

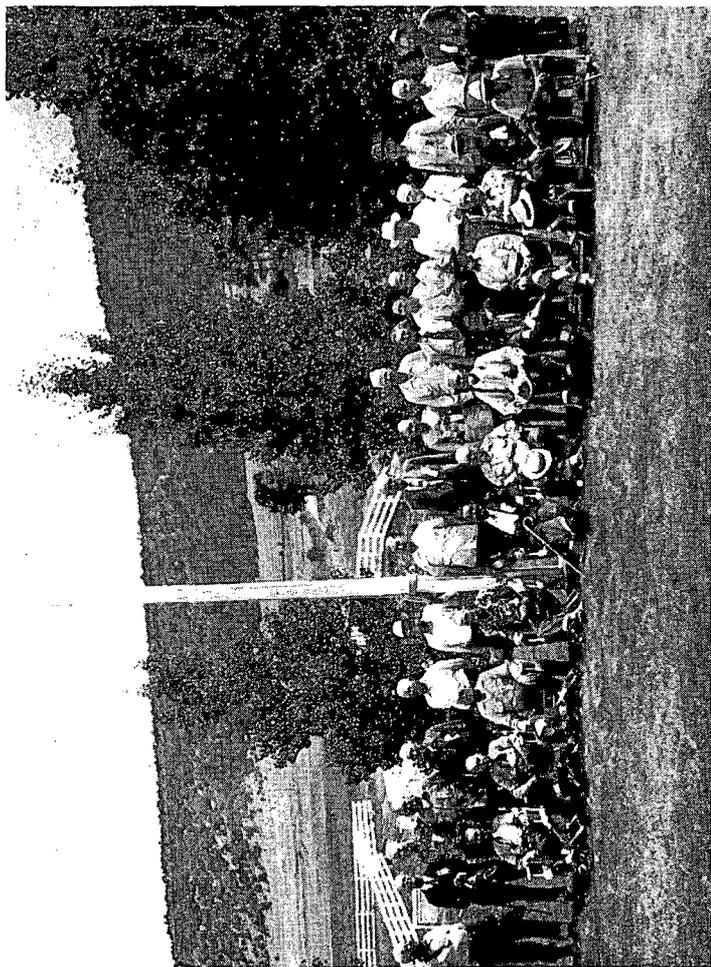
New Mexico Historical Review

Manuscript 1721

The Rough Riders

Chris Emmett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>



ROOSEVELT ROUGH RIDER REUNION, LAS VEGAS, N. M., AUGUST, 1953

NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW

VOL. XXX

JULY, 1955

No. 3

THE ROUGH RIDERS

By CHRIS EMMETT *

In your hey-day, some of you may have been accused of lacking a little in gentleness; but no one has ever said you were not 'men.'

Thinking in terms of your gentleness, I was intrigued by two statements from Stephen Bonsal, who quoted your one-time enemies, the Spaniards. These statements appeared in 1898:

Several officers in the Spanish army, whom I afterwards met in Santiago, never ceased to praise the "vaqueros of Texas," as they called them, for their staunch behavior at this critical moment.

Some days later (after your Capron and Hamilton Fish were killed) I had a conversation with a Spanish prisoner who had taken part in the Guasima fight. "When war was declared," he said with a sad smile, "we who knew the material wealth and prosperity of America, used to console ourselves by saying:

Los Americanos tienen canones pero no corozones
(The Americans have great cannon but they have not
stout hearts)

but after what we saw at Guasima we changed our tune to saying:

Los Americanos no tienen canones, pero, por Dios,
tienen corozones.
(The Americans have no cannon, but, before God,
what a stomach they have for a fight)

* As viewed by the newspapers during recruitment in 1898.
A talk delivered at the 55th Annual Dinner of the Rough Riders Association,
Las Vegas, New Mexico, August 8, 1954.

Now, Gentlemen, because of your *corozones*, your services to your nation, your standing as American citizens, an invitation to speak to you is the compliment of all compliments. For this honor, I am grateful.

Fifty-six years ago yesterday, the survivors of the Cuban campaign, members of the First United States Volunteer Cavalry, forever afterwards to be known as the Rough Riders, sailed from Cuba on the transport *Miami*, leaving behind a history of American arms which has no parallel. You were returning to your homes to receive the awards (as you were told, and as you believed) which come to all defenders of their countries—the reward of being forgotten.

