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I HELPED RAISE THE ROUGH RIDERS

By ALBERT W. THOMPSON

WAR HAD been declared between the United States and Spain. Theodore Roosevelt, native New Yorker, erst-while ranchman of Dakota, in 1898 assistant secretary of our navy who had "preached with all the fervor and zeal I possessed our duty to intervene in Cuba," was commissioned a lieutenant colonel. Colonel Roosevelt proposed that several cavalry units be recruited from the western states and territories, cowboys, hunters, broncho busters and crack shots, for service against the enemy and that these units be commanded by his friend Colonel Leonard Wood and himself. The plan found prompt acceptance in Washington. The official title of this rather unique command was The First United States Volunteer Cavalry though, as the young lieutenant wrote, "for some reason or other the public christened us Rough Riders." Rough Riders became over night a popular tocsin. Oklahoma, Indian Territory, New Mexico, and Arizona were assigned as official mustering places for the quota, originally announced as 740 men which was later raised to 1,000.

On April 25, 1898, Governor Miguel A. Otero of New Mexico was asked how many western cowboys his territory could muster in for special service under Colonel Leonard Wood and Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt. The governor replied that the proposed assignment of 340 men to New Mexico could be ready at short notice. "I sent four troops or a full squadron to The First United States Volunteer Cavalry," wrote the ex-Governor, living in Santa Fe, 1939. "I also sent a gatling or dynamite gun squad known as Troop I."

On one of the closing days of April, 1898, the writer was handed a telegram. It read practically as follows:

Santa Fe, New Mexico, April, 1898.

Albert W. Thompson Receiver,
United States Land Office,
Clayton, New Mexico.

Enlist immediately thirty able-bodied men, your quota from Union County for First United States Volunteer Cavalry, Rough Riders, now being formed. Cowboys and men trained in the use of arms to be given preference. When selection has been completed place men in charge of one of their number and send to Santa Fe, rail. Additional instructions will be wired you as necessary.

MIGUEL A. OTERO, *Governor*,
Territory of New Mexico.¹

The ten year old village of Clayton, New Mexico, was, in 1898, a wide-open, prairie cowtown, not unlike others of its ilk in frontier days. It was situated ten miles from the northwestern corner of the Texas Panhandle and about the same distance from the former "Neutral Strip," Territory of Oklahoma. Clayton boasted of being the largest livestock shipping point in New Mexico, the ranch supply town for a wide, well-grassed district over which grazed at will, thousands upon thousands of cattle. The village was amply provided with saloons, general stores, a hotel, livery stable and dance hall. Clayton was the county seat of Union County. It also housed the United States Land Office, where homesteads and applications for purchase of the government domain, whose district then embraced millions of acres, could be filed.

The Governor's telegram asking me to enlist men as Rough Riders came unexpectedly. I had, several years before, as he knew, engaged in cattle ranching in northeastern New Mexico. I had stood night guard around panicky herds

1. This telegram I unfortunately lost. In response to my inquiry, ex-Governor Otero wrote, 1938:

I do not have a copy of the message I sent you. All official records were left in my office when I turned it over to my successor. If you should delve into the records of forty years back it would take you weeks to go through the vaults in the basement of the Capitol building.

and mingled freely with seasoned range hands and cowboys. Many of the latter I knew not only by name but those who were branded as the best riders, workers and crack shots.

Most of the cowboys were reckless, often foolhardy young fellows, Texas born, who had come up the long trail from San Antonio or further south with herds of cattle which in the 1880's and 1890's were being dumped generously onto the ranges of northern New Mexico. Some were sadly lacking in book learning for in those days schools in the isolated districts of the Southwest were few. Others had never been out of Texas and New Mexico. As Colonel Roosevelt wrote they "had never seen a larger town than Santa Fe or a bigger body of water than the Pecos in flood." When later one of our recruits shipped from Tampa to Cuba "who had never in his life before seen any water more extensive than the headstream of the Rio Grande," the Colonel heard him explain to a friend, "Oh-o-oh Jim, ma hat blew into the creek." Such were the characteristics of the men from whom we might draw our quota. There were scores of them in the Clayton district. One great cattle company gave work during the summer months of roundup, to fifty cow hands.

