

The Philippine Insurrection 1899-1902

A COMBAT PATROL ON SAMAR

DAVID PERRINE

This article describes the planning and action of a combat patrol conducted on the island of Samar during the Philippine Insurrection at a time when the U.S. Army was gradually breaking away from rigid, centrally controlled operations conducted by battalion and regimental commanders to smaller operations commanded by company officers and noncommissioned officers. The new generation of leaders, men who gained their combat experience in Cuba, China and the Philippines, were just beginning to develop new ideas on how to employ their squads and platoons as independent forces instead of small parts of a larger force.

Since the beginning of our Army, patrolling actions belonged to the cavalry. Our experience with locating an elusive foe in the American West both before and after the Civil War had only confirmed this outlook, and those junior officers who had fought in these engagements remained convinced that it would be always so. But as we soon found out in the tropics, the cavalry was seldom employed to any great extent because its horses were ineffective; this was work for the dismounted infantryman and it had to be learned from scratch. There were no definitive procedures outlined in manuals for a patrol leader to follow; all was left up to local experience that might vary from regiment to regiment. In this particular instance, the company commander put into action all of his recently gained knowledge of the enemy and the local terrain. Despite many obstacles, the commander made the best of the situation with a carefully thought-out plan that would allow him an opportunity to engage an elusive guerrilla force with his disciplined troops.

Background

By early 1901, the fighting on the large island of Luzon had been won with the capture of the insurrecto general, Emilio Aguinaldo. Campaigns on several other islands were winding down, but Leyte and Samar were just now coming to the forefront against the resourceful and energetic guerrilla leadership of Vicente Lukban. Since his arrival in the interior of Samar where he set up his headquarters, Lukban was able to combine his few assets (about 200 men) with the diverse, independent bands that soon would create havoc for the few, overworked American forces. His campaign was ruthless but effective.



Figure 1 — The Philippines

Prior to that spring, the taming of these two islands was on the commanding general's "backburner" due to a lack of men who could be spared to conduct a serious offensive effort.

BG Richard P. Hughes, the department commander, had only a token force of seven infantry companies and one artillery battery stationed in six of the larger ports on the 5,276 square mile island, and troops in two of these cities (Calbayog and Catbalogan) were surrounded by the rebels and under frequent sniper fire. In May Hughes received some relief with the arrival of three battalion-size units on Samar, and he immediately launched an aggressive incursion to the interior to deny Lukban's forces their food supply. Crops were destroyed, ports closed, and all watercraft (less fishing boats) were seized. The following month a battalion of the 9th U.S. Infantry arrived, fresh from duty in China; these he planned to station in company-size garrisons at the mouths of the major waterways that led into the jungle interior. From these points, strong patrols would be dispatched along main and secondary rivers to keep the enemy off balance and away from his food supply.

Natives living in the interior would be encouraged to relocate to the major garrisons along the coast and live peacefully until the guerrillas were defeated.

In August the two remaining battalions of the 9th were released from guard duty in Manila and were warmly welcomed by Hughes who positioned them along the coast and in the villages on the inland waterways. Their arrival proved to be bittersweet as Hughes had to release two cavalry squadrons and, as he soon discovered, the present for duty strength of the newly arrived companies was low, only about 70 percent of their authorized strength (three officers and 105 men). This would only get worse as many of the men were due to be discharged within the next four to five months. To exacerbate the problem, many of the more experienced junior officers were absent from their companies, serving elsewhere on the island. On the plus side, the 9th was coming from a year's duty in China; they were healthy, well rested, and eager for action. They were battle tested having fought on Luzon for 12 months and in China where they were bloodied at the capture of Tien Tsin (see "Keep Up the Fire" — The 9th Infantry in Coalition Warfare" in the September-October 2005 issue of *Infantry Magazine*) and physically tested on the exhausting march to capture Peking.

