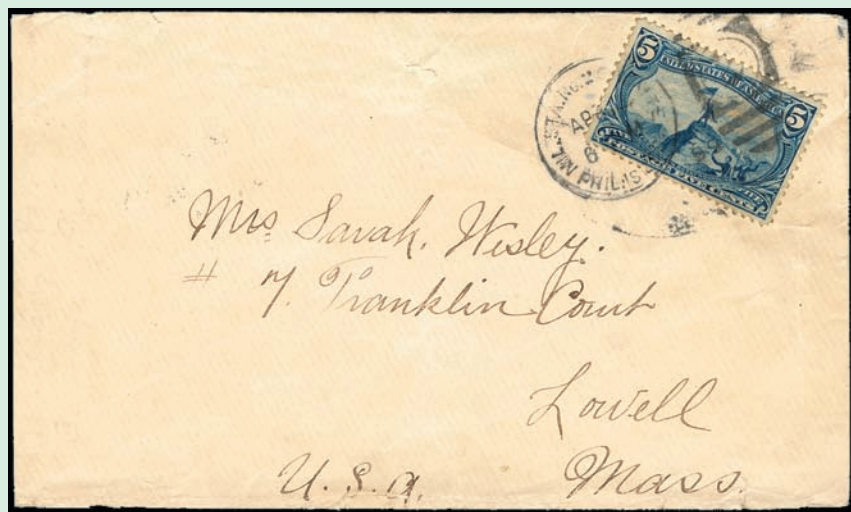


THE PHILIPPINE WAR

by Steve Turechek

The year 1902 is relatively obscure in American history. It is a year the history books generally are content to skip over — about thirty years after the peak of the “Wild West” Indian wars, yet nearly thirty years before the Great Depression. Can you name any significant event that occurred in America in 1902? It just so happens that 1902 was the year the United States achieved victory over independence-minded Philippine insurgents, following the Spanish-American War of 1898. I might add that it is more than a little ironic that the U.S. military found itself returning to the Philippines in 2002 to help shore up our century-old ally’s defense in the war on terrorism. Perhaps it is appropriate to take a quick philatelic look at the Philippine War of 1899–1902.

The Philippine War broke out in February 1899, less than six months after Spain and the United States ceased hostilities, but two days before the U.S. Senate actually ratified the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American War of 1898. The United States found itself not only in possession of the Philippines, but in the midst of a severe political power vacuum as Spain pulled out. In the wake of the Spanish departure, a Filipino independence movement began to take hold under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo. President McKinley had stated clearly at the outset of the Spanish-American War that the United States had no territorial designs, only the freedom of those oppressed by the Spanish. However, at the end of the war the Filipino people were in no way capable of establishing peaceful self-rule either. Two political camps quickly developed in the United States, the Imperialists and the Anti-Imperialists. The Imperialists included Vice President Teddy Roosevelt, Secretary of State John Hay, and the powerful Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. The Anti-Imperialists included ex-Civil War General



Cover postmarked at Cavite naval base, April 6, 1899, a few weeks after the war began. The sender paid the standard overseas rate of five cents.

and ex-Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz, author Mark Twain, publisher William Randolph Hearst, and future president Grover Cleveland. In early 1899, President McKinley gave orders for the U.S. military to occupy the Philippines and the stage for conflict was set, both at home and abroad. By February 1899 hostilities were imminent, and shooting broke out on the night of February 4th.

The philatelic aspects of the war are fascinating for both stamp and cancel collectors and for postal historians. The Spanish-American War gave birth or extended the life of several “back of the book” chapters in the Scott Catalogue. The most prominent of these is the Possessions section, which includes the overprinted stamps and envelopes intended for use from our newly-won islands of Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Placed in service in June 1899, regular U.S. issues overprinted “PHILIPPINES” immediately saw wartime service, the only possessions overprints with that distinction.

