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Hunger Has Made Cubans Fatalists

Siboney, June 27.—The day is hot and lazy; endless Cuban infantry straggling past the door of our shack send the yellow dust in clouds. The Thirty-third Michigan is landing in dribbles upon the beach.

Four Red Cross nurses, the first American women to set foot on Cuban soil since the beginning of the war, came ashore from the State of Texas a few minutes ago, and the soldiers, dishevelled, dirty, bronzed, gazed at them with all their eyes. They were a revelation in their cool white dresses.

Life occasionally moves slowly at the seat of war. This makes two days of tranquillity. The Spaniards, when they fled from the conflict with Roosevelt's men and the First and Tenth Regular Cavalry, took occasion to flee a considerable distance; in fact, they went nearly into Santiago de Cuba.

No army can move ahead faster than its rations, and although here we picture the impatience of the bulletin board crowds who fancy that war is not a complication composed of heat, dust, rain, thirst, hunger and blood, yet it is impossible for the army to move faster than it does at present.

The attitude of the American soldier toward the insurgent is interesting. So also is the attitude of the insurgent toward the American soldier. One must not suppose that there was any cheering enthusiasm at the landing of our army here. The American soldiers looked with silent curiosity upon the ragged brown insurgents and the insurgents looked stolidly, almost indifferently, at the Americans.

The Cuban soldier, indeed, has turned into an absolutely emotionless character save when he is maddened by battle. He starves and he makes no complaint. We feed him and he expresses no joy. When you come to think of it, one follows the other naturally. If he had retained the emotional ability to make a fuss over nearly starving to death he would also have retained the emotional ability to faint with joy at sight of the festive canned beef, hard-tack and coffee. But he exists with the impenetrable indifference or ignorance of the greater part of the people in an ordinary slum.

Everybody knows that the kind of sympathetic charity which loves to be thanked is often grievously disappointed and wounded in tenement districts where people often accept gifts as if their own property had turned up after a short absence. The Cubans accept our stores in something of this way. If there are any thanks it is because of custom. Of course, I mean the rank and file. The officers are mannered both good and bad, true and dissembling, like ordinary people.

But there is no specious intercourse between the Cubans and the Americans. Each hold largely to their own people and go their own ways. The American does not regard his ally as a good man for the fighting line, and the Cuban is aware that his knowledge of the country makes

his woodcraft superior to that of the American. He regards himself also as considerable of a veteran and there has not yet been enough fighting to let him know what immensely formidable persons are your Uncle Samuel's regulars.

When that fighting does come he will see, for marksmanship and steadiness, such a soldier as could never have come into his visions. The fighting of the Rough Riders, by the way, surprised him greatly. He is not educated in that kind of warfare. The way our troops kept going, going, never giving back a foot despite the losses, hanging on as if every battle was a life or death struggle—this seemed extraordinary to the Cuban.

The scene of the fight on the 24th is now far within our lines. The Spanish position was perfect. They must have been badly rattled to have so easily given it up at the attack of less than 2,000 men. Here now the vultures wheel slowly over the woods.

The gallantry of the First Regular Cavalry has not been particularly mentioned in connection with the first fight. There were five correspondents present under fire and we were all with the Rough Riders. We did not know until after the action that the First Regular Cavalry had been engaged over on the right flank. But when a second sergeant takes out a troop because its captain, lieutenant and first sergeant all go down in the first five minutes' firing there has been considerable trouble.

In fact, our admiration for our regulars is a peculiar bit of business. We appreciate them heartily but vaguely, without any other medium of expression than the term, "the regulars."

Thus when it comes down to action no one out of five correspondents thought it important to be with the First Regular Cavalry. And their performance was grand! Oh, but never mind—it was only the regulars. They fought gallantly of course. Why not? Have they ever been known to fail? That is the point. They have never been known to fail. Our confidence in them has come to be a habit. But, good heavens! it must be about time to change all that and heed them somewhat. Even if we have to make some of the volunteers wait a little.

Scovel and I swam two Jamaican horses ashore from the Triton, found some insurgents and took a journey into the hills. Colonel Cebreco's little force we found encamped under the palms in thatched huts with sapling uprights. The ragged semi-naked men lay about in dirty hammocks, but their rifles were Springfields, 1873, and their belts were full of cartridges. The tall guinea grass had been trodden flat by their bare feet.

We asked for a guide and the colonel gave us an escort of five men for our ride over the mountains. The first ridge we rode up was a simple illumination as to why the insurgents if they had food and ammunition could hold out for years. There is no getting men out of such hills if they choose to stay in them. The path, rocky as the bed of a stream, zig-zagged higher and higher until the American fleet blockading Santiago was merely a collection of tiny, shapeless shadows on the steel bosom of an immense sea. The woods, the beautiful woods, were alive around us with the raucous voices of birds, black like crows.