But such has not been the case. You wrought too well. Your endurance, your bravery—sometimes brash bravado, perhaps—etched a place for you in the galleries of history alongside Pickett's men at Gettysburg, Grant's men before Richmond, and the Charge of the Light Brigade at Bala-klava. You took your discharges and went to your homes expecting to be forgotten. Instead, you have been remembered by the people of this nation as no other group of men have ever been remembered and with a wholesomeness akin to idolatry.

I am not one of your number, although I recall those days with fair distinctiveness. Since I am not of your organization, I have given some thought to what would be appropriate for an "outsider" to say to you. I have concluded that a discussion of those things said and done in 1898, during the organization and training of the First United States Volunteer Cavalry, might be appropriate. These public references to the war and to you, as an organization and as individuals, might be listed as:

1. The underlying causes of the Spanish-American War
2. The Organization of the Rough Riders
3. The appraisal by the press of the nation of the Rough Rider personnel.

It is the popular conception that the Civil War was caused by slavery. Slavery, of course, was a cause; but now that we

are nearly a hundred years away from it, we can see there was a changing economic background, coupled to a shifting political transition, which had more to do with the inevitability of war than did slavery. Perhaps there is a parallel in the origin of the Spanish-American War. As the 19th century drew to a close, the American people forced the war upon Spain under the shibboleths that "inhumanity of Spaniards to Cubans must cease at our front door" and "Remember the Maine."

True it is, the Cuban desire for liberty was a cause; but since you men won that liberty for the Cubans, it has become more and more apparent that the United States was in the throes of a more comprehensive movement. We had absorbed our own continent; we were thinking in terms of more conquests, not necessarily of Cuba, but of far-flung Spanish possessions—notably the Philippines!

On February 15, 1898, while lying at anchor in Havana Harbor, the Battleship *Maine*, after a succession of explosions, sank, taking the lives of two officers and two hundred fifty-eight men. The shock to the dignity of the American people was tremendous. We felt ourselves inviolable. Not since the British burned our capitol had we suffered at the hands of any nation. As the spirit of the men of the *Maine* ascended on High, strong men, many of them lacking caution, followed the example of the then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt, to shout: "It is with great difficulty I restrain myself after the treacherous destruction of the *Maine* and the murder of our men."

There was, of course, but one path—war!

Immediately after the declaration of war, the nation came face to face with the fact that it did not have a sufficiently strong army to liberate the Cubans. A volunteer army was absolutely necessary. Furthermore, the department responsible for the conduct of the war had no plans. Roosevelt stated that his was "bitter wrath and humiliation at the absolute lack of plans. . . . As to the Navy, we have our plans. Beyond that, there is absolutely nothing."

It is generally thought that the idea of a Rough Rider regiment originated in the mind of Theodore Roosevelt. The

facts will not bear out this popular impression. Two months before war was declared the Governor of Arizona asked permission from the War Department to raise a regiment of mounted riflemen. The Department did not grant that authority. About the same time Theodore Roosevelt declared his intentions to "raise a company in Billings." That meant, of course, that he intended to go as a captain with a company of volunteers. Later, he said: "It will probably be a regiment of mounted riflemen." That meant, of course, that he was expanding his own ambitions, or that he had been apprised of the idea being pressed upon the War Department by the Governor of Arizona. Roosevelt, however, did nothing about either "the company from Billings" or the "regiment of mounted riflemen"; but Senator Warren of Wyoming seized upon the idea and placed a rider upon the appropriation bill requiring the "recruitment of three regiments to be composed exclusively of frontiersmen possessing special qualifications as horsemen and marksmen to be recruited from the Rocky Mountain Region."

At this point Roosevelt said, since he had been a sheriff in Montana, he would like to go as a Lieutenant Colonel, and that he would "like to put Wood in as a Major. We will have a Jim-dandy regiment if allowed to go." Roosevelt thought quite well of Captain Leonard Wood, saying of him: "He is an army surgeon, but wants to go in the fighting line. He is a tremendous athlete."

Now, let me say parenthetically, he was the personal physician of the wife of the President of the United States, and the personal physician of the Secretary of War, and these things did him no political harm!

