

California and the War with Spain: 1st Battalion, Heavy Artillery, California U.S. Volunteers, 1898-1899

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FIRST BATTALION HEAVY ARTILLERY, CALIFORNIA VOLUNTEERS

AND THE

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

Reference: Muster rolls of Field and Staff of the First
Battalion, California Heavy Artillery, May 9,
1898 to September 21, 1899.

Battalion Headquarters:

Presidio, San Francisco	May 9,	1898 to Nov. 6,	1898
Cavite, Philippine Islands	Dec. 6,	1898 to July 27,	1899
Presidio, San Francisco	Aug. 25,	1899 to Sept. 21,	1899

Mustered in May 9, 1898

Mustered out Sept. 21, 1899

Commanding Officers:

Frank S. Rice, Major Commanding
(Appointed May 7, 1898)

A. J. Pedler, Captain and Assistant
Surgeon

(Appointed May 7, 1898)

(Resigned Oct. 13, 1898)

W. J. Hanna, Captain and Assistant
Surgeon

(Appointed Oct. 19, 1898)

John A. Koster, First Lieutenant
and Battalion Adjutant

(Appointed May 7, 1898)

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FIRST BATTALION HEAVY ARTILLERY, CALIFORNIA VOLUNTEERS

AND THE

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Batteries included in the First Battalion, California Heavy Artillery

Battery A, First Battalion Heavy Artillery, California Volunteers:

Headquarters: Old Montana Warehouse, San Francisco

May 9, 1898 to May 18, 1898

Presidio, San Francisco

May 18, 1898 to May 24, 1898

Cavite Arsenal, Philippine Islands

July 2, 1898 to Sept. 9, 1898

Cavite, Philippine Islands

Sept. 9, 1898 to Feb. 9, 1899

San Roque, Philippine Islands

Feb. 9, 1899 to June 28, 1899

Cavite, Philippine Islands

June 28, 1899 to July 2, 1899

Presidio, San Francisco

Aug. 25, 1899 to Sept. 21, 1899

Mustered in May 9, 1898

Mustered out Sept. 21, 1899

Commanding Officers

Dennis Geary, Captain

(Mustered in May 9, 1898)

Thomas F. Barry, First Lieutenant

(Mustered in May 9, 1898)

(Discharged Nov. 4, 1898)

Joseph B. Morse, First Lieutenant

(Appointed Nov. 9, 1898)

(Discharged June 17, 1899)

Arthur P. Hayne, First Lieutenant

(Appointed June 19, 1899)

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Batteries included in the First Battalion, California Heavy Artillery
(Continued)

Battery B, First Battalion Heavy Artillery, California Volunteers:

Headquarters: Old Fontana Warehouse, San Francisco
May 9, 1898 to May 18, 1898
Presidio, San Francisco
May 18, 1898 to June 7, 1898
Fort Baker, California
June 7, 1898 to Dec. 5, 1898
Angel Island, California
Dec. 5, 1898 to Jan. 30, 1899

Mustered in May 9, 1898
Mustered out Jan. 30, 1899

Commanding Officers

F. T. Hay, Captain
(Mustered in May 9, 1898)
(Resigned Sept. 30, 1898)
Herbert I. Choynski, Captain
(Appointed Sept. 30, 1898)
(Resigned Jan. 1, 1899)
Frank S. Sprague, Captain
(Appointed Jan. 1, 1899)
Herbert I. Choynski, First Lieutenant
(Mustered in May 9, 1898)
(Promoted to Captain Sept. 30,
1898)
Frank S. Sprague, First Lieutenant
(Appointed Sept. 30, 1898)
(Promoted to Captain, Jan. 11,
1899)
George B. Huie, First Lieutenant
(Appointed Jan. 1, 1899)

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AND THE
SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

Batteries included in the First Battalion, California Heavy Artillery
(Continued)

Battery C, First Battalion Heavy Artillery, California Volunteers:

Headquarters: Old Fontana Warehouse, San Francisco

May 10, 1898 to May 18, 1898

Presidio, San Francisco

May 18, 1898 to June 5, 1898

Fort Canby, Washington

June 6, 1898 to Feb. 3, 1899

Mustered in May 7, 1898

Mustered out Feb. 3, 1899

Commanding Officers

John Cooke, Captain

(Mustered in May 7, 1898)

Samuel W. Kay, First Lieutenant

(Mustered in May 7, 1898)

Battery D, First Battalion Heavy Artillery, California Volunteers:

