

San Francisco Examiner
August 20, 1898

Echoes of the War

How an Old Man-o'-Warsman Came by Two Historical Letters

Mr. Daniel McLaughlin is an "elderly naval man" living at Los Gatos. For a longer period than it is given to most sailormen to live he has "sailed the seas over" in every quarter of the world, anchoring at last in the port of Los Gatos only when no longer seaworthy. There he awaits, with neither misgiving nor impatience, the end of his shore-leave and the beginning of his last voyage of discovery into the Unknown Sea, where it may be he will "touch the happy isles."

Mr. McLaughlin was with Perry and Tatnall in Chinese waters, and, I believe, with Sloat at Monterey. He can tell you stories of Midshipman Dewey and the far old days before the civil war. He shuffles a bit in his walk, is a trifle unsteady on his legs, and his voice is not what it was where it swelled the chantey at sail-setting; but his talk is full of the sea-spirit, as if he could

feel the brine
Salt on his lips, and the large air again.

Mr. McLaughlin, like many another of the sailor folk, is skilled in various kinds of finger-craft, for in the idle hours when it is their watch below the needs must be puttering at something besides cards. They learn tattooing, carving pictures on walrus tusks, the building and rigging of wonderful miniature ships and many another art wherein their strong, knotty hands take on a deftness and delicacy of touch interpretive of something in their souls which is not addressed by the boatswain's whistle. Mr. McLaughlin's ingenuity runs to the making of miraculous satchels—such marvelous creations as a girl pupil in the School of Love might long for to carry her textbooks in, or her mother to glorify a wall of her boudoir withal. To the making of each goes I know not how many marine leagues of Irish flax, implicated in one cannot guess how many thousands of incredible knots—the whole lined with silk or satin and banded wonderwise with ribbons. In point of taste and beauty the like of these girlgoing fallals is not on sea or land, and I candidly confess that if this naked and unashamed puffing of the old man-o'-warsman's work shall bring him orders for enough of it to make his remaining days comfortable I shall mark the memory of a hope come true. But that is not the song that I started to sing.

Mr. McLaughlin is a hearty admirer of Senator Morgan of Alabama, whose service to our state against the gigantic conspiracy of the Railroad gang two years ago he narrowly observed and intelligently understood. He recently introduced himself to me and asked if I thought the Senator would care for a little token of regard from a humble sailor who had been an enemy in the dark days of the civil war. I thought the senator would, and to the senator the other

day, through "The Examiner," went two of these incredible satchels—one for his daughter, the other to be sold for relief of any old comrade-in-arms that might be known to be in adversity.

I should like to publish Senator Morgan's acknowledgment—warm, cordial, simple, sincere and, unfortunately for my wish, complimentary. With a delicacy and modesty that one does not have to tread the quarter-deck to learn, Mr. McLaughlin has asked me not to print it. (It did not occur to him to ask me not to say nice things about him myself, for probably it did not occur to him that I would have the "gall.") But as a return favor Senator Morgan sent two letters written to himself by Gen. Jo. Wheeler from before Santiago de Cuba, publication of which is inhibited by no considerations of delicacy that I have the discernment to understand. They seem to me interesting and, with the tree-leave enclosed in one of them, will doubtless be sacredly preserved by many a generation of McLaughlins. May it please the reader, here they are:

Headquarters Cavalry Division U.S. Army before Santiago, Cuba.

July 14, 1898

My Dear Friend,

We are still directly in front of Santiago, our lines being about 275 yards from the edge of the city, which is strongly fortified by the Spaniards. We have them virtually surrounded and my hope is that we will make them surrender soon. Our men suffer a great deal from the intense heat and the terrible rains. I also regret to say yellow fever is spreading, and while thus far it is of a mild type it is greatly impairing the efficiency of the army. Yesterday I went out under a flag of truce with Gen. Miles and Gen. Shafter, and we had a long talk with Gen. Toral, the commanding general of the Spaniards with regard to surrendering.

We see very few newspapers and do not know much about what is going on in the United States. Our time is constantly occupied, but as today we are under a flag of truce awaiting a communication from General Toral, the Spanish commander, I therefore have a little leisure this morning. We can see the whole of Santiago and harbor as plainly as you can see New York from the Brooklyn Bridge. There are five large transports in the harbor and one small one. Our men have done magnificent fighting.

With very high regards, truly your friend,

JOS. WHEELER

P.S.—The enemy has just sent in for commissioners to come out and arrange terms of capitulation.

The second letter, which, like the first, is a trifle rain-spotted (and, one can fancy, fever-stained), is written at the same place three days later—July 17:

My Dear Friend,

We have just returned from the concluding ceremonies of the capitulation. General Shafter and the other generals and their staffs and one company of cavalry marched out to the suburbs of Santiago at 9 o'clock this morning. They were there met by General Toral and his officers and a body of Spanish troops, who formed a line facing our troops and presented arms;

at the same time the Spanish flag was hauled down from the palace and General Toral was authorized to salute him by firing twenty-one guns. General Shafter then gave to General Toral the sword and spurs of General Vars del Rey, who was killed in the fight of July 1st. General Toral then marched his troops back and all his soldiers gave up their arms, which were put in the arsenal. The entire Spanish army then marched out and were put in camp, without any arms, about a mile and half this side of the town. General Shafter and myself then rode into the town, followed by the other generals and their staffs, all arranged according to rank. We were conducted to the palace, where we were introduced to the civil governor, all the officials and the archbishop. We were then given luncheon, and just before 12 o'clock a regiment, the Ninth Infantry, was drawn up in the plaza, facing the palace, and as the clock commenced striking the hour of 12 the American flag (it was my headquarters flag) was hoisted over the palace by Lieutenant Miley, Lieutenant Joseph Wheeler Jr. and captain McKetrick; at the same time twenty-one guns were fired and the band, which was standing directly in front of the Palace, played the "Star-Spangled Banner." After it had played a few other tunes we rode out of the city in the same order as that in which we entered, leaving one regiment to sustain the civil authorities.

Every effort is being made to have the Spanish troops promptly put on board ship and embarked for Spain, and it is hoped that the great bulk of our army, including my command, will be able to start for Puerto Rico in three or four days. We are changing our camp today to try to avoid yellow fever infection. General Toral stated that the surrendered troops number about 23,000.

I enclose a leaf from the tree under which the negotiations for capitulation were made.
With high regards, truly your friend.

JOS. WHEELER

The signature looks so odd, so suspicious!—let me examine it. Well, well, well!—Jo. Wheeler assisting at the hoisting of the American flag! Is it not all a dream—all these thirty-odd years of peace and reconciliation, ending in a fantastic Federal-Confederate war with Spain? Shall I not be waked in a few hours by the shuffling feet of the men as they form silently in line and stand at arms in the dark of the morning to repel an expected attack by Jo. Wheeler? O bother your funny Spanish war!—I don't believe it.