Evidently the chief executive's telegram "enlist thirty men immediately" brooked no delay. A wire brought the request for them to report in Santa Fe within ten days and sooner if possible. It is pleasant to recall that notwithstanding the haste in which they were recruited not one of our squad was rejected as "undesirable" on reaching the territorial capital.

The building next to our Land Office in Clayton, a rough, one-story frame with imposing false front, was occupied as a saloon. Cow hands when in Clayton made the "Favorite" their headquarters. Here they drank, discussed their troubles, and made merry. Behind the wide bar limped "Red,"—stout, sandy complected, taciturn server of liquids. "Red" had been a cow puncher too. When roping a steer in the roundup his horse had fallen breaking "Red's" leg. There-

after it befell his lot to push bottles across a saloon counter.

During the late afternoon of the day I received the governor's message I stepped into the "Favorite." A dozen roughly garbed boisterous fellows, wearing broad-brimmed hats and high-heeled boots, stood about the bar or lounged awkwardly on the establishment's only pool table. One, a tall, erect, dark haired waddie of perhaps thirty years, invited notice. He was dressed after the manner of other range riders. His spurs clattered noisily when he moved about. Unlike his companions, no six shooter hung from his hip. Jack Robinson never displayed a gun. Under his left arm usually concealed by his vest, he parked a small 22. "Sort of an emergency outfit," Jack once remarked half apologetically, "in case rattlesnakes gits too numerous."

Robinson had come to town that day from the Bar T Cross ranch sixty miles southwest of Clayton. A winter-job hand, expert roper and rider, never indulging in excessive use of liquor, Jack was range-wide known. His sense of humor was keen, his expressions homely, original—and sometimes caustic. Once he noticed the saddle one of his men rode was making sores on the backs of his mounts. "Jim," said he, "Jim, you'd better trade that saddle 'er yourn to a butcher shop. It's a meat cuttin' centipede. Every one 'er your hosses has kidney sores. Next time yer go ter town, git a new one. Rustle a blanket out 'er yer bedroll an' put it next ter your hoss."

We stood, perhaps a dozen men facing the tall mirror back of "Red." From my pocket I drew the governor's telegram, and handed it to the bar keeper. I thought this a proper channel through which to introduce the situation. "Read it out loud," I said.

"Red" did so. Then he tossed it over to the man next to me who passed it down the line.

"Who's General Wood and this feller Roosevelt?" somebody asked.

The former had fought Apaches in Arizona, I explained. Roosevelt was once a ranchman in Dakota, rode the open

range, worked on the roundup, and lived as New Mexico and Texas cowboys do. He had gotten into politics and was now assistant secretary of the United States navy. Being acquainted with the habits of westerners Colonel Roosevelt asked the opportunity of showing the country what a regiment of organized cow punchers could do fighting in Cuba. The war department proposed to call his bet. New Mexico's quota in the Rough Riders was, I understood, 340 men, of whom 30 might be drawn from Clayton.

"Them Cubians ought not to be hard to lick," volunteered "Red." "Greasers mostly. Greasers fight like sheepherders. Reckon it'll be a mounted outfit that's goin' after 'em, won't it?"

I thought so.

"Where's Cuba at?" somebody asked.

"Cuba is an island in the Atlantic Ocean south of Texas."

"Toler'ble fur I reckon."

The next morning Jack Robinson's horse stood saddled at the hitching rack in front of the "Favorite." His rider sat on the board sidewalk close by.

"Mornin', I'm waitin' fur you," said the Bar T Cross top hand. "Late gitten down ain't yer?" He smiled.

"What's up, Jack?"

"I'm goin', that is I'm goin' if you'll let me. I thought it over last night. I want to enlist in them Rough Riders. I'm leavin' directly now fur the ranch. I can be back day after tomorrer. What about it?"

"You're sure you want to go? Remember it's war. We'll take you if you've really made up your mind."

"All right. It's a cinch. Come on, let's take somethin'."

We entered the saloon. Several men stood about the place.

"Come up, fellers. What yer goin' ter drink? They're on me. I'm goin'."