Headquarters: Old Fontana Warehouse, San Francisco

May 10, 1898 to May 18, 1898

Presidio, San Francisco

May 18, 1898 to Oct. 17, 1898

San Pedro Macati, Philippine Islands

Nov. 24, 1898 to Dec. 28, 1898

Cavite, Philippine Islands

Dec. 28, 1898 to April 1, 1899

Dalhican, Philippine Islands

April 1, 1899 to July 2, 1899

Cavite, Philippine Islands

July 2, 1899 to July 22, 1899

Presidio, San Francisco

August 24, 1899 to Sept. 21, 1899

Mustered in May 10, 1898

Mustered out Sept. 21, 1899

Commanding Officers

Henry Steere, Captain

(Mustered in May 10, 1899)

(Discharged July 12, 1899)

John W. F. Diss, Captain

(Appointed July 14, 1899)

John W. F. Diss, First Lieutenant

(Mustered in May 10, 1898)

(Promoted Captain July 14, 1899)

George L. McKeeby, First Lieutenant

(Appointed July 14, 1899)

ACTIVITIES OF THE
FIRST BATTALION HEAVY ARTILLERY, CALIFORNIA VOLUNTEERS
DURING THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

It is proverbially true that of all the branches of the military service of the United States, there is none more widely scattered and less frequently together as units, than the artillery regiments. This is equally true of the volunteer artillery organizations. Where the entire regiments of infantry have been moved from place to place, the various bodies of artillery have been broken up and widely scattered. Of all the scatterings and dis-integrations of military units, the history of the First Battalion of Heavy Artillery, California Volunteers, during the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection, furnishes the most unique example.*

The Battalion consisted of four batteries, and as was disclosed after the termination of the war, the intention of the government in calling it into existence, was to man the fortifications which protected San Francisco Harbor from attack by sea. It is generally known that the coast defenses in that neighborhood as planned, would be the most complete and invulnerable of any defenses along the coast of the entire country.

The possibility of an attack by Spanish War vessels, which, although projected, never came, owing to the success of our own fleet in distant seas, prompted the call for volunteer artillerymen of exceptional intelligence who might be trained in the handling of these defensive machines.**

An entire regiment might have been recruited with as much ease as were the four batteries collected. Extreme care was exercised in selecting men for the battalion. College graduates, lawyers, doctors, electricians, machinists, wealthy men's sons, clerks, and laborers vied with each other in an endeavor to enlist. Although thousands presented themselves, only 600 were originally sworn in. In June and July 1898, 200 recruits were added, bringing the full strength of the battalion up to 800 or the equivalent of two battalions of infantry.

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 93.

**Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 94.

ACTIVITIES OF THE
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Two batteries, A and B, were recruited in San Francisco. The recruiting officers worked untiringly to select the best material available. Battery C was originally recruited in Sacramento and its original members comprised Troop B, National Guard of California. Battery D was recruited in Los Angeles and was the only military organization in California, outside of San Francisco, that saw service in the Philippines. The battalion as a whole was the only military body recruited from citizens of the State not belonging to any of the various State Military Organizations, excepting the original recruits of Battery C, who numbered scarcely ten percent of its members.*

Enrollment completed, the batteries were rendezvoused at San Francisco and the offices of the Governor became the mecca toward which aspirants for commissions turned. The reputation of the battalion had become so generally known that National Guard officers of high rank and years of experience clamored for even the barless straps of a second lieutenant. Youthful officers of the Civil War elbowed younger men who had been taught military science at Military Schools. Men used every known influence to secure a commission. The Governor, be it said to his credit, withstood the most seductive blandishments and steadfastly declined to appoint any but men of experience. With the material at hand to select from, it was not surprising that the officers selected were remarkably high in the scale of intelligence and experience. That the officers and men, chosen for the battalion, maintained a high standard of honor, courtesy, efficiency, and discipline, has been evidenced repeatedly by the outspoken commendation of the officers of the regular troops with whom they came in contact. The Volunteers were particularly proud of this and the relations between officers and men appeared to be a perfect understanding based on mutual respect.**

At San Francisco the officers joined their batteries and marched to the Old Fontana Warehouse at the North end of Van Ness Avenue near Fort Mason, where the battalion went into quarters. The Old Warehouse was a ramshackle affair. The wind and fog rushed through the broken windows and as the dilapidated building was

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 94.

**Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 94.

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not provided with stoves, the atmosphere was most uncomfortable.

