

STORY OF SAN JUAN RETOLD.

It may be interesting to some to know a few of the many incidents preceding that now oft-told tale—Leaving Port Tampa, one trip thither, three long lines of transports, flanked on either side by our gallant convoy, making five lines in all, with our skirmishers ahead, was indeed a pretty sight, and how a shot from our convoy reduced a waterspout, much to our relief, and how the warships bombarded Baiquiri and Siboney before we could effect a landing, which the troops on our vessel, the San Marcos, managed to accomplish on June 24th, after being confined on that transport? 16 days; and how, after landing through the surf and just having time to get a bath and a short rest, firing was heard over the hills, whither the First and Tenth cavalry and rough riders had gone to investigate matters farther in the interior—our brigade was ordered to their support, and on our way thither meeting the wounded coming down, and after hurrying several miles, to hear that the Spaniards had been driven in, when we fell back a mile or two and occupied a position overlooking the valley in several directions; and how the land crabs (with which that part of the country is infected) worried our pickets as they would rustle through the bushes at night—one man actually challenging one; and after being relieved by the Seventy-first N. Y., "marching down the hill again," and locating a beautiful coconut grove for encampment, but finding it in some respects unsuitable, selecting another site nearer the sea; and after remaining in that place a day or two, marching several miles nearer Santiago, our final encampment before actual hostilities took place.

On the evening of June 30th we drew 3 days' rations and were notified that reveille on the following morning would be at 4 o'clock, which was significant that on the morrow something would occur. On July 1st we were ready to start on our memorable march bright and early, but were delayed some time in order to allow about 6,000 Cubans under Gen. Garcia to pass, dirty, ragged and mostly barefooted; also a brigade of our own troops and the foreign delegations, then our turn came. Our brigade, the First, First division, Fifth army corps, comprising the Sixth and Sixteenth U. S. infantry and Seventy-first N. Y. volunteers, under Gen. Hawkins, marched a couple of miles, then rested in some fields on our left, during which time there was some sharp artillery firing going on in the direction of El Caney, whither other brigades of our corps had moved to attack and capture. Our balloon in the meantime, as on the day previous, making observations. But on this occasion it appeared was following our movements too closely and might prove disastrous to us as well as ourselves, which afterwards proved to be the case. Then being ordered to advance, the army took the road to our right, meeting several wounded Cubans, either on litters or walking, returning from the front and newspaper correspondents by the score hurrying to the front.

It is difficult to understand the geographical lay of the country going through it for the first time, and being simply a unit in the great fighting machine, but my pocket compass told me we were getting nearer Santiago although pursuing devious ways. After resting a short time at some water-works on our left, we proceeded nearer the enemy, shortly to hear the sharp and deafening crack of a shell from one of our own guns which passed closely over our heads—the first indication apprising us that we were in for

it—and which was responded to quickly by the enemy, the balloon in the meantime making observations only a few feet from the ground and still following our movements so closely, seemed to apprise the enemy of our location and greatly precipitate matters. We were immediately ordered to take off our blanket rolls and haversacks with our three days' rations, place each company kits in separate piles and in most cases a man was left in charge of them. Our dress and equipments thus reduced, consisted of blue pants, shoes and leggings, blue shirt opened in front and sleeves rolled to elbows and campaign hat. Our arms and equipments comprised rifle and bayonet and 200 rounds of ammunition, and our indispensable canteen of water, weighing in all about 35 pounds, one hundred rounds of ammunition weighing about 11 pounds, and rifle about 9½ pounds, besides canteen of water. In that manner we hurried onward under a burning sun, a man occasionally dropping out by the way wounded, or worse still, killed. Pressing forward we finally arrive at that deadly creek about which so much has been written—where our men dropped by scores, in all directions, and not a Spaniard in sight. One wounded man fell in the creek in deep water only to be immediately rescued by some brave fellow. We hurried across the river waist deep and sought what shelter the neighboring banks afforded, for a few seconds in order to get a breathing spell, then dashed through the dense chaparral infested with Spanish sharpshooters who were doing all the damage—as we afterwards learned—and found a large open field with grass waist high, flanked by roads and barb-wire fences and to the right of which—from our position—stood the much-coveted San Juan hill, surmounted by well ordered entrenchments and a blockhouse, which had formally, no doubt, been a farm house. How to cut those fences and dash across that field nearly a half a mile under a deadly fire and ascend a hill, I should judge at least 350 feet high and almost perpendicular, was the coup de grace. There was the necessary delay the deadly barb-wire created, which caused a little temporary confusion, officers shouting orders here and there. Some regiments were prepared for such an emergency with nippers, I understand, the remainder using their bayonets, which made a poor substitute—then a wild dash, but how that field was crossed and the summit of that hill reached defies description. A situation like that would make many a man with weaker nervous constitution quail, while men of probably more phlegmatic temperament, while possessing the intelligence to understand and realize the deadly character of the undertaking, would blindly press forward with the one object in view. Two men dropped dead on that field without a wound and at least one actually lost his reason—temporarily, I hope. Many dropped behind, in some cases whole companies—I do not say this disparagingly only those who have been placed in such a position, particularly for the first time, can properly realize what it means and precedent furnishes us with many similar situations. Our good lieutenant in command proved himself the coolest and most capable man of any.