The Company

E Company of the 9th Infantry arrived with the initial contingent in mid-June and was assigned to the coastal town of Tarangan, some 20 miles northwest of Catbalogan, the capital city. Tarangan had always been a poor coastal village, and in the 18th century it had been the subject of many raids from the marauding Moro tribes of the southern islands. The inhabitants were forced to move to the more secure village of Dapdap on the Gandara River, a few miles inland. Here the people would remain for about 100 years until the arrival of the Spanish who provided security and allowed prosperity to return with profitable abaca (hemp) trade.

The commanding officer (CO) of the company was CPT Francis H. Schoeffel, a 34-year-old native of Rochester, N.Y., and a 1891 graduate of West Point where he played tackle on its first football team and also on its varsity baseball team. He was a veteran of the regiment's campaigns in Cuba, Luzon, and China and had commanded the company for



CPT Francis H. Schoeffel commanded E Company, 9th Infantry for almost three years and was a veteran of the regiment's campaigns in Cuba, Luzon, and China.

almost three years. He was energetic and thoroughly enjoyed command duty; he looked forward to the independence of his new duties and its added responsibilities. He was quite tall for that time (over 6 feet, 1 1/2 inches) and remarkably fit; he expected his men to be able to keep up with him. It is interesting to note that within two weeks of their arrival at Tarangan, he had the men build a small gym and exercise apparatus so they could work out.

Upon landing, he put his men to work immediately, setting up the barracks in an old convent and a dispensary in an old schoolhouse. Part of his command was put to work unloading the ship of their three months worth of supplies. Small patrols were dispatched under his only officer to learn the lay of the land while he and a few men went throughout the town confiscating all small boats.

Schoeffel was authorized two officers to assist him, but his first lieutenant was serving as a company commander for a company elsewhere on the island. His second lieutenant was 29-year-old George W. Wallace who had grown up on the Plains, the son of a cavalryman. The two had a complete, trusting relationship and Schoeffel considered himself most fortunate to have him. Wallace, like his CO, was a "go-getter" and was exceptionally brave. He had been recommended for the Medal of

Honor for actions on Luzon in 1900 and would receive the medal in 1902.

Attached to the company was 1LT William W. Calhoun, an Army doctor who had served with the regiment since the Santiago campaign of 1898. With one hospital corpsman, Calhoun ran the dispensary and was responsible for the company's health and advised Schoeffel on matters of sanitation. He also treated the company of Filipino Scouts stationed in the town as well as the civilian population as much as he could. Normally, Calhoun or his corpsman would accompany the patrols.

The composition of the NCO cadre had changed considerably since the regiment first landed on the islands in 1899 when the squad leaders (corporals) averaged over six and a half years of service while the section sergeants averaged about six years of service. The first sergeant and the quartermaster sergeant were more experienced, both on their fourth enlistments. But the hard campaigning had taken its toll on the older men, and by the time the men landed at Tarangan all but one of the corporals were first termers while the sergeants averaged less than four years service. Both the first sergeant and quartermaster sergeant were on their first hitch.

The Enemy

E Company had much to learn about its new enemy, but the Soldiers learned fast. They discovered that the Samarinos were more primitive than the insurgents on Luzon, yet tougher and much younger, some as young as 12 years old. Physically, they were short and muscular. They had few firearms, and most of the rebels did not know how to use them. However, they were most adept with the fighting bolo and dagger and frequently were armed with both. Some carried long sticks, which they jabbed to make their opponents lose balance, thus allowing others to pounce on their enemy. They liked to fight in swarms and surround their enemies, darting in and out, jabbing and slashing. They seldom attacked unless they had the advantage of surprise to overcome the American firepower of the .30-caliber Krag-Jorgensen rifles (called Krags by the men). Once the Soldiers were able to use their weapons effectively, the rebels tended to melt into the jungle as soon as they could. Some of the independent bands were members of the Dios Dios sect, a group

of religious fanatics who were utterly fearless because they believed they were divinely protected. With this attitude, they tended to fight like demons and would continue fighting despite taking enormous casualties.

