while completing some graduate work in Columbia and Drew universities, I am constrained to say that the regiment I served as chaplain during the Spanish war and the Philippine insurrection proved to be the largest-and-most-effective church I have ever contacted—all men (plus two busy nurses in San Francisco, Della Weeks, supported by friends in Des Moines, also Nurse Flora Uri of San Francisco).

The Spanish-American war was a most significant development historically—the breakdown of medieval tyranny in the domain discovered by Columbus four centuries before, and a new world outlook in the Far East. After the war was fought, our regiment came home to reinforce the nation in its ideals, its commerce, its farming and industry, in college teaching and administration, in scientific and professional skills, in county and state
and national government, in science and philanthropy and religion, a wonderful work!

**Value of Regimental Band**

As a National Guard organization in Iowa, before being mustered into the Federal service, the regiment had been accustomed to assemble its companies on Sunday mornings, under the leadership of non-commissioned officers, for regimental "Church," at the sounding of "Church Call" by the buglers, and the challenging music of the regimental band. And oh, what a Bandmaster we had—George Landers! None better! At ninety years of age he writes me: "I am making a special fight for more religious music in band concerts. The people want it! God wants it! It is the music worthwhile—music to prepare us for the future." This custom was continued for some time, while the regiment was all together, in our Sunday morning church.

And I held some "protracted meetings" among the men, one in cooperation with the Chaplain of the 20th Kansas regiment, which was brigaded with us in the Presidio. I remember a soldier who came to me and wanted to be baptized. On inquiry I found out that he had been baptized in his home town several years before, but had not fulfilled to his own satisfaction the obligations implied. After some talk with him I urged that he make good on the significance of that former consecration.

Through personal conversations in camp, the visitation of the sick in the hospital, and the burial of the dead, the bonds of sympathy and fellowship between the chaplain and the men in that church of ours were greatly strengthened. Not a few instances are recalled of genuine spiritual service. There was a noble fellow whom I had met on the football field in Iowa. He was sick unto death, and I talked and prayed with him deep into the night. The next day he thanked me for these words of consolation and cheer, and when he died I was able to write something of condolence and Divine promise to his folks at home. Another instance comes to mind, of
a man who was diseased from his past dissipations; and when he seemed to be nearing recovery he told me his story and proposed to live a clean life thereafter. And odd bits of fraternal helpfulness bobbed up now and then; a private (who afterwards became a preacher) came to me as we weighed anchor from Manila for Iloilo, and asked to borrow an undershirt. The native washerwoman had not returned his garments as she had promised—so I clothed the naked (as the Gospel teaches).

Arriving at Manila, the transport "Pennsylvania," as I have said, was ordered at once to Iloilo, to prevent the insurgents there from burning the town, and to watch a suspicious German ship that was standing by. My bride found a home for the time with a Spanish-English family in Manila, and afterwards, during our field activities, in the home of a doctor, a former major-surgeon in the Spanish army. On returning to Cavite, the regiment was disembarked to guard the navy yard, having been quartered on the S.S. "Pennsylvania" for ninety-four days. With such a record we proudly called ourselves "Loper's Marines." And then, even before we were all ashore, the call to arms was sounded—Manila had been attacked. Admiral Dewey landed from his flagship and called on Colonel Loper and advised that the insurgent troops in San Roque, just across the causeway from the navy yard, be ordered to leave, under threat of bombardment. This they did, burning the town as they left. The next day I was ordered to go over the area to see if any of the people had been abandoned, sick or in distress. I did as ordered, and found no people there at all.

**Burial of Smallpox Victim**

A few days afterwards, I was ordered to bury one of our men, Wallace Bolin, our regimental quartermaster sergeant, a victim of smallpox. This burial ground was subsequently designated as the National Cemetery of San Roque. I had a firing squad under my command to complete the ceremony at the grave. But when we were about to march back to camp several shots came pinging around us from the shore. Were the insurgents
attacking? I ordered the squad into line of skirmishers and we advanced in the direction from which the shots came—only to find that they were from a soldier out shooting dogs, which, with the destruction of the town, had become a great pest.

Our first battalion was ordered to reinforce the line protecting the city of Manila on the south, and established themselves in the neighborhood of the Culi-Culi church, Pasay, and San Pedro Macati. There was outpost firing day and night. The chaplain visited them, held several worship services from time to time, and saw members of his "church" pass out food to hungry native children. On this front it was that Private Bordwine was wounded and captured; and in spite of strenuous efforts on the part of H Company to recover him, he was never heard of again. On one occasion I remember hearing the voice of "Gentle Annie," otherwise William H. Keating, the very worthy captain of F Company, ordering volley after volley into the deploying forces of the insurgents. And I also traveled out along the line eastward to visit friends in the First California regiment, who had borne the heavy burden of the fighting out there.