At this stage of preparation the government was slow in providing suitable clothing and blankets for the men. The authorities were doing their best to equip the troops as quickly as possible, but in the meantime the men were suffering from the cold. There was scarcely a man in the battalion who had not a cold or sore throat and several were threatened with pneumonia. Food too, was none too plentiful and the quality was poor. At a later date the situation was remedied. Blankets and overcoats were provided, food in more generous quantities and of a better quality was supplied and the Red Cross Society supplied several large heating stoves.*

Then on the evening of May seventeenth the old building in which the men were quartered showed signs of collapsing. The combined weight of the 600 recruits and their equipment was too much for the weakened structure. Sounds resembling reports of a rifle were heard and upon investigation it was found that the pillars and cross-beams of the structure had commenced to crack. The building gave evidence of being about to collapse and the men were marched across the street to an unoccupied lot where they made themselves as comfortable as possible. The night was a pleasant one and no serious results followed.** The following day the battalion was transferred to the Presidio in San Francisco where it occupied the quarters formerly used by the First Regiment of the United States Infantry.***

The battalion had hardly become established in its new home when the organization was rent asunder. Batteries A and D were attached to the Eighth Corps and made a part of the Philippine Expeditionary forces. Battery C was ordered to Fort Canby, Washington, where it performed garrison duty until mustered out some months later. Battery B was subsequently sent to Fort Baker at Lime Point, California, where it was stationed until all danger of attack was past, then it too was mustered out.****

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*San Francisco Examiner, May 14 and 15, 1898.

**San Francisco Examiner, May 18, 1898, page 4, column 3.

***Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 98.

****Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 98.

ACTIVITIES OF THE

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DURING THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

Perhaps no organizations were ever torn to shreds after the date of their assignments to the expeditionary forces as were Batteries A and D of the First Battalion of California Volunteer Heavy Artillery. The first detail consisted of fifty men, twenty-five of whom belonged to Battery A and twenty-five to Battery D. The men under the command of Captain Dennis Geary left San Francisco May 24, 1898, on the transport "City of Sydney" with the first expedition of American troops sent to the Philippines.*

It was believed that with the taking of various strongholds of the Spaniards in the Philippines, that the Americans would come into possession of much valuable ordnance and that there would be immediate need for artillerymen on the islands. The men chosen from Batteries A and D to accompany the first expedition were, therefore, selected because of previous military experience of mechanical ability.**

On June 23, 1898, one sergeant of Battery D sailed on the transport "Newport" on special duty. On August twenty-sixth another detachment of twenty-five men, thirteen from Battery A and twelve from Battery D, under command of Arthur P. Hayne of Battery A sailed on the transport "Scandia" as special guard to \$3,000,000 United States specie sent to the islands for the purpose of paying off the troops. The main portion of Battery D under command of Captain Henry Steere and Second Lieutenant George L. McKeeby sailed October sixteenth on the transport "Senator". Two days later, on October eighteenth the main portion of Battery A under command of First Lieutenant J. B. Morse of that Battery and Second Lieutenant John F. Lucey of Battery D sailed on the transport "Valencia". Another detachment of twenty-five men, twelve from one Battery and thirteen from the other sailed on the transport "Ohio", October twenty-fifth; while on November 6, 1898, the commanding officer of the battalion, with headquarters, staff, and the remaining portions of the two batteries under command of First Lieutenant J. W. F. Diss of Battery D and Second Lieutenant John A. Glass of Battery A sailed on the transport "City of Puebla". Two days later, Dr. W. J. Hanna, who had succeeded Dr. Chester Pedlar as Assistant Surgeon of the battalion, set

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 96.

**Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust, (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) pages 96, 97.

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sail on the transport "Newport". Therefore, this command was among the first and likewise among the last of the original expeditionary forces to start for the Philippines.*

Batteries A and D were not reunited until December 11, 1898, when they were brought together in the town of Cavite, the point at which the First American Flag was unfurled in the Philippines. To the two California Batteries were attached Light Battery A, Wyoming Artillery, and Troop A of the Nevada Cavalry, the whole comprising the garrison of Cavite under Major Frank S. Rice.**

Officers of the Regular Army who had observed the First Battalion at the Presidio in San Francisco carried word concerning its character to Admiral Dewey at Manila Bay and at his request, the battalion was assigned to protect the old Spanish Navy Yard at Cavite. After its capture on May 1, 1898, the Navy Yard had been made the base of supplies for all the ships of the Asiatic squadron, and tons of ammunition and millions of dollars worth of other property were stored in the arsenal, practically at the mercy of the foreign and native residents of the town. In addition to its other duties, a portion of the First Battalion performed provost duty for the military district of Cavite.*** The surroundings at Cavite were pleasant, the different organizations occupying various residences as barracks, while the officers were quartered in houses vacated by the Spanish officials.