The natives were ingenious at laying dangerous traps and snares for the Soldiers. They employed numerous pitfalls with sharpened stakes in the bottoms. These were frequently smeared with poisonous herbs or putrid meat to cause infections to the unlucky victim. A second device was the spear trap that employed a bow to propel one or more objects to impale the unwary Soldier. A third popular device was the release of a heavy log to roll downhill to sweep away Soldiers walking along a trail.

Troop movement was restricted to the rivers or a very few trails, and these were always under observation by natives who would sound a warning to the guerrillas, usually by signals blown from a conch shell or bamboo horn. It was extremely difficult for troops to travel anywhere without hearing signals announcing their arrival. It was very difficult, if not impossible, to surprise the rebels.

The Tactical Situation

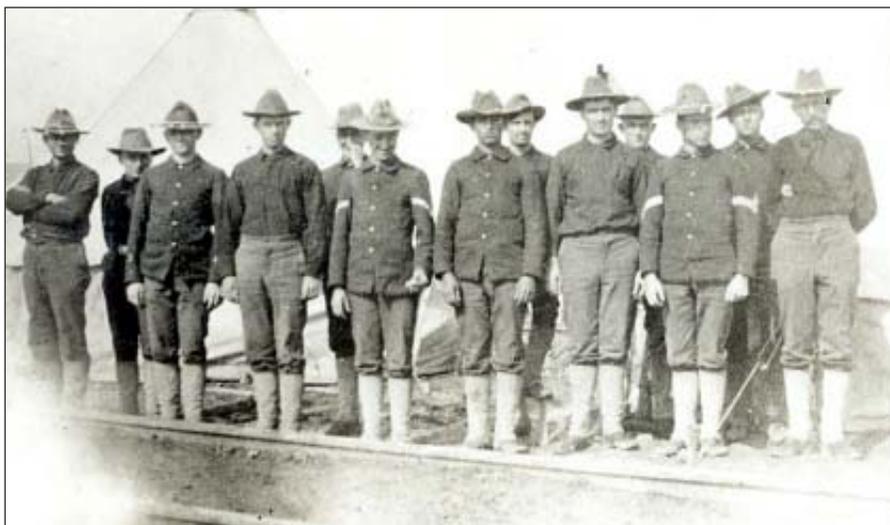
By September Hughes believed the campaign was progressing satisfactorily and he had good reason to think so. There had been many successes. Numerous patrols crisscrossed the island keeping the rebels on the move; crops were destroyed, denying much needed food to the enemy in the hinterland. Lukban's headquarters had been attacked resulting in the capture of the chief's family and most of his documents. The rebels scattered, and Lukban had been wounded, barely escaping. Hughes was not an "armchair" general and frequently accompanied the patrols until he had to quit after breaking a leg. But besides being a fighter, he sought ways to end the campaign with minimum losses and hardships on his men and the friendly natives. His efforts to pacify the natives were not overly brutal as he "allowed every man who would come to us and take the oath of allegiance to do so. Then he was treated as a friend and trusted and was fed." However, those who wished to remain insurgents would be hunted down and captured or killed. As a result, many civilians moved into the larger towns and took the oath of allegiance.

Accordingly, he moved his headquarters to the island of Cebu where conditions were not good and required more and more of his attention. From Cebu he planned to continue directing affairs on Samar. On September 24 he wrote LTG Adna Chaffee, the Army commander, that the campaign on Samar was "promising" with improvements "growing slowly but surely." Four days later events would prove him wrong and would set into effect drastic actions that triggered harsh conditions for the native population. It would also lead to a rapid end to the conflict.

On Sunday morning, September 28, C Company Soldiers in Balangiga were enjoying their breakfast when they were surprised and overwhelmed by several hundred bolo-swinging natives in a daring raid planned by the villagers. Three officers and more than 44 men were hacked to death before a few brave men were able to secure their Krag rifles and drive off the enemy.

