



Army Heritage Center
Foundation
*Telling the Army Story...
one Soldier at a time*

Voices of the Past

PHILIPPINE INSURRECTION

Highlights:

- After several failed attempts, John D. LaWall enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1899 at the age of 15.
- Trained at Camp Meade, PA (near Harrisburg) LaWall spent 16 months deployed to the Philippines to fight the insurgency there.
- His memoir, *Sixteen Months in the Philippines*, sheds an insightful look into the experiences of a Soldier in the Philippines.
- Though wracked from physical ailments after returning from the Philippines, LaWall lived to age 95.

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Part of the Army Heritage Center Foundation's Educational Series

John D. LaWall: Hard Marches & Tropical Sun

(Philippines, 1899-1901) The Spanish-American War had ended after only four months the previous year, but the United States soon found itself entangled in another conflict in the newly annexed Philippines, as the natives sought independence. The Philippine Insurrection broke out in February 1899, and fighting quickly escalated.

Born in 1884, Rochester native John D. LaWall was only 15 years old when he first tried to enlist in the Army. Twice turned down in his home town, LaWall traveled to Elmira, New York to try again. He was accepted for duty and enlisted in the United States Volunteer Infantry on July 25, 1899.

LaWall wrote of his experiences in a memoir entitled *Sixteen Months in the Philippines*:

There is a time in the life of nearly every boy when he is obsessed with the desire to become a soldier. Some boys delight to read of great battles, they are never so happy as when they are in the possession of fire-arms, and they regard the Fourth of July as the holiday of holidays. They are thus cultivating, unconsciously, their warlike propensities; so when they have an opportunity later on in their lives practically to demonstrate their tastes, they sometimes take advantage of it by enlisting. But nothing takes the romantic ideas out of a boy's head so thoroughly as eating moldy bacon and hardtack, and nothing dampens his enthusiasm for the glamor and



John LaWall poses in his uniform. LaWall was a member of the 27th Regiment, U.S. Volunteer Infantry serving in the Philippines. His likeness would eventually be used on the Spanish-American War Veterans Survey. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC.

glitter of war so much as lying all night in a heavy rain fighting mosquitoes.



U.S. Soldier on picket duty near Caloocan, Philippines. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC, Spanish American War Survey Collection 1898-1902

In the summer of 1899, I was greatly impressed by the opportunity of travel, adventure, and experience offered by joining one of the thirty new regiments which were being organized for service in the Philippines. So strongly did the desire to go and see for myself what these islands and their people were like, and to participate in such an unprecedented war, take possession of me, that I determined to enlist. My first attempts to join Uncle Sam's army were rather discouraging. I was twice rejected at Rochester, New York, because apparently I did not possess the physical requirements. Before giving up, I decided to make one more effort, and as a result managed to pass the physical examination at Elmira, New York; and on July 25 1899, at the age of fifteen years and five months, I was duly sworn in to "uphold the honor and flag of the United States against all her enemies whomsoever."

The young recruit was sent with a handful of other enlistees for training at Camp Meade, Pennsylvania, near Harrisburg. During the voyage, LaWall had an unpleasant experience:

My experience on this first journey in Uncle Sam's service were far from pleasant; for, yielding to the advice and persuasion of my companions, who were all celebrating their enlistment, I was induced to smoke my first cigar with them. They assured me that it was not strong, that it was indeed very mild but to this day I believe that it was a veritable "stogie." At any rate, for fifty miles, much to

the enjoyment of my comrades, I suffered all the symptoms of a malady which I was to undergo later on, namely, seasickness.

After two years in the Army, LaWall headed home. Life in the Philippines had not been kind to him, and he returned home suffering from a number of ailments:

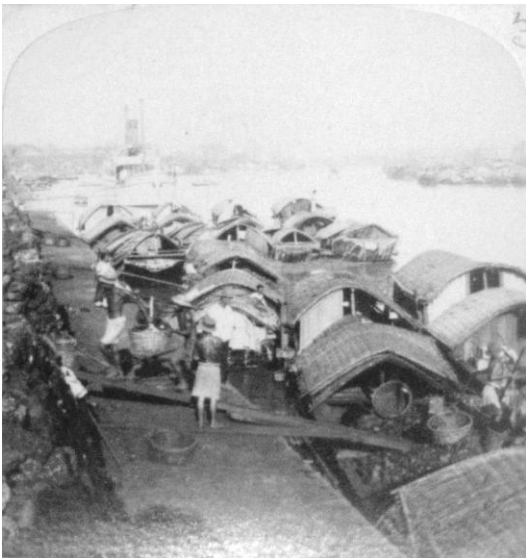
Physically, I was in no shape to stand the rigors of a soldier's life in active campaign. As Kipling says, "All the delights of the season tickled me one by one." I had recurrent chills and fever, I had an epidemic of boils, I had "Dobie itch" and "tropical ulcers" on my feet and legs. Finally I caught cold. I grew worse on the long cold return journey to San Francisco, and when I reached home, many of my friends thought I was dying of quick consumption. Our family doctor dosed me with cod-liver oil and whiskey. I spent the late spring and summer of 1901 with my mother, recuperating and working on my lecture, "Sixteen Months in the Philippines."

Although he claimed never to have recovered fully from the physical effects of his service, whatever lingering effects he experienced seems not to have slowed him down: John D. LaWall died in 1979 at the age of 95.

Sources

John D. LaWall's Veteran's Survey, Spanish-American War Veterans Survey Collection, Box 67, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

John D. LaWall's Memoir, *Sixteen Months in the Philippines*.



Transports on the Pasig River, below the Bridge of Spain, Manila, Philippines. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC, Spanish American War Survey Collection 1898-1902.