

History of the National Guard of California and the Philippine Insurrection: 1st Battalion, Heavy Artillery, California U.S. Volunteers 1899-1901

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ACTIVITIES OF THE
FIRST BATTALION HEAVY ARTILLERY, CALIFORNIA VOLUNTEERS
DURING THE PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION

The exchange of the Peace Treaty Ratifications between Spain and the United States on the eleventh of April, 1899, had no noticeable effect on the attitude of the insurrectionists toward the Americans in the Philippines. The actual outbreak of hostilities had taken place on February 5, 1899, and from that date until they were finally subdued, a guerilla warfare against the Americans was conducted by Aguinaldo and his followers. Whenever the rebels made a stand they met defeat at the hands of the Americans and were steadily being forced to withdraw toward the interior of the Island of Luzon.

The eleventh of April 1899, found Batteries A and D of the California Heavy Artillery, two Battalions of the 51st Iowa Volunteer Infantry, the Wyoming Light Battery and the Nevada Cavalry holding a position near Dalhican, several miles southeast of Cavite. These troops had under orders held about 6,000 insurgents in check at that point since February eighth. Depleted by sickness, hounded and shot at by the natives in their immediate front, with attacks on their outposts every night and with orders to grin and bear it, these volunteers gave sufficient proof of the kind of material of which the American army was composed.*

When the hope that there would be an order to advance had about been abandoned, General Lawton's command commenced moving toward the artillery's front. Then came orders to the waiting troops to reconnoiter the country in the vicinity of Salinas and Novaleta. On June 15, 1899, a reconnoitering party of eighty men from Batteries A and D under command of Captain Geary were fired upon by the insurgents near Novaleta. The insurgents were completely routed. On June sixteenth Batteries A and D under Major Rice scouted the roads leading to San Francisco de Malabon, Cavite Viejo, Salinas and Novaleta. Near the latter place Battery D under command of Lieutenant J. W. F. Diss found the enemy entrenched across the road and a spirited encounter took place in which the insurgents were again routed.

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 101.

Note The officers commanding the First Battalion of Heavy Artillery, California Volunteers, during the Spanish-American War remained in command during the Philippine Insurrection.

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On June nineteenth the Battalion of Heavy Artillery and two companies of the Tenth Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, received the surrender of the town of Rosario. From that time on the insurgents began to move and the First Battalion took the field in earnest, scouting the country along the line of General Lawton's advance, furnishing valuable information, at times operating in conjunction with the Tenth Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, but more often alone.*

On July first the California troops returned to Cavite, having been relieved by a Battalion of the First Montana Volunteer Infantry and a battery of the Sixth United States Artillery. Preparations for the homeward voyage were then begun. Prior to the departure of the First Battalion from Cavite on the homeward voyage, a number of men of both batteries, were at their own request discharged, some to re-enlist for further service in the islands, some to explore the unknown regions in the Philippines or elsewhere and others to enter business in the New American possessions.** On the twenty-third of July the command embarked on the United States army transport "Sherman" and with the First Regiment of California Volunteer Infantry reached San Francisco on the twenty-third day of August 1899. The trip home was a delightful one by way of the Inland Sea of Japan, and with stops at Nagasaki and Yokohama, permitting brief visits to Tokio and other points of interest. The Battalion went into camp at the Presidio, San Francisco where it remained until it was mustered out September 21, 1899, having been in the Federal service sixteen months and eleven days.

As the men went about, finishing their packing, preparatory to abandoning camp at the Presidio, there was more regret over the severance of the close relations among the men than for leaving the service. The boys had been together so long in hospitals, barracks and in the field and had listened to each other's complaints over being detached for special duty while others whom they considered more fortunate were on the firing line, that it seemed hard to believe that it was over and that they were returning to civilian

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 103.

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life. After the Batteries had lined up and answered to roll call for the last time, each man was presented with a copy of the final order from Battalion Headquarters which read as follows:*

"Headquarters, First Battalion Heavy Artillery,
California Volunteers,
Model Camp, Presidio California

September 21, 1899

Order No. 64:

To the Officers and Men of the Battalion:

The signing of this order terminates the official relations that have for over sixteen months bound us together as a military organization.

For your patience, forbearance, and fortitude under the exercise by me of military discipline but slightly less in degree than that usually applied to troops forming a part of the regular establishment, I extend to you my grateful appreciation and heartfelt thanks, and for such errors of judgment as have characterized my administration of the battalion I invoke your charitable consideration as men of full age and discretion.

The association with you as an organization has to me been one of the proudest, and the termination of this relationship this day is one of the saddest experience of a lifetime. The best wishes of your battalion commander accompany you, one and all wherever the duties of your life may call you.

Frank S. Rice

Major Commanding Battalion"

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*San Francisco Examiner, Sept. 22, 1899, page 9, column 2.

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Battery C was the only unit of the First Battalion of Volunteer Heavy Artillery to seek further military honors after having been mustered out of the Federal Service. That organization reported for duty in the National Guard of California and was returned to its former status as Troop B, Cavalry.* Major Frank S. Rice was on the twenty-third of April 1900, commissioned Major and Engineer Officer on the Third Brigade Staff, National Guard of California.** Of the other officers and members of Batteries A, B, and D, some enlisted in the National Guard, but the great majority of the men returned to private life.

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*Adjutant General Report 1899-1900, General Order No. 6, page 59.

**Adjutant General Report 1899-1900, General Order No. 3, page 77.