All the survivors could do was gather up their wounded (many of them helpless), secure a few boats, and row their way to the nearest garrison some 25 miles away by open sea. This affair (termed a massacre by all the national newspapers) created a flurry of activity and caused both rage and fear on Samar, especially as many of the bodies were mutilated and most of the weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition were missing. Three more infantry battalions and a battalion of U.S. Marines were rushed to Samar, and the pacification program was scrapped. LTG Chaffee was livid, calling for harsher methods "based on distrust of everybody." He ordered stockades to be erected at every garrison and outposts established to preclude any more surprise attacks. Americans were to be "stern and inflexible." And above all, the missing weapons must be recovered immediately.

Two weeks later a 46-man detachment of Schoeffel's company located on the Gandara River came under a similar attack when several hundred members of the Dios Dios sect attempted to surprise the men at breakfast. This time the weapons of the Soldiers were within easy reach and ready to use. Despite the initial surprise, the men fought the insurgents with rifles and bayonets and routed the fanatics, killing more than 80 of them. The Americans had 12 men killed and eight wounded. One of the dead was the first sergeant who was in command at the time. The Americans recovered three of the missing Krags which certainly pleased Chaffee. From this affair, Schoeffel learned three things: first, the unsharpened bayonet issued to the men was inadequate and the men did not like using it. Two of his men died because they could not withdraw the weapon from the impaled fanatic who would hang on until help came. A third Soldier also found himself in this predicament and was severely slashed but lived to tell his story to Schoeffel. From now on, rather than using the bayonet in close combat, the men would use their rifles as clubs. A second lesson concerned the difficulty the Soldiers encountered reloading their weapons as the thimbles on the cartridge belt where individual rounds were stored tended to contract in size when wet. Unfortunately, the commander was unable to do anything about this problem which was not solved until the Army developed the clip system of reloading rifles. Lastly, he discovered that after the attack, many of the men continued to



Courtesy of family of PVT Walter J. Berthoff

Soldiers of C Company, 9th Infantry Regiment were attacked by bolo-swinging natives September 28, 1901, in Balangiga on the island of Samar.

show signs of nervousness due to the vicious nature of hand-to-hand fighting. Only by maintaining strong leadership and discipline could these emotions be overcome.

With LTG Chaffee applying pressure on the commanders to bring in Lukban, the commanders in turn pressed the village leaders to assist them by either bringing in the rebels or providing information on their whereabouts. The Presidente (mayor) provided Schoeffel with guides and workers to assist the Americans. The guides proved to be effective, but the workers could only be depended upon to provide labor and could not be trusted to provide any fighting capability. Occasionally the mayor would pass on information, although it is not known if any of the information was useful.

To offset the losses experienced by the regiment, companies of Filipino scouts were formed from natives of other islands to fight on Samar. These men were trained by discharged American Soldiers who received commissions in the new organization; the native troops were given uniforms and weapons and soon they received high praises for their work throughout the islands. In November a company of Filipino scouts under LT Lang was assigned to Tarangnan to work under Schoeffel.

The Plan

In mid-December, Schoeffel received word that a band of insurgents were north of Tarangnan along the Gandara River; most importantly, one of the members was said to be “an influential Filipino, one of Lukban’s most active agents.” E Company had tried in the past to nab him but he had always eluded the patrols in the tidal swamps. Schoeffel wanted him badly. It was also reported that the group had several rifles and this provided added incentive.

