



The Ninth U.S. Infantry

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General:

The Ninth U.S. Infantry served in Cuba during the Spanish American War as part of [General Shafter's Fifth Corps](#). The regiment was involved in the assault on San Juan Hill. The unit suffered losses in battle, but disease was its main enemy. Following the Spanish American War, the Ninth U.S. Infantry steamed to the Philippines, and saw service during the Philippine-American War.

Unit History:

As the Spanish American War approached, the Ninth U.S. Infantry was at home in the Madison Barracks, on the Black River, near Sacketts Harbor, New York. Prior to the issuing of the [declaration of war](#), the unit was already on the move. It was ordered to proceed to Tampa, Florida, beginning its trek on April 19, 1898. At this time, it was under the command of Col. William Powell, with [Lt. Col. Ezra P. Ewers](#) being second in command. The strength of the unit was 489 men.



Lt.Col. E. P. Ewers

The uniform that the men were required to pack for their trek included their blue uniform, campaign hat, leggings, and equipment for heavy marching order. Their knapsacks contained a shelter half, overcoat, dark blue flannel shirt, blanket, suit of underclothes, pair of shoes, pair of stockings, towel, brush and comb. In addition, each man was required to carry one day's cooked rations, three days of travel rations, and thirty days of field rations.

In addition to these supplies, additional equipment was packed for company use, and shipped along with the regiment. Each company provided the following additional equipment for each member of the company: blouse, trousers, forage cap, suit of underwear, and two pairs of stockings.

When April 19th arrived, the Ninth marched to the train station, past cheering crowds, taking the 11:30 a.m. train out of town. The unit was the first to make the long trek down the east coast, and past enthusiastic crowds all along the way who were caught up in the novelty of the scene. The Ninth's band pleased the southerners by serenading them with "Dixie." The unit arrived on April 22, and as assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 1st Division of Maj. Gen. Shafter's 5th Army Corps. The Third Brigade was under the command of Brig. Gen. Jacob Kent.

On arriving, the unit was given orders to expand each company, and add additional companies. The order was never carried out in any major way. Here also, orders were issued concerning the packing of equipment. The change was important, since it would help to keep the men from being seen in the jungles of Cuba. Blanket rolls were to consist of the blanket, poncho, shelter pole and pins, all rolled in the shelter half and then encased in brown trousers. This would keep the white shelter half from attracting attention in the jungles.

On June 7, the unit started for Port Tampa, along the Plant railroad lines. The regiment left camp at 3:20 a.m., and marched to Ybor City, where it arrived 25 minutes later. It left Ybor City by rail at 4:10 a.m., and moved aboard the transport SANTIAGO at 10:00 a.m. June 8. It had gone a total of 13 miles! At about this same time, the regiment learned that its colonel, Powell, had been promoted to the command of the brigade.

The SANTIAGO, Transport #2, was a chartered Ward Line steamer. Though it had been converted for use as a transport, the Ninth found the ship hot, crowded and uncomfortable. However, she was considered to be one of the better transports in the fleet so the men considered themselves lucky. When the transports eventually steamed for Cuba, after a delay created by fears of Cervera's Spanish Squadron, the SANTIAGO was the second ship in the column, after the gunboat HELENA.

After two days at sea, the SANTIAGO arrived off Cuba on June 22. Much to the chagrin of the men, who thought they would be among the first to land, the SANTIAGO was ordered to take part in a diversionary movement toward Santiago. The Ninth had their baptism under fire when the vessel passed close to the entrance to Santiago harbor and a gun in the fortifications opened fire, sending two shells toward the vessel. Both missed.

The SANTIAGO and several other transports languished off of Santiago for several days. In the disorganization of the disembarking troops, supplies, etc. at Daiquiri, Maj. Gen. Shafter simply had forgotten about the transports in the diversionary movement! The men spent their time swimming, and trying to cope with the crowded conditions. The morning of June 25 dawned to reveal something no one aboard the SANTIAGO had expected - an empty sea! During the night, the other transports had received belated orders to proceed to Siboney. In the darkness, the SANTIAGO was not seen and did not receive the orders. Finally the orders arrived in the morning. The first had become the last! The Ninth was finally able to begin to disembark at about 3:00 p.m., passing the wounded arriving from the skirmish at Las Guasimas as it came ashore.





The 9th U.S. arrives at Siboney

The next day was spent in helping to unload supplies from the transports. On June 27th, the Ninth finally took up their line of march toward Santiago. The unit made four miles that day, the men laboring in the intense heat, carrying their blanket rolls and ammunition. That night the regiment camped at Sevilla.