But when our regiment was ordered to the north line and into the advance on Aguinaldo's capital at San Fernando de Pampanga we entered upon our major campaign. At Calumpit our skirmish line was under heavy fire from across the river. I was walking along behind it, intent on seeing how the boys were faring, when I called to some of them to go forward a bit and find cover in a thicket. One looked at me with a queer expression, and I hushed, realizing that I was only a chaplain and not a line officer.

It was on this field that the wisdom of an old soldier of the Civil war was confirmed in my experience. At Ames, Iowa, I had been rooming in the home of George Laud, the undertaker. He had been a scout in the Army of the Potomac and was battle-wise. When I left to enlist for the Spanish war the old soldier gave me this
advice: “Boy! whatever happens, hang onto your canteen and your rubber blanket!” But at Calumpit, as we advanced through the low-spreading bamboo thickets, these reached out their spined fingers and snatched away my rubber blanket without my knowledge. Night came, and we bivouacked on the field. I had my canteen, but it could offer no shelter from the rain. Ah! here was the kindness of the men to their chaplain! One of them had found the rubber blanket, and with the chaplain’s name on the inner surface, he brought it to me. So I had a restful night in spite of the rain.

At Quingua, there was severe fighting over quite an area. Colonel Loper was hospitalized at the time, and Lieut. Col. Miller was in command of the regiment. He sent me around to our scattered companies to see how their supply of ammunition was holding out. In this task I came upon Captain Wheeler of Troop E, 4th U.S. cavalry, which was serving among our scouts. One of his buglers is now, as I write, Col. William Halthusen, of Albuquerque, an esteemed friend and member of our veterans’ camp. I got over into the area occupied by the First Nebraska regiment. These men were feeling very mournful at the time, for their highly respected commander, Col. Stotsenburg, had just been killed in the fighting. After a time I got back to camp with a few wounded men carried on litters.

**Good Shooting Anywhere**

In the advance on Santo Tomas we had to cross a number of swamps and bayous. Our skirmish line was attacking the enemy’s troops, which were well drawn-up at not too great a distance ahead. A private near me pushed his gun into my hands and said: “Here, chaplain, take a shot! I have to fix my legging!” I took the gun and was looking to see just where a bullet might be placed for the greatest advantage to our cause. But I was too slow. The soldier adjusted his legging in a jiffy, and then seized the gun from my hands and began firing. “Ah shoot! shoot!” he said, “just anywhere.”

It was on that field that I saw a mounted officer of the
regulars, in command of skirmishers, trying to get his horse to leap off the bank and into the stream that he wanted to cross. But the horse balked and would not be persuaded. Just then, however, the chaplain came along and gave the horse and his rider a push into the water; and we pressed on toward Santo Tomas—I waded.

As I have said, there were eight battles in capturing San Fernando, Aguinaldo's capital—the last on July 4, 1899. There we found that we had "another river to cross." As I plunged in with the advancing line, I was afraid that some of the short boys might have difficulty in keeping their feet—but they got through. I was carrying a Mauser rifle at the time with two or three cartridge clips in my pocket. This was the type of weapon used by the insurgents, quite modern, captured from the Spaniards. One of our men had acquired it and wanted to keep it for a souvenir (I learned in Los Angeles that it is still in his possession). So, he asked me to carry it for him, since I had no gun. But having forded the stream, the insurgent fire burst out so fiercely, as they charged our line, that I dodged behind a little knoll and tried to load the Mauser, wanting to help our cause a bit. But the gun was so rusted and foul that I couldn't get the clips into place. However, in a few minutes, the enemy broke and fled. Then Lieut. Col. Miller directed me to go over the field and help the hospital squads to find and bring in the wounded, that none be missed. This we did.