Before the people of the United States knew anything about the three regiments to be recruited, President McKinley astounded Theodore Roosevelt by offering him the colonelcy of the First United States Volunteer Cavalry. He was shocked at his success; and he knew, too, that his lack of experience disqualified him. He therefore did the right thing. He declined—but suggested—Captain Leonard Wood, saying that if Wood were made colonel, he would take the minor position of Lieutenant Colonel, for "Wood is one of

the most promising, enterprising, intelligent, fearless officers of the army, thoroughly equipped to exercise command of a regiment, a man of great ability and courage."

Of himself he said: "I can learn but the thirty days spent in learning would be the very thirty days needed to get into the fight."

Roosevelt was right in both counts. Immediately after being informed by President McKinley that the colonelcy was to be his, Captain Leonard Wood, in typical soldier fashion, commandeered some experienced non-commissioned officers, set them to work on G Street, Washington, making requisitions for every piece of equipment he thought the men would need. Forty-eight hours after receiving notice that it was the President's intention to give him the colonelcy, Captain Wood walked into the office of the Secretary of War, took a seat and waited until the Secretary had affixed his signature to every requisition. Then he sent telegrams to the governors of the Territories asking for troops; and after announcing San Antonio, Texas, as the concentration site, left for Texas.

In response to the call upon the governors, twenty-three thousand men and boys tendered their services for enlistment in the First Regiment. Ultimately approximately one thousand were inducted. Before the recruiting was complete, one variation from the original bill was effected. The original authorization was for 780 men. When 23,000 offered to enlist, an amendment permitted enlistment up to 1000, not limiting the additional recruits to the Rocky Mountain Region and Territories.

It is interesting to see how Theodore Roosevelt was thinking regarding the personnel of the troopers. Actually Roosevelt was Eastern in family background. By personal choice, and because of his health, he had made himself a Westerner. He therefore had divided leaning, toward the West, toward the East. And carrying the same thought, let us see what he said at that time:

The men are to be raised in the Rocky Mountain States, but it may be I can get them to include a company from New York. We want nobody who has not had some experience with both the horse and the rifle, and who is not sound of heart and

body. Whether I can do anything for you, I do not know. If I can I will. But you must have everything ready so I can slash you in if there is a failure of recruits in the West, as there very well may be.

The increase of the strength of the regiment to a thousand resulted in Roosevelt "slashing in," immediately, some sixty-three men from New York and the East. Those troops were the subject of much derision and, at times, unsympathetic newspaper comment. I shall not quote these statements to you, but content to say they were referred to as The Swells, Roosevelt's Pets, Roosevelt's Terrors, The Millionaire's Sons, The New York 400, The Gentlemen Bankers, but finally became most generally known as The Fifth Avenue Boys.

So far as I have been able to determine, there was no rift between the boys from the East and the West. The newspapers, however, did much, and very unkindly, to promote such a schism. Your own George Roland has made a study of this.

Now, let us scan a few of the newspapers of 1898. Let us see what you fellows thought of some of the papers (I believe some of you held unexpressed opinions!); and let us see what the same papers wrote about you. (What I say hereafter has come from the columns of some newspapers published during 1898. Direct quotations are not always indicated. This omission is in the interest of time.)

San Antonio, Texas, was selected by Captain Leonard Wood (soon to be Colonel) as the point of concentration and training because "its climate is favorable, a gradation from the Rocky Mountain States, from whence most of the men will come, and Cuba, where all of the men, now, think they want to go."

The camp site was Riverside Park. The *San Antonio Express* described it as "on the outskirts of San Antonio, in the State Fair Grounds, beside a tortuous, slow-moving stream. The vast exhibition building is some architect's bad dream of Moorish splendor made manifest in huge inverted onions; but over the wide field, ringed with hackberry and pecan, cottonwood and sycamore, the clouds move with singular majesty."

Neither the *Express* nor *The Daily Light* credited the

Arizona men with being "the first arrivals." This honor was bestowed upon 189 mules and three horses which came from Missouri in a train of nine stockcars. They nosed out the Arizona boys from first place by nine hours. This intended pack-train was destined to be forgotten in the sands of Tampa, but many of the Western men—the first men to arrive—such as Alexander O. Brodie, William O. "Bucky" O'Neill, and J. H. McClintock were to go on to Cuba as flames in the torch which gave meaning to the then popular American song: There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight.