The regiments instinctively deployed in skirmish line—no definite formation, companies and regiments somewhat mixed up, but still pressing forward, and with a wild rush and hurrah reached the foot of that impregnable hill, which they commenced to ascend (or should I say scale?); then the Spaniards (to use a homely phrase) commenced to climb. The top was reached with much cheering. They

were pursued a short distance over the hill, but the men being greatly exhausted and the objective point being gained fell back to the safe side of the hill for reforming and rest, but when the roll was called many were missing. They evidently did not expect us so soon. There was a huge kettle of mush, all hot, prepared for their dinner—a few stone bottles of wine and cigars in the blockhouse and some equipments. Had the Spaniards been better prepared or fed, it seems, should have swept the entire field and annihilated everything; but they hadn't been charged for at least three years previous.

Here, to settle a question about which I have heard so much regarding which colors were first raised on San Juan, I can positively declare that the Sixteenth U. S. infantry colors were the first and only colors there for some time, although many gallant regiments were there simultaneously with the Sixteenth and share the honors equally with them, notably the Twenty-fourth U. S. infantry, whose brave conduct was second to none on the field, and contributed largely to winning the day; also the Sixth and Thirteenth U. S. infantry and a portion of the Seventy-first N. Y. volunteers.

Although I mentioned the shortcomings of the manner in which the charge was executed across that field, they fully vindicated themselves by the brief manner in which the object was gained; "the end justifying the means." One bad feature was the over-wrought enthusiasm in which the supporting skirmish lines would continue to fire to the extreme danger of the men in front, the same thing occurring in the trenches afterwards. Men would shoot, shoot, shoot—long after cease firing had sounded—couldn't shut them off—not a thing in sight anywhere—recruits I fervently hope.

The Spaniards fought well and proved themselves excellent shots as result showed. We found many dead in their trenches and scattered round the brow of the hill. One very sorrowful incident was the killing of Lieut. Orde of the Sixth infantry—a brave and gallant young officer well liked by all who came in contact with him—by a wounded Spaniard whom he was endeavoring to save.

The blockhouse was subsequently occupied by general headquarters and from which place all communications between the two armies took place, the Twenty-fourth infantry being selected for the post of honor of garrisoning the same.

Now our interests became more closely identified with our own regiments and brigades, over which I will endeavor to pass as briefly as possible.

That evening we passed up a ravine in selecting a more suitable position and entrenching ourselves for the morrow and there rested some time, during which one peculiar and gruesome incident occurred. Many of us had noticed a stray dead soldier lying by the roadside, so to speak, here we rested, the men tired and worn out flung themselves down all around the dead body and when the first sergeant of the company, in whose vicinity he lay, requiring a detail to go back for hardtack and bacon, he gave the body a vigorous shake with the rest, although himself had previously noticed him lying there. That night found many of us digging entrenchments and the following morning found us pretty well situated in our new position. Firing opened up promptly at daybreak and those of us who had been in the trenches during the night rested and sought shelter behind the trenches, which proved to be a very exposed position. But in order to show how in-