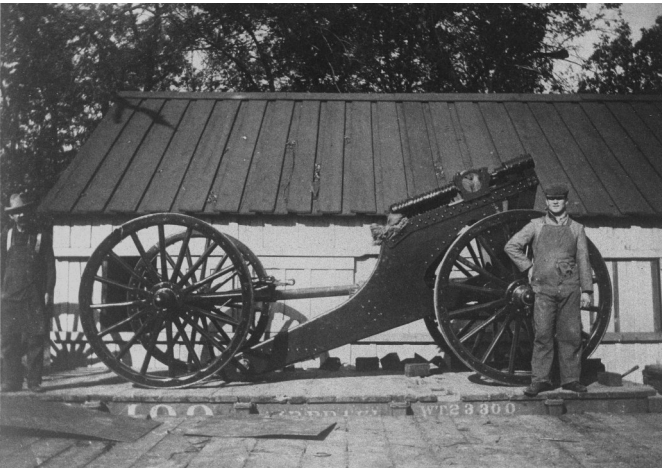




Supplying the Spanish-American War

FROM THE ARCHIVES



7-in siege gun carriage being shipped from RIA during Spanish-American War, 1898.

MONTHLY TRIVIA

- 1 What did the Roosevelt’s “Rough Riders” ride into combat?
- 2 What do we still pay \$4,000 for, as a result of the treaty ending the Span-Am War?
- 3 How much did the three month long Span-Am war cost in 1898 dollars?

ANSWERS FOR JULY QUESTIONS

- 1 What was the name of the U.S. defense weapons project that facilitated the end of the war?
▶ Trinity The Manhattan Project
- 2 What were the two aircraft that deployed the atomic bombs over Nagasaki and Hiroshima?
▶ The Enola Gay & The Bockscar
- 3 What was the deadliest amphibious assault in American history?
▶ The Battle of Peleliu (Deadliest Rate) OVERLORD (Most Lives Lost)

USA: Hey, you guys sunk the USS Maine!

Spain: What? No we did’n-

USA:



The rush into the Spanish American war was in part led by then Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt.

The Spanish-American War of 1898, was marked by significant challenges for the U.S. Army. In this short war, spanning only a few months, the U.S. Army’s logistical efforts were critical to its success, despite numerous obstacles. From the beginning of the war, the U.S. military infrastructure was ill-prepared for a large-scale expeditionary conflict. The regular army was small, and the rapid expansion required the integration of many poorly trained volunteer units. The sudden mobilization strained the existing supply systems, which were not designed to support a large number of troops deployed overseas. One of the first obstacles was the transportation of troops and equipment to the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The primary theater of operations was in Cuba, particularly around Santiago. To project power across the Caribbean, the Army needed to secure sufficient shipping. This was a daunting task due to the lack of a dedicated transport fleet. The War Department requisitioned commercial vessels, converting them into troopships and supply ships. The Army’s logistics officers had to coordinate the assembly of these ships, the loading of men, horses, artillery, and supplies, and ensure their safe passage through potentially hostile waters patrolled by Spanish naval forces. Once the troops landed in Cuba, the challenges multiplied. The infrastructure on the island was rudimentary, with few roads and even fewer railways. The tropical climate and rough terrain further complicated the movement of supplies. Disease, particularly yellow fever and malaria posed significant threats to the troops. Ensuring a steady supply of food, clean water, medical supplies, and ammunition required innovative solutions. Mule trains became a primary means of transportation over land, and the Army established depots to store and distribute supplies.

The Siege of Santiago exemplified the difficulties of sustainment. The Army had to supply its forces besieging the city while also supporting the naval blockade. Coordination between the Army and Navy was crucial. The port of Siboney, after being captured by American forces, became a critical logistical hub. Supplies were unloaded from ships and then transported by wagons and mules to the front lines. In the Pacific, particularly in the Philippines, the logistical challenges were equally daunting. The distance from the U.S. mainland meant that supply lines were stretched thin. The capture of Manila required careful planning and execution, ensuring that troops were well-supplied despite the vast distance.



Throughout the war, the Army’s logistics were characterized by improvisation and adaptation. The lack of pre-war planning and the sudden scale of operations forced logisticians to be resourceful. They established supply lines in hostile and unfamiliar environments, ensuring that American forces remained combat-effective. Despite these challenges, these innovations in sustainment were ultimately successful, contributing to the rapid victory over Spanish forces and the emergence of the United States as a global power. The transformation of logistic & sustainment operations during the Spanish-American War highlighted the importance of supply chains in military success and set the stage for future improvements in the Army’s materiel readiness. The lessons learned would later provide some basis for the more extensive and complex logistics of World War I and beyond. The rush to the Spanish-American War is often associated with the Operation Desert Storm. The speed at which both wars were executed left mobilizing units in the U.S. and training had not even been completed prior to the end of major combat actions.

Sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana Harbor

On February 15, 1898, an explosion ripped through the American battleship Maine, anchored in Havana Harbor, sinking the ship and killing 260 sailors. Americans responded with outrage, assuming that Spain, which controlled Cuba as a colony, had sunk the ship. Many newspapers presented Spanish culpability as fact, with headlines such as "The War Ship Maine was Split in Two by an Enemy’s Secret Infernal Machine." This was in part fueled by the then Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt. Two months later, the slogan "Remember the Maine" carried the U.S. into war with Spain. In the midst of the hysteria, few Americans paid much attention to the report issued two weeks before the U.S. entry into the war by a Court of Inquiry appointed by President McKinley. The report stated that the committee could not definitively assign blame to Spain for the sinking of the Maine. In 1911, the Maine was raised in Havana harbor and a new board of inquiry again avoided a definite conclusion. In 1976, however, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Admiral Hyman Rickover conducted a new investigation. ADM Rickover, and the investigation team came to the conclusion that the explosion was caused by spontaneous combustion in the ship’s coal bins, that led to an adjacent power magazine explosion. The coal fire was a common problem that afflicted other ships of the period including ships like the Titanic.



H i s t o r y i s m a d e e v e r y d a y i n t h i s C o m m a n d

Cover Image: Navy Sailors off loading Army duffel bags from a contracted transport carrier onto ships bound for Cuba. Detroit, Michigan 1898
Article Image: 71st New York Soldiers “On Duty” during day 16 of the siege of Santiago. 1898
For more history content visit us on our website or scan the code to left: <https://www.aschq.army.mil/About/History>

Presented to you by your friendly ASC History Office. Feel free to call or stop by our office for any of your history needs.
Contact: usarmy.ria.asc.list.history@army.mil | Bldg. 390, 1 Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island, Illinois, 61299
Kevin Braafladt : Command Historian | Mark Struve : Assistant Historian | Kaleb Bemis : Archivist