Cavite was the first headquarters of the Filipino insurrectionists and there Aguinaldo resided. The native residents of the town, numbering about 5,000, were to a great extent imbued with revolutionary ideas and it was not an easy task to prevent an uprising. Toward the latter part of the year there were signs of uneasiness among the natives and the mutterings of impending revolution were heard about the Calle Real. Aguinaldo and his compatriots were impressed with their own importance to such an extent that it was stated on the best authority that a request was actually forwarded to Brigadier-General Anderson, who was at that time in command at Cavite, that an order be issued requiring all United States troops to salute the officers of the so-called "Filipino Army". Needless to say the order was never

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U.S.V.) page 97.

**Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U.S.V.) page 98.

***Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U.S.V.) page 98.

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issued.

During their stay in the Philippines, the officers and men of the California Heavy Artillery made little if any contest with the Spanish. There were but few Spaniards left in Cavite where the Artillery was stationed. Also on account of the duties assigned to that branch of the service there, the First Battalion took no active part in the attack on Manila, August thirteenth. After the fall of Manila the insurgent chieftain paraded through the streets, accompanied by his aides, meeting messengers from the other side of the bay and transmitting orders to his cohorts in Manila. Aguinaldo's activities in that direction became so pronounced that he was requested to withdraw from Cavite with his troops.* He obeyed by moving to San Roque, a town of about equal size, and separated from Cavite only by a narrow causeway less than one-half a mile in length. After Aguinaldo's withdrawal from Cavite, Battery D occupied the insurgent Leader's old headquarters and palace as barracks, and maintained possession of the same until July of the following year.

About February 1, 1899, the insurgents commenced massing their forces at San Roque and immediately, thereafter, sentries and outposts were established by the battalion in full view of the Filipinos at the outskirts of San Roque. Details from the batteries prepared to move at a moment's notice. Gatling guns were placed and field pieces were trained on the block-houses occupied by the insurgents. Two gunboats were anchored close inshore in readiness to lend assistance in case it was needed.**

Throughout the town of Cavite excitement was at fever heat. Sentries patrolled the streets in expectation of an uprising. Filipino laborers left their work at the Navy Yards at a time when their services were most needed. Scarcely a night passed that there was not some exciting episode to keep the sentries on the alert. From February fifth to February 8, 1899, the men of Batteries A and D slept on their arms, the officers abandoning their quarters and passing the nights with their men. On the afternoon of the eighth, it was decided to demand of the insurgents the evacuation of the town of San Roque, coupled with an ultimatum that unless the request was complied with before nine o'clock the following morning, the town would

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) pages 98, 99.

**Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 99.

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be bombarded. Before the time limit expired, flames burst from a dozen houses in the town and soon the entire place was ablaze. The entire garrison of Cavite was called out and dispatched across the causeway to San Roque.

The Americans fought their way through the burning town in pursuit of the retreating insurgents, the artillerymen dragging their heavy guns by hand. The chase continued several miles inland, the Americans capturing the towns of Caridad and Dalhican. At the latter place the Heavy Artillery halted and went into camp. Here breastworks and lines of communication were constructed under fire from the insurgents who were strongly entrenched about 1,500 yards in advance.* The First Battalion stayed about four months in the midst of pestilential swamps, held under orders from Major-General Otis from making any advance owing to the limited number of men available. For sixty-nine consecutive days the First Battalion was under fire there, guarding one of the most dangerous points on the entire island by reason of its being the key to an advance on the Navy Yard. The splendid discipline of the American soldiers under these trying circumstances, while 8,000 insurgents were kept at bay, was marvelled at by all the commanding officers. Try as they would, the insurgents could not force the artillery's lines.**

While the two batteries of California Volunteer Heavy Artillery were thus stationed guarding the approach to the Navy Yard and arsenal at Cavite, the war between the United States and Spain came to an end. The Treaty of Peace between the two countries had been signed at Paris on the tenth of December 1898. On the sixth of February 1899, the United States Senate had recommended ratification of the treaty and on the eleventh of April 1899, the exchange of ratifications took place.

Under the terms of enlistment, the volunteer troops were entitled to their discharge, but the hostile attitude of Aguinaldo and his followers rendered it impossible to dispense with the services of the volunteers until such time as regular United States troops could be transferred to the Philippines to replace them. Such Regular troops would be available during the coming summer, and in the meantime it was necessary for the volunteers to carry on

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*Campaigning in the Philippines, by Karl Irving Faust (Operations of the California Heavy Artillery, U. S. V.) page 100.

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

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

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in opposition to the Tagal insurgents who were waging a determined guerilla warfare against the Americans on the islands.

Batteries A and D, California Heavy Artillery continued to perform an important part in the military activities on the Island of Luzon during the spring and early summer of 1899. A description of the activities of the Battalion from April eleventh until its return home will be found in the History of the Activities of the First Battalion of Heavy Artillery, California Volunteers in the Philippine Insurrection.

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