"The hell you are, Jack," somebody retorted.

"May-be-so that's it," laughed Robinson.

Presently we were in the streets again. Jack loosened the rope with which his horse, a sunken-eyed, broad-back, vicious looking bay was tied to the hitching rack, coiled up the lariat, and fastened it to the horn of his saddle into which he gracefully swung.

"Adios," he called as he started down the dusty avenue. Then he pulled up his horse.

"Reckon I'm the first to enlist, ain't I,—sorter number one like?"

"You certainly are, Jack."

Could I have envisioned the future I am sure I should have called him back. Eight weeks later, on July 2nd, Jack Robinson, a member of Troop "E," Rough Riders, crept up San Juan Hill under the galling fire of sharp shooters, with others of his company. That night in the list of those killed was the name of Trooper John L. Robinson. "He was commanded to lie down during the charge," his Captain, Frederick Muller of Santa Fe, afterwards told me, "but he would not. Just then a shell clipped off the top of his head." How close he may have missed an untimely end was detailed to me by ex-Governor Otero.

"I remember Jack Robinson very well. He failed to show up after his arrival in Santa Fe when the troop was about to be sworn in. Presently he appeared running up the street out of breath, and begged so hard to be allowed to go, I had the Adjutant General add him to the roll." First of our men to enlist he was the first to die. Fate had laid her inexorable, dark, hand upon Jack Robinson.

The next week was one of the most perplexing and not altogether happy ones I ever experienced. When it became known that a Bar T Cross roundup boss had enlisted in the Rough Riders I was immediately beset by other range workers to join. Our Land Office became the center, not of those who desired to make land entries, but of cowboys intent on going to war. Men from the Cimarron River district in New Mexico and Oklahoma hurried to town; men living as far south as lower Ute Creek, seventy-five miles from Clayton,

made all night rides, to join our quota. Amusing situations are recalled in connection with some of the applicants.

One cowboy wanted not only to join the Rough Riders but urged that he be allowed to take his pet saddle horse along too.

"Old Gotch would sure ride down them Cubians," said his owner. "He sure would. He ain't afeared 'er nothin'. I can shoot between his ears an' he won't wink an eye. When I hunts antelope on him an' tells him ter 'lie down' he does it while I fires over his side. I'd certainly like ter take old Gotch along. Could ride him ter Santa Fe in five days."

Old Gotch's owner was informed that no authority had been issued as to an enlisted man furnishing his own mount.

Another cowboy suggested that if he was accepted he could "save the government money" by furnishing his own rifle, a weapon he carried on his saddle. "It's a true hitter," he affirmed. "I had the barrel cut off. It'll kill a coyote every time at three hundred yards."

One evening a messenger handed me a note asking if I would come at once to the camp house within the livery stable corral. On reaching the requested meeting place two men stepped quickly toward me. No one other than ourselves was about. Both of the strangers were armed. Entering the camp house one of the men lit a candle. In its uncertain light we took seats on boxes scattered about the room.

The men were brothers. They had ridden fifty-five miles from the Neutral Strip where, in a deep canyon, lined with cedars and scrub pine, they resided.

One of my hosts had killed a man in Texas over a long standing feud and was obliged to leave the country between suns. He made his way, horseback, to the Neutral Strip, where his brother joined him. Here, their whereabouts was for a time kept secret. Recently he had received word that this had become known, and the fugitive warned to be on his guard. He feared he might be shot from ambush by a revenge-seeking scion of the family he had injured. He

must seek a new asylum and asked to be permitted to join the Rough Riders. All he knew was to ride, rope, and shoot.

The fellow's story was appealing. He was told that he would be accepted and might come to town on a certain day, when it was planned to send our men to Santa Fe. He gave his name—probably fictitious. Of his subsequent history and fate I never learned.