As the first troops arrived the *San Antonio Light* thought it quite a feat that "water has been turned through the pipes used at the recent interstate drill, and the boys will have plenty of water." At least one of the Arizona boys was not thinking about water, but he consoled himself when he found Mr. Quinn's Bar which had been set up outside the sallyport; and being inspired by Mr. Quinn's wares, which he seemed to have sampled to satiation, gave the first newspaper interview by a Rough Rider. His words shall go down in history:

I am surprised to get a beer for five cents at Mr. Quinn's Bar. Where I come from in Arizona, beer is fifteen cents a glass.

It appears there were other beer-samplers among the troops, and all of them did not come from Arizona. There is the classic case of the red-headed Irish lad, whom you fellows dubbed "Sheenie Solomon," who invaded a San Antonio chop-suey joint, clipped the Chinaman's pig tail, and left for Camp Wood, despite his "overload," at a record breaking pace for fear the Chink might recover his passport to Heaven and thus contaminate the coveted region with his celestial presence.

Also there is the *Daily Light* account of May 17, 1898, and this time I quote exactly:

L. W. Edwards, a member of the Rough Riders of New Mexico contingent was arrested last night . . . in Warnette's Saloon on Commerce Street and placed in the city jail. . . . This morning he is still in jail. Edwards hails from Cerillos, New Mexico, near Santa Fe, where he has well-to-do relatives. He was mustered in at Santa Fe, and since his arrival has been on a protracted spree. . . . He deserted camp and after a two day

search by the sergeant and several men, he was located in the city but gave his captors the slip yesterday and continued his spree. . . . He is 6 feet in height and is a fine specimen of manhood.

The *Light* also took notice of a three-part-concoction, a mixture of citizens, Rough Riders and whiskey, which resulted in "a party of Rough Riders and three citizens having a howling time of it, yesterday evening, in the saloon at the corner of Nueva and East Streets. A pistol was exploded twice while the saloon mirror was smashed with a beer glass. The boys were in a rubber-tired hack, and when the mounted police arrived and arrested them a dirk was found, but the pistol and the Rough Riders were gone. The three citizens were fined \$5 each today."

The bar incidents, of course, were diversory with the Rough Riders. This the *San Antonio Express* recognized when it commended the character of the men converging upon the city:

The First Volunteer Regiment will present the flower of western manhood. [The Easterners had not arrived when this was written.] It is composed of men picked from the thousands for their exceptional daring and endurance. They are called Rough Riders only with reference to their equestrian abilities, for there are no rowdies and desperadoes among them. They are full of the western spirit of hilarious buoyancy, but they have the western spirit of self-respect and chivalry. There are no outcasts and no desperadoes in the column. They are full of vim and vigor, and they find it hard to keep still.

Since the men were finding it so hard to keep still, Captain Stevens of the Quartermaster Department furnished them a diversion in line of duty, for, according to the *Express*, "he was busy at all hours of the day inspecting and buying horses, and when he had collected as many as 20 or 30 animals, the bunch is taken out to the camp by a squad of Rough Riders." When the Rough Riders showed up for the horses, "the breaking-in process became interesting. In the delivery of the horses the Rough Riders gave some exhibitions of their horsemanship equal to anything that can be seen in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show for the official price of one dollar."

Such a free show, of course, attracted on-lookers, one of whom told an Express Reporter:

If horsemanship is to win the war, the boys show up well, and look as if they could repulse an Island full of Spaniards. They are no long haired roughs like some of us expected to see.

To this, the reporter appended his own observation: "Most of the men ride their horses bareback from the Post to the Fairgrounds with ropes slipped over the horse's nose in lieu of bridles. Several were unbroken mustangs which the Westerners controlled with grace and ease."

Now, who were those troopers who controlled their unbroken mustangs "with grace and ease?" One of them was *not* Private Martin L. Crimmins, late of the Medical Department of the University of Virginia. Trooper Crimmins would have enjoyed the fun of serving in the convoy but circumstances precluded him rendering Uncle Sam this character of service, although he was well qualified to perform it. In fact, he was doing valiant duty on KP until, he, through inadvertence, got himself into the guardhouse. He was, therefore, not one of the original horse-wranglers. In fact, he was not "at liberty" to be. He was in jail! He got out of jail—as you will see—and was later to serve with distinction, such distinction that we now address him as "Colonel."