Postmarks in use during the war included both civilian and “Military Station” types. Stamps and covers with military station postmarks are elusive and highly sought after by Possessions collectors. The main post office in Manila used a civilian postmark. Branches that were run by the military in outlying cities and towns used the military station-type postmarks. Reduced postal rates for soldiers serving in the Philippines remained in place after the Spanish-American War concluded and continued throughout the Philippine War. A letter addressed back to the States cost the sender two cents, the same as for a stateside letter. At two cents, “soldier’s letter” postage actually represented a discount of three cents from the usual nickel overseas letter rate at that time.

Although the Philippine War engulfed all the main islands, the conventional fighting on Luzon, around Manila, ended for the most part in late 1899. The first cover shown was postmarked in April, a few weeks after the war began. It bears a somewhat blurred Mil(itary) Sta(tion) No. 2 Cavaite Phil(ippine) Isl’d marking, and is franked with a 5-cent blue Trans-Mississippi stamp, paying the normal



Major General Arthur MacArthur

overseas letter rate. The sender is not known to have had any ties with the military that would have entitled him to the 2-cent “soldier’s letter” rate. It appears likely that the sender was a civilian businessman living and/or working in close proximity to the Cavite naval base where the letter was posted. Listed, but unpriced in the Scott Catalogue, Trans-Mississippi covers mailed from the Philippines remain scarce.

The war entered a new phase late in the year that would drag on throughout 1900 as well. The Filipino insurgents, realizing that they were no match for the U.S. military in conventional terms, began a campaign of guerilla warfare. The Americans had a difficult time reacting, and the top U.S. general was replaced. The new

commander was none other than Major General Arthur MacArthur, whose son Douglas eventually would leave his own enduring military legacy in the islands. In the meantime, however, a stalemate had ensued. The United States, coming off its smashing 1898 victory over Spain, a major world power, was suddenly helpless against a rag-tag insurgent army. Troop deployments surged until, at the height of the war, 75,000 men were serving in the Philippines, almost three-quarters of the entire U.S. Army. To top things off, the fanatical Boxers rebelled in China during the summer of 1900. Troops were diverted from the Philippines to help relieve the besieged diplomatic legations in Peking, and progress in the Philippines ground to a halt.



When stamps were scarce, soldiers often sent mail home postage due.



Left: President McKinley's decision to occupy the Philippines following the Spanish-American War led to the Philippine insurgence and ignited the U.S. Anti-Imperialist movement (Scott 326). Center: Following McKinley's assassination in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt became Commander in Chief, finally declaring victory in the Philippines in July 1902 (Scott 557). Right: William Howard Taft, future U.S. president, was the civilian Governor-General of the Philippines throughout the conflict (Scott 685).



Carl Schurz, Civil War general and former Secretary of the Interior, led the Anti-Imperialists (Scott 1847).



Mark Twain, resolute Anti-Imperialist, wrote articles against McKinley's foreign policy (Scott 863).

One of the problems during wartime is the distribution of stamps to outlets that are conveniently located so that soldiers can purchase them. No access to a post office often meant that letters were written and posted without any stamps. These invariably were assessed as "postage due" upon arrival back in the States. One enlisted soldier, Frank Jones, wrote to his mother in Chesaning, Michigan. The cover has a Manila P.I. postmark dated January 30, 1901, while a March 6 Chesaning, Michigan, receiving mark cancels the 2-cent postage due stamp on the front. Although the cover is pleasing as a piece of postal history, it is the contents that make the item an interesting piece of military history. Frank Jones wrote:

Morona, P.I.
Jan. 27, 1901
Dear ma,

Today is Sunday and we are having a rest. Have got a new Capt. And he don't believe in working a company to death, as did our old one. I was in the hospital a month. Went in Xmas day. Wasn't very sick. Had the hives and Lord how they itch. That was all. Well, by the time you get this we will be looking for our orders to sail. Only about 2 months now and we'll be home. Are having lovely weather, but awfully cold nights. I don't suppose they would be cold for you, but we almost freeze on guard at night. Will send you some more pictures in this letter.