The native troops in that region were largely of the Ilocano tribe of northern Luzon. I was so impressed by their quality and character that when I returned to the Islands after two years, with Rev. W. H. Hanna and Dr. C. L. Pickett, we chose the Ilocano area for our major work in missionary pioneering; and they have not disappointed our expectations. They have character and ability and a desire for improvement. Besides our beginnings in the Manila area, we started church enterprises in Laoag, in Vigan, in Bangued, as well as in Aparri, and the work of the Gospel continues to prosper.
While living in Vigan, I compiled and published the first English-Ilocano Dictionary. For the occupation of the whole insular field the Evangelical Union of the denominational missions was successfully organized, a happy illustration of denominational cooperation. Yes! Christian Union through cooperation! One of the Methodist bishops congratulated my father on the leadership his son had contributed for inaugurating the work of the Evangelical Union on the island of Luzon.

**OVER HALF OF REGIMENT SICK**

During the summer of 1899, our outposts around San Fernando were attacked quite often, while our troops made several fierce advances. I was kept very busy between times catching the trains to Manila to visit our men in the hospital. Some 53 percent of our regiment were on the sick list during those days. Finally the whole regiment was ordered back to this port for embarkation home. General MacArthur, the father of our illustrious American commander in the war with Japan, bade us goodbye with fervent words of appreciation, and a benediction: "God bless the Fifty-first Iowa regiment!" And subsequently a congressional medal was authorized for the troops thus serving, inscribed "For Patriotism, Fortitude, and Loyalty."

Our final "Regimental Church" in the Philippines was held in Manila, in the Quartel de Espana, September 17, 1899.

**MOVEMENT OF FIFTY-FIRST**

The following "Memoranda of the Regiment" were printed on the final page of our last regimental church program in the Philippines, as follows:

1898, Apr. 26, Mobilized in Des Moines, Camp McKinley.
May 30, Mustered into the Federal Army.
June 5-10, in transit to San Francisco and Camp Merritt.
July 29, Removal to Camp Merriam, Presidio.
December 7, Arrived in Manila Bay.
December 25, Weighed anchor for Iloilo.
1899, Feb. 5, Disembarked at Cavite, 94 days on ship.
Feb. 9, San Roque occupied, 3rd battalion assigned to the firing line.
Feb. 13, First battalion put in field at Pasay.
Mar. 26, Second battalion on duty in Manila.
April 14-16, Regiment united at Malolos.
April 23, Engagement at Quingua.
April 24, Engagement near Pulilan.
April 25, Engagement at Calumpit.
May 4, Engagement at Santo Tomas.
May 5, Two battalions occupy San Fernando.
June 13, The engagement at Zapote Bridge, Wagner killed.
June 16, Insurgents attack San Fernando.
Aug. 9, The last skirmish, Calulut.
Sept. 7, Regiment ordered to Manila to prepare for homeward voyage.

DEAD IN LUZON

Wallace A. Bolin, Q.M. Sgt., smallpox, Mar. 25, buried in San Roque.
Walter Wagner, Co. A, killed in action June 13, buried 57 National Cemetery.
Paul B. Puch, Co. L, typhoid, July 1, 96 National Cemetery.
Lt. Jno. L. Moore, Co. L, pistol shot, July 18, buried Sec. 82, No. 7, Paco.
Clarence W. Mason, Band, appendicitis, Aug. 3, buried 147 National Cemetery.
Walter E. Hutchison, Co. A, dysentery, Aug. 8, body sent home.
Rodney Clark, Co. B, typhoid, Aug. 8, buried 154 National Cemetery.
Alfred J. Borduwine, Co. H, missing in action.

RETURNED TO UNITED STATES

After a brief stay in Manila we steamed back to San Francisco on the transport "Senator," through one of the worst typhoons of record (we were told). Before the regiment was mustered out at the Presidio on the second of November, to take its place in the ranks of industry and public service, one of our men was recruited to serve on the faculty of a prominent college in California. Later, Lieut. Edward Hearne returned to the
Philippines for the Y.M.C.A. work among the troops, and represented the Helen Gould fund in China; afterwards he served for years with the organization in New England, and cruised around the world to visit again the Philippine islands. His brother Charles pioneered in Panama. Mark Wayne Williams, a mail orderly in Camp Merritt, became a city preacher in San Francisco, Milwaukee, Boston, in London, England, and in Brooklyn, New York. There is no end to these success stories.

In the First World War a number of our men served as field officers in Europe. Murve Hutchinson was in the New York city office of that remarkable service corps, the Army and Navy Y.M.C.A. I called on Dan Turner when he was in the state capitol at Des Moines as Governor of the State of Iowa. Gen. Mat Tinley of Council Bluffs has not only been illustrious as a military man, but also as a doctor of medicine in western Iowa. Lamont Williams, wounded in action, was for years the superintendent of Arlington National cemetery. E. E. Carle, as I write, is the adjutant general of the Veterans department in Washington. And then there is Frank Meredith of Los Angeles, so diligent in keeping us acquainted with one another. But I cannot name them all. As for farmers, business men, scientists, teachers, county officials, and the many important tasks performed by our citizens in this blessed country of ours, and around the world, the 51st Iowa Volunteer infantry has provided its full measure of help to our expanding civilization.