At the summit we looked upon a new series of ridges and peaks, near and far, all green. A strong breeze rustled the foliage. It was the kind of country in which commercial physicians love to establish sanitariums. Then down we went, down and down, sitting on the pommels of our saddles, with our stirrups near the ears of the horses. Then came a brawling, noisy brook like an Adirondack trout stream. Then another ascension to another Cuban camp, where just at dusk the pickets in bunches of three were coming in to report to the captain, lazily aswing. One barefooted negro private paused in his report from time to time to pluck various thistle and cactus spurs from his soles. Scovel asked him in Spanish: "Where are your shoes?"

The tattered soldier coolly replied in English: "I lose dem in de woods."

We cheered.

“Why, hello there! Where did you come from?” To our questions he answered: “In New York. I leve dere Mulberry street. One—t’ree year. My name Joe Riley.”

There he stood, bearded, black, a perfect type of West India negro, speaking the soft, broad dialect of these islands and—harp of Ireland—his name was Riley. I have heard of a tall Guatemalan savage who somehow accumulated the illustrious name of Duffy, but Riley—

As we swung and smoked in our hammocks, the Cuban soldiers crooned marvelous songs in the darkness while the firelight covered with crimson glare some naked limb or made tragic some dark patient face. The hills were softly limned against a sky strewn with big stars.

We were up in the cold of the dark just before dawn. With fifteen men as escort, we moved again up the hills. In time, we arrived on a path that curved around the top of a ridge. Here we found Cuban posts. They having no tools with which to dig trenches, naturally turn to the machete. They can't dig down, so they build up.

These Cuban posts were each fronted with a curious structure, a mere rack made of saplings, tied fast with sinewy vines and then filled with stones. They were about six feet high, one foot thick and long enough to accommodate from five to eight riflemen. These structures paralleled the path at strategic points.

Soon we came to a point where upon looking across a narrow but very deep valley we could see in the blue dawn the shine of Spanish camp-fires. They were within rifle range, but we slunk along unseen. Our horses had now been left behind.

Then came a dive into the dark, deep valley—into Spain. The hillside was the steepest thing in hillsides which could well be imagined. We slid practically from tree to tree, our escort moving noiselessly below and above us. By the time we reached the bottom of this hill the day had broken wide and clear. A stream was forded and then came a creep of five hundred yards through tall grass. There was a Spanish post upon either hand—100 men in one, 50 men in the other. The Cubans had no tongues and their feet made no sound.

To make a long story short, there were some nine miles of this sort of dodging and badgering and botheration—nine infernal miles, during which those Cubans did some of the best scouting and covering in the world. At last we were at the foot of a certain mountain. Olympus, what a mountain! Our weary minds argued that to this one the other hills were as the arched backs of kittens.

We ascended it—no matter how—it took us years. At the top we lay on the ground and breathed while the Cubans chopped a hole in the foliage with their machetes. Then we got up and peered through this hole and saw—what? Santiago de Cuba and the harbor, with Cervera's fleet in it and the whole show.

I had noticed that one of the men had carried with care something done up in a dirty towel and tied with creepers. When you see a man carrying with care something done up in a dirty towel and tied with creepers, what do you conclude he has? Why, a telescope, of course.

The hill was more difficult when going down than when coming up. We fell from tree to tree, from boulder to boulder.

The escort only behaved badly once. It seems they had had nothing to eat but mangoes for three weeks, barring a favorite mare which some stern patriot had sacrificed to the general appetite. We were within two miles of the insurgent lines and passing through a thick wood when the escort sighted a tree laden with mangoes and with luscious ripe ones crowding the ground. The captain raved in whispers and gestured sublimely, but it was of no benefit. That escort broke formation and scattered, flitting noiselessly and grabbing.

There was a time when a Cuban nursed a cartridge and there are some disadvantages to his having a-plenty. When we reached the open ground we were a little reckless, being homeward bound, and the insurgents on the ridge, not valuing ammunition as they once did, began to pot genially away at us.

In one of the camps we stopped to lunch upon one can of beef. It was a mango camp. Our mango escort was still with us. That orange-colored fruit seemed to look reproachfully at us from the stomach of every man present. They gathered sadly around to see us eat the beef. It was too much for us. We divided one pound of beef among about thirty men, including ourselves.

We told our fifteen men, loyal save for the incident of the laden mango tree, that as they had only done twenty-five miles over impossible mountains since daylight they had better come six more miles over more impossible mountains to our rendezvous with the Three Friends on the coast. Whereupon we would generously give them two good rations per man from the ship.

We mounted and rode away, while they padded along behind us. As we breasted the last hillock near the coast we beheld the Three Friends standing out to sea, the black smoke rolling from her. We were about one half-hour late. There is nothing in any agony of an ordinary host which could measure our suffering. A faithful escort—thirty-one miles—mangoes—three weeks—Three Friends—promises—pledges—oh, horrors.

Scovel rode like mad through the guinea grass to the beach to make desperate signals. The escort ran headlong after us. I could hear the captain screaming to his men “Run! Run! Run! Run!”

“I can't run any more! I'm dying!” cried a hoarse and windless private.

“Run! Run! Run! Run!”

“If I take another step I will die of it,” cried another hoarse and windless private.

“Ah,” shrieked the captain wildly, “if you have to eat mangoes for another three weeks you'll wish you had run.”