Everybody is well. Bentley as big a fool as ever. Some of the volunteers have already started. The 11th Cav, the 36th Inf, the 27th Inf, and the 30th Inf are now ready and will sail in a few days. Well, I will close now.



Other Philippine city post offices occasionally handled soldiers' mail bound for the States, such as this 1901 cover postmarked Zamboanga.

Give my love to Elsie & Doris. Keep the chickens fat. We are living good. Plenty to eat. Our flags are half-mast for Julien Vic. Have that Co. A picture enlarged will you? I'm going to Cleveland first to see if I can get anything to do there. I could get a job in Manila now but I don't want to stay. They pay \$8 a day in Manila for printers. Pearl could make a fortune there. Good by

Frank

Note how newsy this soldier was in describing military unit preparations and movement intentions. Many of the Volunteer units that had formed during the Spanish-American War had agreed to remain in the Philippines to fight the insurgents — but not indefinitely. Now the Volunteers were going home, to be replaced by regular Army units. This type of intelligence information would have been invaluable should it have fallen into enemy hands. Clearly, personal letters were not censored during the Philippine War, as they would be during the coming world wars.

The new year, 1901, brought a significant string of successes for the Americans. MacArthur had no compunction about killing Filipino civilians who assisted the insurgents. Campaigning district by district, island by island, the Americans began to fight and win a war of logistical attrition. The capture of their rifles, foodstuffs, and other supplies slowly strangled the insurgents' will to fight. Entire villages were often put to the torch. All males of age to serve in the military were rounded up, questioned, and paraded in front of informants who identified insurgents. In April 1901 Aguinaldo himself was captured. Back home, in Buffalo during the Pan-American Exposition, President McKinley, the Commander in Chief, was assassinated. Theodore Roosevelt took the oath of office as President of the United States.

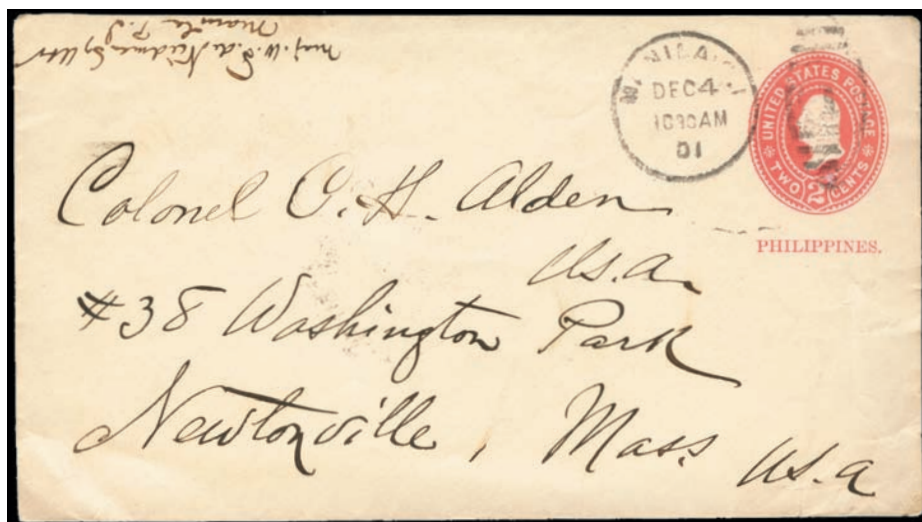
Although a majority of mail leaving the Philippines during the war passed through Manila, other city post offices did handle letters bound for the States. One such example shows a faint purple military station postmark from Zamboanga (on the



President William McKinley and his successor, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt.

island of Mindanao) canceling the overprinted 2-cent stamp on April 26, 1901. First Lieutenant William Topping Merry sent this cover to his mother in Ilion, New York. Lieutenant Merry had graduated from West Point and was commissioned in the infantry on February 15, 1899, just in time for the Philippine War. He survived the conflict and remained on active duty following its conclusion.