Within a week our squad was mustered and ready to go forward. Four men excepted, the quota was filled with cowboys and range hands. Otto F. Menger, a tall clerk from one of the Clayton stores was enrolled as was Robert J. Parish, blacksmith, John F. Roberts, carpenter, and Jose L. Duran, barber. Ever smiling "Joe" Duran was a native son. George W. Detamore, ranchman and cowhand, Jack Robinson, Menger, William T. Easley and Bob Parish were allotted on reaching Santa Fe to Troop "E," Captain Frederick Muller. All participated in the battle of San Juan (Kettle) Hill, July 2nd, in which engagement Robinson was killed, Menger and Detamore wounded. Duran and Roberts assigned to Captain George Curry's Troop "H" were left in Tampa and saw no active service in Cuba.

The list of Rough Riders finally enrolled in Clayton is, I regret to say, hopelessly missing and unobtainable. After forty years the names of more than one of our boys are blotted from memory. To add to the confusion some of the cowhands who may have committed offenses in other parts of the country had found it convenient or perhaps necessary to adopt, as one of their comrades wrote me, "consumed names," and who when being sworn in at Santa Fe, feared to give other than their baptismal patronymics. Through this procedure their identity was lost.

The morning our squad was to leave Clayton for Santa Fe dawned bright and clear. The train of the Colorado & Southern which was to carry them to Trinidad, Colorado, where they were turned over to the Santa Fe, was due about sunrise. Practically the entire village gathered at the depot to bid the little company adieu and wish them God speed. A

few women were in tears. Cat calls, shrill coyote barks, and frequent discordant "Yip-Yips" from boys who had tarried too long at a saloon bar, rent the otherwise quiet surroundings. No serious disorders occurred. The men had been up all night in anxious anticipation of the coming day. I assigned Jack Robinson who had returned from the ranch, captain of the wild bunch, over which he kept good natured supervision. Jests and raillery such as the prairie dweller was accustomed to, were exchanged. One unsteady cowhand presently conceived the notion that it was incumbent on him to visit town and stepped up to his superior in command.

"Jack," said he, "I'm goin' over yonder. I'll be back directly."

"What yer goin' fur?" drawled Robinson.

"I left ma extra pair er spurs in the 'Favorite.' I plum forgot 'em. I sure did, Jack."

"Now yer know yer don't need no more spurs than them yer has on. Yer never had no extra spurs in yer life, onless yer rustled 'em from some sheep camp. Yer stay right here in the dayherd, an' don't yer try ter break out of it neither. You've had enough nose paint fur one mornin'. Hear me?"

"Think you'll get this outfit to Santa Fe, Jack?" an onlooker inquired.

"Oh I kinder reckon I will. Most of 'ems stampeded pretty plenty an' is about tuckered out. After I git 'em on them cars, they'll bed down poco pronto. All I'll have ter do is ter ride round 'em occasional an see there don't nothin' scare 'em. I'll have 'em in the big corral tomorrer."

Santa Fe reached, the men were sworn into service, assigned to different troops and sent to San Antonio where their training began. Infantry drilling was irksome. Cavalry practice to their liking. Here they met equally good riders as themselves, from Arizona, Oklahoma, and other parts of the west. Horses were purchased and assigned to them. "Half the horses of the regiment bucked or possessed some other of the amiable weaknesses incident to horse life

on the great ranches." Breaking bronchos was familiar work to our boys. Camp life pleasant.

I had asked our men to write to me. Knowing how arduous and difficult it was for the average cowboy to assume the role of scribe I hardly expected them to comply.

"There ain't much news going on here," wrote one of our boys from San Antonio. "It's turrible hot. We drill every day. Some of the hosses is sure raggars, as bad as them broncs the Cross L gits in every spring. Chuck is good an' the cooks is give everything they asks for, dense milk an' distracted lemon an plenty of beef to an frejoles. Our cook ain't no better than old Con (Con was a noted roundup wagon cook employed by one of the big northern New Mexico cattle companies) an when it comes to sower dough bis-kits, Con can beat him plum holler. Musketoes is sure bad an as big as a yearling that's followed his mammy all winter. So long for this time."

Not long afterwards we at home received word of the departure of several troops, New Mexico captained, for Cuba, heard too (war reports because of the censorship of telegrams could not always be trusted) of the fight at San Juan Hill and the wounding of several of our Clayton squad. Then came more cheering news. Santiago had surrendered, peace between Spain and the United States promised and the Rough Riders—all that was left of them—transport bound by sea for New York where, at Montauk Point after recuperating for some weeks, they were, on September 15, mustered out of service.