Among those who early attracted the attention of both Colonel Wood and Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt, as well as the newspapers was (and is) one William O. McGinty. Roosevelt affectionately named him "Little McGinty." You men now know him either as your life-time president or just plain "Uncle Billy." His service in the beginning was alongside Jesse Langdon in Troop K. Little McGinty hailed from Stillwater, Oklahoma, but he now lays claim to citizenship in Ripley. Judging from a look at Little McGinty he has not grown perpendicularly to any great degree since 1898. When Doctor Massie measured him in at Camp Wood, by stretching a little, he rose to the tremendous height of five feet two inches. Also, he complied with Colonel Wood's orders to Dr. Massie not to take any man whose belly was bigger than his chest. (I am afraid Mr. Denny could not pass that test, to-

night!) Roosevelt said that Little McGinty made himself a pledge never to walk if he could ride. It appears his preference in transportation was a horse. He did not care about the "temper" of the horse, for the meaner, the better he liked it. It was, therefore, but a natural consequence, when Captain Stevens delivered a bunch of "Old Smokeys," Mr. McGinty would look them over and pick one "just my size." Colonel Wood told of one such event. This incident might have found its way into the newspapers but the horse seemed disinclined to await the arrival of a news reporter, for, when Little McGinty stepped aboard, there was immediate activity. The horse first bolted for a tree; then into a picket line. The tree stood the assault, but Little McGinty, the horse and the picket-line ended up on the ground firmly bound together in the coils of the rope. Colonel Wood saw the destruction of government property taking place, and in conformity to army regulations, took charge. He went immediately to Little McGinty. He found him uninjured. Then he surveyed the tree. It had withstood the impact. Then he picked up the rope, remarking: "I'll see if you damaged this."

Among those whom Roosevelt mentioned as being capable of "taking 'em as they come" was William D. Wood of Bland, New Mexico, Roscoe E. Moore, commonly called "Smokey Moore," from Raton, New Mexico, Thomas Darnell, who could ride anything alive, and Little McGinty. The newspapers who had reporters stalking Camp Wood constantly for news, made reference to many others, some of whom were expert riders, some being proficient in other skills.

For example, there was Horatio C. Pollock, an educated Pawnee Indian, who, in the language of the *Express*, was "an excellent soldier." But, as is the way in the army, he was put to work as regimental clerk. Then there was "Rocky Mountain Bill" Jenkins, who came from Montana "just to be with my old boss." When reporters cornered him for a story he told them of "many a bear-hunting fight with Mr. Roosevelt in times of so-called peace." As evidence of these bear-hunting fights, he let the reporters view his scarred body. "A piece of his ear is gone—'chawed off'—there is a long deep scar over his right eye—where a paw struck me." The *Light*

described Rocky Mountain Bill as having "the appearance of being constantly loaded for bear with hilts of knives and butts of revolvers sticking out of every pocket and from every angle of his anatomy, but Bill says he hasn't got his war-paint on yet."

The next man found by a *Light* Reporter was among the convoy of horses coming over from Fort Sam Houston to Camp Wood. That trooper, evidently, was a modest man, judging from the report he gave to the *Light*:

Then there is Bronco George Brown from Arizona, who lives in Skull Valley. He has a record of five men to his credit. This means that he has dropped that many in righteous causes, —for stealing cattle, cheating at cards, incivilities to women, etc. Bronco George's patriotism is undoubted. When the stage-driver brought him word a fortnight ago that Roosevelt had issued a call for troops, he got up from dinner, jumped on his wildest bronco, and set off bareback through Devil's Gate and Dead Man's gulch and over Parieta Mountain for the nearest recruiting station, Cripple Barracks, at Prescott. George is believed to be the wildest rider of the West.