When it came time to select the men for his patrol, Schoeffel did not have many choices; his company had been reduced to 37 men present for duty (including several sick men), and so he was forced to limit the number as he still had to provide a strong garrison security force. By now there was little squad integrity as men were departing almost daily for Manila where they were to be discharged. He selected two squad leaders — Corporals John H. Russell and James Gaughan. Both were in their early 30s, recently promoted and were mature, steady and dependable. As his assistant,



Figure 2 — Western Samar

he selected SGT John P. Swisher, a 32-year-old veteran of all of the company’s battles on the islands and China. The 14 men appeared to have been selected at random; all had been with the company at least a year except for PVTs Thomas Clark and Philip Bradley, who reported two weeks earlier. Clark, however, was a seasoned regular of 21 years service. Fortunately, Schoeffel did have LT Lang’s scouts which he planned to use to good advantage.

For his plan, Schoeffel recognized that he would have to do something unique to penetrate the Gandara without notice otherwise his efforts would be as fruitless. The river entrances were under constant watch by young boys who were quick to sound their conch signals that were audible for well over a mile. He decided to use Lang as a decoy and draw the attention of the nearby rebels, directing him to take 18 scouts, and with a large number of Tarangnan laborers, to precede E Company’s patrol, making no attempt to conceal their movement. He was to land at Dapdap and build fires that could be easily spotted. He was then to send the native laborers into the surrounding rice fields and

collect and bag the rice. Meanwhile, Schoeffel’s men would slip into the river behind Lang and move upriver for another mile and a half to the village of Talinga; then they would work their way back to Dapdap and try to come in behind the insurgents, taking them by surprise. He believed the rebels would concentrate their men near the town, focusing all of their attention on Lang with the view of attacking him at the first opportunity. He was confident that his plan had a good chance of success.

Schoeffel planned to personally lead the patrol as this would probably be the company’s last operation from Tarangnan. The week before, he had received orders alerting him to the fact that the company would soon move to a garrison further inland. He directed LT Wallace and the two senior NCOs to start preparing for the transfer of property and so none of them were available for this action. The other NCOs were too inexperienced for an important operation such as this one. Besides, the CO was quite familiar with the terrain as he had worked over the area around Dapdap at least four times prior to this patrol. He was the logical choice.

The Movement

The two parties were awakened at 0200 hours on December 24 and fed a quick breakfast. Lang's boats departed Tarangnan in darkness, and by 0530 hours they stepped ashore in Dapdap and built a large fire as ordered. Schoeffel's three boats followed at a discreet distance, and he was pleased to hear the enemy loudly announcing Lang's force while his entry appeared to escape detection.

Sometime around 0700 hours, the three craft quietly arrived at the swamp edge of Talinga, and the men slipped into the jungle away from view. The boats then retraced their route to Dapdap where the rowers reported to Lang. E Company moved inland and started their climb of a hill behind Talinga from where Schoeffel would be able to observe the area and the trail leading into Dapdap. He positioned himself with a small advance guard of three men and a trusted guide nicknamed Jocko, an older man with a thorough knowledge of the area and an expert at detecting the deadly traps his men had encountered on more than one occasion.

By 0800 hours the patrol approached the crest of the hill when Schoeffel ordered a halt while he and the men in the point worked their way carefully to the top. Removing his field glasses, Schoeffel systematically examined the countryside, especially the trail leading down to Dapdap. Satisfied, he motioned to SGT Swisher to bring the remainder of the men and the natives to the crest.

Before them lay a hogback ridge descending to another hill. The trail for the most part was open but then it entered tall, dense Cogan grass growing on both sides of the trail. Here the path narrowed to about 18 inches and would force the men into a single file. The men were to be especially alert as they entered the Cogan grass; if the weaker advance section came under an attack, the men in the rear would rush forward and lend their assistance. There could be no hesitation — action must be violent and swift. Bayonets were not fixed; the men were to fire their five rounds from the magazine and then taking advantage of their size and strength, use their rifles as clubs and beat back the enemy.