Scores of relatives and friends came to greet us as our train crossed the river to Council Bluffs and brought us back to our home state. My father, James Madison Williams, was there, and my mother, Augusta Zimmer- man Williams, both from the faculty of Drake University. My father had served in the Civil war as an orderly sergeant in the 44th Iowa infantry. He was asked to offer the prayer of thanksgiving for our safe return.

Gen. James Rush Lincoln of Ames, Iowa, inspector general for the state, reported as follows: "I desire to speak of the pride with which the citizens of our state
welcomed the return of the Fifty-first Iowa at Council Bluffs. A more soldierly looking body of veterans never paraded, and their behavior when under the obligation to be obedient to discipline, other than their soldierly instincts prompted, proved them to be as honorable gentlemen as they had been gallant fighters and peerless soldiers."

SERVED AND ACHIEVED

Yes, the Fifty-first Iowa Volunteer infantry was the largest church I ever contacted, and the most effective. They helped to bring a new hope to a somber world. Through subsequent years its members were active in the affairs of the nation and of world civilization. In the building of a thousand homes, in agriculture and industry, in business and medicine and education, in government administration, in evangelism and world missions they served and achieved. "When the roll is called up yonder," I pray that we may meet again and rejoice in the accomplishments we were able to assist in for the advancing history of the nation and of mankind. The Iberian dark ages were doomed and the clouds are beginning to disperse. Our veterans of the Spanish war deserve the gratitude of generations to come. The bondage of the past was broken and the people set free for a new social order that is challenging the oncoming future in both hemispheres. We did not see the significance of all these things then, for the God of History leads us only step by step in the path of duty. And still the darkness is heavy over the world. But we go forward in life as hearing the Divine challenge: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord! make his paths straight." The men of the 51st Iowa Volunteer infantry were in the line of prophetic succession for the betterment of the world.

There is something very Christian in volunteering one's life for the service of his country and the welfare of humanity. Some years ago, while I was chaplain of the Veterans' hospital in Albuquerque, it seemed to me that those invalided soldiers represented in much the
ideals that Christian consecration has stood for through the centuries. So, for a Sunday morning, I had printed on a card and distributed the following verses, as a timely meditation for that “All Souls’ Church,” which the volunteer builds in the service of his country. And here I present it in this special dedication to the men of the Fifty-first Iowa Volunteer infantry:

A Meditation

A few men meet in the Assembly Hall;
Many with phones, in the wards, lie abed;
Some sleep, are in pain, or care not at all—
O Christ, for them all Thy blood was shed!

They were sworn to defend our heritage;
For their brothers’ good they ventured loss;
Are wounded, sick, and spent with age—
They seem like comrades of the Cross.

At Bethlehem—how ran the song?
Glory to God! Peace! and Good Will!
O heavenly Host, we follow on!
The love of Christ must triumph still!

51st Regiment Iowa Volunteer Infantry
Roster of Field, Commissioned and Non-Commissioned Staff
Officers at muster in of Organization May 30, 1898, at Camp McKinley, Des Moines, Iowa

Field and Staff—John C. Loper; Colonel; Marcellus M. Miller, Lieutenant Colonel; William J. Duggan, Major; John T. Hume, Major; Sterling P. Moore, Major; Joseph T. Daidson, Regimental Adjutant; George A. Reed, Battalion Adjutant; Frank M. Compton, Battalion Adjutant; Herbert C. Lane, Battalion Adjutant; John D. Cady, Quartermaster; Willard S. H. Mathews, Surgeon; David S. Fairchild, Jr., Assistant Surgeon; Donald Macrae, Jr., Assistant Surgeon; Hermon P. Williams, Chaplain.

Non-Commissioned Staff—Claude M. Baker, Sergeant Major; Wallace A. Bolin, Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant; Fred F. Carpenter, Hospital Steward; Jarvis E. Hodgson, Hospital Steward; Wilbur S. Conkling, Hospital Steward; Howard W. Seager, Hospital Steward.

Listed in “Roster of Iowa Soldiers,” Vol. VI. pp. 507-508
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