Another trooper who had no objection to reading his name in the paper was "Dead Shot Jim." He would not say for sure, but he intimated to the reporter that his real name was Simpson. He hailed from Albuquerque, and was positive about his skill as a marksman. In fact, he could "out-shoot all the dead shots on the range." Besides that, according to his version, "I can bring down an Indian at every crack when they are so far away that most people can't see them." He left it to be inferred that he could focus his shootin' eye with equal precision on a Spaniard. He vowed that his primary reason for coming to San Antonio was "to find a fight,"—not necessarily to ride wild horses, but he was not averse to that diversion if there was no fight handy; but he did not like to be called "a long haired rough." He just "came to fight."

The troopers coming from east of the Mississippi were of two groups—12 young men fresh from the colleges, which newsmen called the "Collegiates," and about fifty who became known as "The Fifth Avenue Boys." The *New York Journal* was anything but kind toward these men. It chided them about their occupations, or the lack thereof, pointing

them out as "dancers, football player, steeplechaser, golfer, polo-player, gourmet, oarsman, fireman, policeman." It referred to them as "The Swells," labeling them as "duly accredited Rough Riders, although they have not done any rough riding yet." The *San Antonio Express* followed the unenviable example of the *Journal* and carried a headline about them:

MILLIONAIRES' SONS JOIN ROUGH RIDERS

The Society Swells are already in Town.

Emboldened by these attacks upon the personnel of the regiment, another newspaper also showed its fangs. It was the *Cincinnati (Ohio) Post*. That paper carried a banner-line with text following:

Army officer don't think they are so "warm." Teddy's Terrors, or Roosevelt's Roughs, are no more soldiers than these war-correspondents around here. The trouble is that these people have been puffed up so in the press that they think they are the whole thing. They have had enough of that to make any body of men conceited. I do not see why the administration should take any stock in those Rough Riders, and they would not if the regiment's officers did not have a pull at Washington. The regular army had all kinds of trouble getting its equipment. These people get uniforms, hats, horses, magazine rifles; in fact, anything they want, and they get it in abundance, without delay. Now, why should they be favored. They are composed of hard men, and can ride and shoot. Those accomplishments don't make them soldiers, and the regular cavalry probably have them in a higher degree. The best way to make soldiers of them would be to break up the regiment and use the fragments to fill the regular cavalry to war footing.

Despite criticism occasionally from the press, there was one man in San Antonio who remained steadfastly the Rough Rider's friend. He was Professor Carl Beck, Director of the San Antonio Band. And when the rumor got circulated that the Rough Riders were to head to Cuba, he announced a "last courtesy"; he would play a concert; it was to be "the last chance the citizens have of meeting the Rough Riders at any social function and give them a hearty farewell." The date was set for Tuesday, May 26, at 8 P.M. From this point let us follow the *San Antonio Light's* account of the event:

Professor Beck extended his invitation to Colonel Wood and Colonel Roosevelt, and they accepted. The program arranged was a patriotic one, including the Cavalry Charge, the Phantasia accompanied by cannon and anvil firing, especially arranged by Professor Beck for the Rough Riders, and the trip to Coney Island (which of course was for the Fifth Avenue Boys). No. 7 on the program was the chief musical feature: Hail to the Chief, closing into three cheers for Colonel Wood and Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt. Dixie and Yankee Doodle followed, closing with three cheers for the officers and soldiers of the First United States Volunteer Cavalry: then the Star-Spangled Banner, and three cheers for President McKinley: Hail Columbia, and three cheers for the citizens of the United States.

Now, fifty-six years later with the echoes of cheers and farewells of Carl Beck's musicians coming back to your ears—as I am sure they do to some of you—let me, like Professor Carl Beck, thank you “for this last chance to meet the Rough Riders at a social function.” Despite the criticisms I have relayed to you, which originated during your period of training, and despite Theodore Roosevelt's prophecy spoken to you September 4, 1898, just before you received your discharges:

The world will be kind to you about ten days. Until then everything you do will be considered right. For just about ten days, you will be over-praised; over-petted; then you will find the “hero business” is over for good and all. . . .

I say to you that “the hero business is not over for good and all.” You earned the title of hero as Rough Riders; you have maintained that status since as citizens of America. The American people have erected a monument in their hearts to you. You have taken your place in history alongside Pickett's Men of Gettysburg, Washington's Men on the Potomac: and in the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, I say:

The American people hold you to be
“the blood of the Princes of the Earth.”