The Action

Jocko stepped out first, followed by Russell, PVT John Marr, CPT Schoeffel and one other Soldier. Swisher and 10 men followed while the natives under a man named Angel, brought up the rear. Not long after entering the tall grass, Jocko stopped momentarily and then let out a loud grunt and fell forward, his intestines spilling out from a large bolo wound in his gut. A split second later CPL Russell sounded the alarm before he was cut in his legs; falling backwards, he managed to fire off a round and kill one of his attackers. Marr was hit several times, fatally, in his front and back and would die within an hour. Schoeffel for some reason did not have his pistol drawn but nevertheless, kept his wits when attacked. Being an accomplished boxer, he sidestepped the first man and dropped him with a powerful blow with his fist. He quickly drew his pistol and shot his dazed opponent in the chest; he then turned to face three more natives rushing to him. He killed two of them while the third fled. Turning around he noticed movement from the first man he had shot and was surprised to see him still alive. Not only was he alive, but this time, despite his wound, he was faster than Schoeffel, cutting the CO deeply in the back with his bolo and

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giving him another slash before crawling away into the safety of the grass. Schoeffel barely felt his wounds as he then moved over to the dying Marr and retrieved his weapon and continued the fight.

There were probably 75-100 zealots in the Dios Dios band, most of them wearing their distinctive red caps with chin strips and carrying their amulets and charms about their

necks or in their hats to protect them from the American bullets. This was the same sect who had attacked the company two months previously on the Gandara River. It would appear that their plan was to hit the smaller advance element and overpower it quickly while the bulk of the group lay in wait for the Soldiers in the rear to rush forward to the aid of their comrades.

Hearing the heavy fighting in front of him, Swisher urged his men forward. The men followed his orders to the letter and quickly were at the head of the column, but the price had cost them dearly. Swisher, CPL Gaughan and PVTs Joseph Weippert and Frank McAndrew were cut down and fell by the trail, dead of multiple bolo and dagger wounds. Others were hacked as they ran the gauntlet with only three men, PVTs Benjamin Antry, Nathan Fisk and Edward Butler arriving unscathed. A fourth man, Arthur Bonnicastle, an Osage Indian from the famous school at Carlisle, Pa., was slightly wounded, owing his good fortune to his cartridge belt which absorbed the full force of a vicious bolo blow to his midsection. These four men, having expended all of the rounds in their magazines, had clubbed their way forward, cracking the skulls and limbs of the insurgents who swarmed about the survivors. It was now up to these four and Schoeffel to do the fighting as none of the others were sufficiently strong to shoulder a weapon. Here they prepared for a second assault they feared would soon come. They stood back-to-back and poured round after round into the grass to discourage their attackers. Within five minutes the affair was over, their foes having slunk away in the tall grass, leaving their dead behind. Schoeffel was still conscious but was unable to stand and was sick to his stomach. He gave orders to retrieve the dead and wounded and bring them to the front where they could be treated. They were collected and placed within a tight circle. One man, PVT Clark, was missing.

The natives at the rear of the column were now brought forward. Only Angel, their leader, and a handful of others had responded to Swisher's orders to come forward. Angel was dying and two others were wounded and out of action. When the others were asked why they did not rush forward, the natives lamely responded that they had only bolos and feared they would be mistaken as enemies and shot down by the Americans.

The Consolidation

Schoeffel sent the prearranged signal to LT Lang to come to their assistance and was relieved to hear the return signal. However, it would take Lang's party about an hour to reach the survivors. In the meantime, the wounded were made comfortable and given first aid. For some unknown reason, no corpsman accompanied the patrol, leaving the first aid duties to the few healthy men. A small search party was sent out to find the missing Soldier. Bonnicastle soon found him at the bottom of the hill, barely alive suffering from severe bolo wounds to his head and stomach, lying next to two

rebels whom he had killed. He was brought to the circle to join the seven other severely wounded Soldiers. Marr was dying, and PVT George Bedford was the next worst case having multiple wounds to his back, head, chest, and arms. The tough 35-year-old Soldier would survive the grueling trip downhill, the boat ride home but die 10 minutes after reaching the dispensary in Taranganan. PVT George Claxton, an Irishman with over



PVT George Beford, a tough 35-year-old Soldier, was severely wounded during the patrol and died from blood loss.