In October some of our lads—less than a third of the enthusiastic band Jack Robinson chaperoned to Santa Fe five months before, were back in Clayton once more, each man plainly showing the ravages through which he had recently passed. They had stories to relate, of poor and insufficient rations, of fighting Spanish sharpshooters concealed in tree tops whose rifles did deadly work in the charge up "the Hill." Worse than all had been the grim apprehension of fever with which so many of their comrades were

stricken in Cuba. In these harrowing relations I recall no expressions of resentment or recrimination. Praise was never stinted when our men spoke of the three captains New Mexico appointed, Luna, Muller, and Llewellyn, who showed unflinching bravery and cool leadership in the fore front of their cowboy troops. The center of the drama was ever Colonel Roosevelt, "the feller that used to wrangle cows up in Dakota."

Humorous stories as well as melancholy situations were rehearsed. Smiling "Joe" Duran, barber and native son, was the target for his comrades' jocular shafts.

During training in San Antonio "Joe" was ordered to carry meals to a high ranking officer of his troop, so ran the tale. Joe refused to obey, whereupon he was confronted by a corporal's guard which promptly marshaled him into the presence of his superior to answer to the charge of insubordination. Joe endeavored to explain that he had enlisted to fight, even if necessary to lay down his life for his country, and not to "sling hash," a calling he considered menial. This outburst of patriotism, however, failed to excuse him for disobeying orders and Joe was led to the guard-house to brood over the injustice of military discipline and the sad lack of appreciation of those who had volunteered to make the supreme sacrifice.

There was another story told by one of our boys which stamped itself lastingly on my memory, as typical of the Rough Rider spirit.

"One mornin'," said the narrator, "after we'd been in San Antone a short time, we got notice that the Colonel (Roosevelt) was goin' to inspect us next day. We'd been drillin' on foot but hadn't made no great success of it. On hossback we done better. We sure did appear onery afoot—out of line, out of step, an' when we wheeled I reckon we must 'er looked like a rattler, makin' a zig zag race for a prairiedog hole. We determined though, ter do our damndest.

"Next afternoon come. We was all fixed up in our best—hat, uniform, an' boots. We marched to the parade ground

an' got inter step. The Colonel was on hossback. We went past him, turned, an' pretty soon we come back. I kinder quick-like looked down the line an' nudged the feller next ter me. He nodded. We was sure evolutin' some. I reckon we was scared too."

"By an' bye we drawed up before the Colonel. He didn't say nothin' for a minute, but directly he smiled. Then he showed his teeth. I guess he wanted to laugh, but he didn't. Finally, out it come. 'Well boys' says he, 'well boys, I've seen better marchin' than that, but I'll be damned if I ever saw worse.'"

"And what did you do," I asked.

"Why, we plum forgot all about disciplin' like, threw our hats into the air and laughed. The Colonel laughed too. After that we knowed he wouldn't never lie ter us."

What was Roosevelt's judgment of these rough, untutored riders of the plains? Subsequent acts of kindness to them, and especially to members of his troops who were wounded, showed that after the smoke of battle had blown away, he did not forget them. I know of a number of applications from troopers, lowest in the ranks of the Rough Riders, which, after Theodore Roosevelt became president, met immediate responses. They were touching testimonials of his love for his men.

On November 12, 1911, Colonel Roosevelt penned the following from Sagamore Hill, New York, to Colonel R. E. Twitchell, Santa Fe:

My dear Col. Twitchell:

Half the officers and men of my regiment came from New Mexico; and no Colonel ever commanded a finer fighting regiment. Moreover they were just as good on the march and in camp, as in battle, these of the plains and mountains, bold riders and skilled riflemen, who faced danger unflinchingly and endured hardships uncomplainingly. I regard the fact that I was one of them as well nigh the most precious heritage I can leave my children."

“Bold riders—skilled riflemen”? Yes. Some of these men of the plains who “faced danger unflinchingly,” were members of the squad enlisted in Clayton.

*1420 Grant St.
Denver, Colorado.*