As the Ninth finally approached Santiago and the San Juan heights, it found itself in the valley between the American artillery and the Spanish forces. Shells of all types filled the air, luckily a safe distance above the regiment. Orders were issued to stack the blanket rolls, which were placed under guard, prior to going into action. The unit began its advance, forming its line, though it was not clear in which direction they should advance. The bullets of the **Spanish Mausers** sliced the air, but the smokeless powder completely concealed the Spanish positions. Finally, they were ordered ahead by Gen. Kent, and led to a path that led to the left off of the main road. In the movements, the first and second battalions of the regiment got separated with the **24th Infantry** placed between. As the units moved into position, they past the 71st New York Volunteer Infantry hunkered down and trying to shield itself from the enemy's fire.

In the space of a short time, Colonel Wikoff was killed, Lieutenant Colonels Worth and Liscum were both wounded. The Ninth Infantry and the other regiments of the 3rd Brigade advanced toward San Juan Hill, in spite of not having a brigade commander! **Lt. Col. Ezra P. Ewers**, who was now the senior officer in the Brigade would not learn this fact until after San Juan Hill was captured!

The men had to pass over five hundred yards under heavy enemy fire. Instead of aiming for the blockhouse atop the heights, the brigade aimed for the space between to the blockhouse, and the end of the hill, placing the unit in a very pivotal position. The troops of the Third, Ninth and **24th Infantries** intermixed in their crossing of the San Juan River. The men were ordered to cease firing, but the order was of no avail. Some of the troops began to move ahead. The Ninth followed a few seconds later. As it reached the crest of San Juan Hill, its men took part in the volley firing against the retreating Spanish troops.



The 9th U.S. prepares to move out toward San Juan Hill

From the heat and exhaustion, the men lay down on the reverse side of the slope, out of range of the Spanish bullets. They remained in this position until Gen. Hawkins ordered them to get back into position at the crest to fire on the Spanish, in case the enemy counter-attacked. The expected counter-attack did not come. During the ensuing night, the regiment dug in, and by morning was entrenched.

On July 3, the men of the Ninth heard the sound of a distant bombardment. It was not until the next day that they learned that the firing was from the naval battle of Santiago, and that they had listened to the sacrificing of the dreaded Spanish squadron.

The men now settled into the siege of Santiago. From July 3 to July 10, they worked to reinforce their trenches.

Each company was sent down to the river to bathe until it was learned that the river was being used for drinking water by the units downstream. The bathing was quickly stopped unfortunately for the men of the Ninth.

No company cooking equipment had been provided, so each man had to fend for himself. Between gathering firewood, obtaining supplies (which were always in short supply, and only being replenished in the nick of time), cooking their food, etc. each man spent nearly six hours a day simply in keeping himself fed.

During the Battle of San Juan Hill, and the ensuing siege of Santiago, the Ninth U.S. Infantry lost one officer and 4 enlisted men killed and 27 enlisted men wounded. The surrender came on July 17. The Ninth may have taken part in the surrender ceremonies or have arrived just afterward, marching into Santiago, and watching the raising of the U.S. flag. After the ceremony, the regiment took up quarters in the Teatro de la Reina ("the Queen's Theater"). It began guard duty in various sites around the town. At about this time, khaki uniforms were finally issued to the men.

It was also at about this time that sickness began to make its appearance in the regiment. Up until July 13, between four and nine men were usually reported sick each day. By July 17, the number had risen to about 17 men per day. Within two days, the sick count had risen to 28 men. By July 20, the number jumped to 78 men, the next day to 92 men, and by July 22, 132 men out of the regiment's 433 men were reported sick. Many of the men who were not officially reported as sick were also in poor condition, and barely able to perform their duties. The first death from sickness occurred on July 21. The second occurred on July 30. Two more men died on August 2.

On August 2, the Ninth was relieved by Col. Hood's 2nd U.S. Volunteers, which was considered to be an "immune" regiment. By August 10, the Ninth was given orders to withdraw. The three mile march to the docks was difficult on the weakened men. Fifteen officers and 323 men made the trip. Leaving the docks, the men passed the sunken hulk of the **REINA MERCEDES** and were taken out to the **ST. LOUIS**, along with the 10th U.S. Infantry and part of the 71st New York Volunteer Infantry.

Aboard the transport one man died, and his death was attributed to yellow fever. As a result, the vessel was put in quarantine. The men were also put through a rigorous cleaning, and given new blue uniforms. The Ninth reached Montauk [**Camp Wikoff**] on August 13, with only 277 men present for duty, the remainder being placed in the hospital. On August 21 the unit was released from quarantine, though many of the men remained in the hospital.



The 9th U.S. Infantry at Montauk Point

By early September, the Ninth U.S. Infantry was back in the Madison Barracks. However, its stay would be short. By March of 1899, the unit was ordered to proceed to the Philippines to take part in the Philippine-American War. Before the unit left, the legacy of Cuba showed itself one more time - 26 men were discharged

Bibliography:

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