

Comments made by Minnesota & Oregon soldiers
active in the Spanish-American War or the Philippine-American War

Source: Minnesota Historical Society reference collection unless otherwise noted

"The natives [Filipinos] have some cause for their grievance toward the U.S. troops from their standpoint. They were waging a warfare against the Spaniards. They had invested the city, cut off supplies from the country, stopped the water supply, and had actually driven the Spanish Army within their entrenchments and were holding them there when Dewey appeared upon the scene with his battleships. Now we prosecute a war on our own against the Spaniards, gain a victory, obtain possession of the city, and set the insurgents out[s]."

Charles A. Cressy, Chaplain of 13th Minnesota, September 11, 1898

"I deprecate this war, this slaughter of our own boys and of the Filipinos, because it seems to me that we are doing something that is contrary to our principles in the past. Certainly we are doing something that we should have shrunk from not so very long ago."

General Mc C. Reeve, former Colonel of 13th Minnesota, 1899.

"The mission of the American volunteer soldier has come to an end. For purposes of conquest he is unfit, for he carries a conscience as well as a gun."

Minnesota Governor John Lind welcoming home the 13th Minnesota Volunteer Regiment, October 12, 1899

From the letters of George F. Telfer, Oregon volunteer soldier

Published in Sara Burnet, Manila Envelopes, Oregon Historical Society.

April 14, 1899 - Marilao, P.I.

"We are still guarding railroad. Also it is still hot. All efforts to induce the natives of the Province of Bulacan seem to be of no avail. The commissioners proclamations, printed in Spanish and Tagalog - offering every inducement for them to return to their homes and occupations. They returned—but. The fun commenced about 5 days ago. I went out with 13 men to scout toward the East. I found a very rich country—thickly settled. I treated the people nicely and they were very friendly - and had nothing to do with the insurrection...[Then the scout troop was ambushed as they crossed the Rio Marilao. They crawled out and sought refuge in a Filipino village! After a rest, set out to march 'home.' Filipino troops opened fire, the Oregonians continued to retreat but were ambushed as they slept. Three Oregonians were killed.] The next day we proceeded to devastate the country. We burned every house within two miles of our camp—and drove the natives away. [The troops joined two other companies and the 13th Minnesota under General Wheaton's command. At daybreak the troops set out for Santa Maria, where Telfer says Aguinaldo led about 1,000 Filipino soldiers.] "They made slight resistance and then retreated. We burned the town and every house or rice stack near there. We marched back to the railroad leaving a trail of smoke such as this country has never seen before. We shot at every human being that came within range - paying no attention to white flags."

Comments by General Charles McC. Reeve (former commander of the Minnesota forces)

[Interview with an unnamed San Francisco *Call* reporter, September 19th, 1899, on Reeve's return from the Philippines. Published by Minneapolis *Tribune* in September, 1899.]

Excerpts:

"Leading English, German and Scotch merchants...told me the Filipinos were intelligent, industrious, peaceable and fond of home life. Personal investigation convinced me that the natives were engaged in all branches of industry. In the professions of law and medicine were many of the natives. The best dentist in Luzon was an officer in Aguinaldo's army. In the field of mechanical and railway pursuits the Filipinos were active and promising. I was surprised to ascertain that the diffusion of knowledge was general. The percentage of Filipinos able to read and write was large. In the provinces we found courts and schools established and found local authorities administering affairs of government. Here was a system of collecting taxes and disbursing the money so collected in the interests of the governed. The disposition of the natives was that of extreme friendship to the Americans...But it was well understood at headquarters that these social visits excited the displeasure of General Otis...

"Conciliatory methods would have prevented the war. Now, we all agree to the proposition that the insurrection must be suppressed, but in the beginning a conciliatory course was not adopted. General Otis' unfortunate proclamation of January 4 rendered conciliation almost impossible. He adopted the policy of ignoring the natives, of treating them as half-civilized savages. No indication was given the Filipinos as to the future intentions of the [U.S.] government...

"Admiral Dewey entertains a high opinion of the industry and intelligence of the natives. He employed many of them at Cavite arsenal and spoke highly of them. The natives expressed great admiration for the admiral. He holds to the opinion that the natives are capable of self-government and in my judgment he firmly believes that the war could have been avoided by an enlightened policy of conciliation in dealing with the natives."