10 years service in the regiment, had numerous gashes about his arms and suffered arterial bleeding. On arrival at the dispensary, LT Calhoun was forced to amputate his arm, but Claxton died on Christmas Day having lost a massive amount of blood.

The other three Soldiers — CPL Russell, PVTs Bradley and Daniel McPherson — were luckier. Although they had many bolo wounds, they were to recover within a few months and return to duty. Schoeffel's wounds, though not considered serious at the time, proved difficult to treat. Especially serious was a deep gash to his left buttock. Schoeffel continued to be nauseous, and it was later learned that he had been jabbed in the groin by a fanatic armed with a pole.

Lang put his scouts to work cutting down bamboo for the litters. He went about and counted 37 bodies in the vicinity. The men gathering the litter poles counted another 15 rebels along the slopes of the hill.

The Return

When all was ready, the five dead Soldiers (by now Marr was dead) were carried on the backs of the natives. The seven litter cases were borne by the natives also while Lang and his scouts led the way down the hill. Before reaching Dapdap, Clark expired bringing the death count to six men. The wounded were carefully placed in the barotas and the slow trip home began.



PVT Arthur Bonnicastle went on to become a first sergeant and later after his discharge became chief of the Osage Indian tribe.

Finally at 1400 hours the small boats limped into Taranganan where Doctor Calhoun went to work immediately. LT Wallace dispatched 1SG Gaylord Connelly to regimental headquarters with information on the attack. Enroute Connelly encountered a gunboat that carried him the rest of the way. His report initiated a flurry of activity at Catbalogan and all available men of L Company under LT Gibson were gathered and placed on the gunboat along with 25 Filipino Scouts under the command of LT Caulfield. A second surgeon along with the regimental chaplain also embarked, and the ship sailed at 1830 hours to reinforce E Company, arriving two hours later. The next day Gibson's men and the scouts began a concerted effort to track down the Dios Dios band and managed to encounter them the next day, but the rebels escaped deep into the interior. Although the company did not catch their intended target, they once again dealt the guerrilla forces a severe blow by using tried and proven discipline and leadership measures. Schoeffel's plan was a good one and made excellent use of the elements of surprise, violence, and control. He dealt a punishing blow to this particular band of rebels who would not be heard from again for a long time to come.

Epilogue

LTG Chaffee continued to press his troops and within three months the island

was secure with most of the rebels making arrangements to come in and surrender their weapons. Lukban's headquarters was attacked again in February and this time he was captured. This action broke the back of the insurrectos and soon they drifted in to the American camps to surrender. Finally in late April, the last group of them capitulated and laid down their arms. By this time, E Company and the rest of the regiment were heading for Manila where they would soon sail for San Francisco.

CPT Schoeffel's wound proved far more serious than anyone thought at the time. His sciatic nerve was damaged and he was forced to retire in 1903. He was recalled to active duty as a lieutenant colonel in World War I and ran the Port of Embarkation at Hoboken, N.J. CPL Russell recovered from his wounds and was discharged the following March as a sergeant. He reenlisted for one more hitch, this time as a hospital corpsman. He returned to his Boston home, dying in 1951. PVT McPherson also reenlisted for an additional three years and then went back to Houston. PVT Bradley (whose real name was Andrew Fleming) remained in the service until his death in 1916. PVTs Antry, Fisk, and Butler remained with the regiment and went back to their hometowns when their enlistments expired. PVT Bonnicastle later became the first sergeant of the company and then returned to the Indian School at Carlisle. He soon married and returned home to Pawhuska, Okla., where he became involved with many of the tribal affairs, eventually becoming the chief of his tribe in 1920. He died in 1923.

David Perrine is a retired lieutenant colonel who served 21 years in the Infantry including combat tours in Laos and Vietnam with the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) and 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry (Airborne). He currently lives in Annandale, Va.
