The Rough Riders

The United States declared war on Spain on April 19, 1898. The situation in Cuba was not good. In 1868, Cuba had a rebellion against Spain, Cuba wanted its independence. The result was a long, bloody struggle that wound up with Spain still in control. In 1878, the Cubans came to the United States for help. No public help was given to the Cubans, but private help from citizens was given in the form of guns and ammunition. The Americans fervently supported the Cuban strive for independence since it was only one-hundred years earlier that the Americans had won independence from a European country. The situation in Cuba worsened as time passed. In 1898, the United States sent the Maine to Cuba to evacuate Americans on the island. While in dock on February 18, 1898, the Maine was destroyed. The U.S newspapers called for immediate action and war with Spain. It was never clear whether the Maine had been destroyed by anybody, namely by the Spanish. It was just as likely that radical Cubans or a malfunction were to blame for the explosion. The Congress then debated as to whether to go to war, and on April 19, 1898, the decision was made.

Teddy Roosevelt was the Secretary to the Navy in the year preceding the war. Roosevelt was very interested in this war, and eager to involve his nation. Roosevelt would not take the commission of Colonel because he felt that he was not well experienced, so he agreed to take the rank of Lt. Colonel under the stipulation that his friend, Dr. Leonard Wood, received the commission of Colonel. This was granted by Secretary Alger and was satisfactory to the secretary and the President. Wood was more
experienced in warfare. He had served under the General Miles’ campaign against the Apaches, where he received the Medal of Honor. Wood and Roosevelt received command of a voluntary cavalry that was made up of people all around the country, some of whom were friends or acquaintances with Roosevelt.

There was nothing that was going to keep Teddy Roosevelt out of the Spanish-American War. He was a very strong supporter of the war and during it made sacrifices that helped to better the situation for the troops. He was very affectionate toward his troops and was proud to serve with them.

The stories that Roosevelt tells about in the Rough Riders are interesting ones that take a look at the lives of the soldiers as they begin training and then through the rest of the war. During the beginning part of training, Roosevelt tells of men giving each other nicknames as they begin acquaint. Roosevelt even talks about the name “Rough Riders,” which was the name given to his group. He says at first he did not like it, but once the President referred to the group as the “Rough Riders,” the name stuck. Near the end of the war Roosevelt tells about one of his men named Pollock, an Indian who wanted to get his hair cut and gave the reasoning of “Don't want to wear my hair long like a wild Indian when I'm in civilized warfare.” Roosevelt was very entertained because he did not know that Pollock had a sense of humor.

The Rough Riders did their training in San Antonio. It was hot and dusty during their stay. At this time they trained extremely hard every day. Roosevelt said that after a couple of weeks he could tell the vast improvement the troops had made. Roosevelt and Wood were very strict and did not allow anybody to get out of line; if they did, they would be dealt with in a manor that made it so that nobody else would attempt it. One
such incident took place when the Rough Riders were waiting on their transport from San Antonio to Tampa. A group of guys while waiting went out to the bar and became drunk. These men were brought back to the train depot and nobody was allowed to leave the area. Later the drunken men were punished.

The train trip to Tampa was only supposed to take 48 hours, but that was not the case. The trains were ill-equipped to handle the horses, so cars had to be altered to meet the horses’ needs. This delay is what caused the men to go out and drink. After they fixed the cars so they could accommodate horses, they fed and watered the horses and sent the trains off in intervals that were long enough apart to allow for the trains in front to be able to stop and let the horses roam around and graze for a bit. Wood was in charge of the first three sections, which left Roosevelt in charge of the last four. The trip ultimately took much longer than was planned. The Rough Riders received overwhelming support from the locals of the town. Roosevelt talks about one man who fought on the Confederacy and never thought he would see the day that they would greet the stars and stripes and be sending their sons to fight and die under it.

When the troops reached Tampa, Roosevelt and Wood had the men practice skirmishes. They then found out that they would not be able to bring their horses along to Cuba, and that they would have to leave behind four Troops of men. On June 7, orders were given that in the morning they were to ship out from a place nine miles from where they were, and if they were late, the transport would leave without them. At once Roosevelt ordered the men to prepare for the morning. The orders told the Rough Riders to be at a certain track at a certain time, but the train never came. Roosevelt and Wood spent three hours looking for answers, but never found any. They were finally told that
they needed to be at a different track, so immediately they had the men march for the track, but no train appeared there either. Early in the morning some coal cars came by, so Roosevelt and Wood seized them after a short argument. When arriving at Port Tampa, neither Roosevelt nor Wood could find on what transport they were to be. Then after an hour, they found out. Wood went and boarded the ship, while Roosevelt went to the men and hurried them to the boat because the boat had also been assigned to two other regiments, but could not fit everyone. So it was of the utmost importance that they get to the transport first. This quickness by Roosevelt allowed the Rough Riders to make it to Cuba and join in on the fighting.

Once in Cuba, after a few battles, the men had some time to rest. Roosevelt wanted the men to have some good food for a change, because the food that was provided was not of the greatest quality. The rations were not full either. The salt pork and hard tack were sufficient, but the allotment of coffee, sugar, and other supplies were lacking. Roosevelt, because he cared about his men, took a few of the strongest men and mules back to the seacoast and brought back beans and canned tomatoes. Roosevelt received these partly by his own exertions, and partly by the aid of Colonel Weston of the Commissary Department. One problem that Roosevelt still had was that he was not able to buy canned vegetables for his men, but he could for officers. Roosevelt side-stepped this difficulty easily and bought what his men needed with his own money. Roosevelt clearly stated this, for he wanted people to know that of his generosity.

In conclusion, Roosevelt cared about his men very much, and wanted the chance to be involved with the war. He knew that he did not have the experience to be Colonel, so he took the position of Lt. Colonel instead. He merely wanted the chance to be a part
of the war. Roosevelt cared deeply for his men and went out of his way to get them more food supplies, and even spent his own money so that they would have some canned vegetables to accompany their salt pork and hardtack. Roosevelt was very unselfish when it came to the Spanish-American War.
Works Cited


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