Any military campaign places a great strain on medical personnel. They experience the horrors of war in ways no one else can appreciate. One interesting cover was sent from a military surgeon to another surgeon. The cover is an



Postal stationery overprint "PHILIPPINES" sent from a military surgeon serving in the Philippines to a retired colleague in Massachusetts.



Civilian Cavite, Cavite, P.I. postmark on cover sent to his wife by Admiral Franklin Hanford, commander of the U.S. naval base at Cavite, about a month before the end of the conflict.

embossed envelope with a 2-cent indicium and carmine "PHILIPPINES" overprint. It, too, has a civilian Manila postmark, dated December 4, 1901. The writer, Major William Feodor de Niedeman, was an assistant surgeon in the U.S. Army who served as a Captain with the 22nd Kansas Volunteers during the Spanish-American War. He was promoted to Major and went on to serve as Surgeon, U.S. Volunteers, during the Philippine War. The addressee was retired Army Colonel Charles Henry Alden, whose career spanned nearly forty years, from 1860 to 1900. No doubt the two surgeons were close friends. Major de Niedeman resigned from the Army immediately following the Philippine War.

By the end of 1901, the Americans had made great strides toward winning the war, but at the expense of great hardship for the Filipino civilian population. At home, the Anti-Imperialists were inflamed by accounts of atrocities committed by U.S. officers and men. The usual "pacification" formula followed by the Army was to move entire towns into a zone that could be protected. Schools and other public works projects were established. Civilian Governor-General William Howard Taft administered these pacified zones. This policy effectively cut the insurgents off from their source of food, and kept them on the run and in the field. It clearly accelerated their demise. The year 1902 dawned with every expectation that the conflict would soon end.

The final cover illustrated was written by Admiral Franklin F. Hanford to his wife, and posted January 6,

1892, about a month before the Philippine War finally ended. Toward the end of the conflict Hanford commanded the U.S. naval base at Cavite, west of Manila, on Luzon Island. As it turns out, the Admiral and the author share a common hometown: Chili, New York. Chili is a modern suburb of the city of Rochester. (No, it is not "Chili" as in the Mexican soup; it is pronounced "Ch-eye-lie" with two long "I" sounds.)

The end of the insurrection in the Philippines came in the spring of 1902, when the last of the insurgents surrendered on the island of Samar. Although a victory for the United States, the conflict fully exposed the nasty side of imperialism to the American public. The Anti-Imperialist outcry was so severe that a number of court-martial proceedings were brought against U.S. military officers. Most were acquitted. The Philippines were successfully "pacified" and would now enhance U.S. commercial and military interests in the Pacific for decades to come.

I would encourage anyone who might be interested in Philippine history to add a cover or two from the Philippine War to your collection. It could even blossom into a new specialty for you. However, you should be prepared to be very patient in your search for material. Bargain covers on eBay can be had for as little as \$15, but getting a nice clean cover with a very fine or better postmark can set a collector back a couple hundred dollars. One additional observation is that dealers and eBay sellers often mistakenly confuse Philippine War material with the Spanish-American War. It really pays to know your dates. The Spanish-American War hostilities ended August 12, 1898, with the signing of a "protocol" by President McKinley and the Spanish Ambassador. The actual treaty was signed February 6, 1899. The Philippine War began February 4, 1899, and hostilities ended April 27, 1902. Military rule was formally replaced by civilian government on June 16, 1902. President Teddy Roosevelt declared victory in July 1902, and the United States promptly forgot about this war — its passion for empire, insatiable in 1898, now completely spent.

The Author

Major Steve Turechek is an Air Force officer (temporarily assigned in Saudi Arabia) who collects classic, worldwide stamps and covers, and any modern USPS material that catches his fancy.