

## 1.7 SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR ERA 1898-1901

France gave up an interest in colonizing North America due to France's near bankruptcy, which left Spain salivating for the chance at more New World land. After the explosion on the USS Maine in Havana Harbor which was blamed on Spain, the U.S. battled Spain on its Pacific islands of Guam, Philippines, Hawaii and other outlying islands and took on the Spanish insurgents in Cuba, winning on all fronts.

“Senator Henry Cabot Lodge believed that America at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had become ‘over civilized’—that young men were turning soft and needed to somehow stir ‘the wolf rising in the heart,’ as Theodore Roosevelt put it. It is significant that Lodge and Roosevelt, who pushed America to go to war with Spain in 1898, had written about war a great deal but [had] never seen it. President William McKinley resisted; he had, as he noted, ‘seen the dead piled up at Antietam’ in the Civil War. But the Hawks in America were able to roll the Doves, not for the last time.”

—Sebastian Junger, author of War. Hachette Book Group, 2011.

### “Navy Hymn”

Eternal Father, Strong to save,  
Whose arm does calm the restless wave,  
Who tells the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep.  
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee  
For those in danger on the sea.

—William Whiting/Music by  
John B. Dykes, penned in the 1870s.



Three sailors in their wool uniforms,  
from Great-Aunt Edna's scrapbook.

The Continental Navy was established 10/13/1775. Several of its armored cruisers and newer ships were sunk or scuttled in the Battle of Santiago, Cuba, 7/3/1898. Some of the rest were sunk in the Battle of Santiago (Guam) and in the Caribbean. The replacement steel navy was sorely tested, but emerged victorious, liberating Cuba from Spanish rule, adding acreage to the Union, due to The Treaty of Paris: netting the Philippines, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and Guam, among other islands, which made trade with Asia feasible. —<https://en.wikipedia.org>

The following poem is to honor the peculiar penchant for slang used in all the branches of the military over world history. A colorful sampling of 1898 Navy slang is woven here, with accompanying translation.

## In Other Words

Bare navy

Makes us long for a Grub-spoiler's Tommy.  
Now Banyan days avast Admiralty ham  
And worse, Harriet Lane;

*In Other Words: Definitions of Stanza One*

**“Bare navy”**: tinned rations of standard-issue crackers and beans

Makes us long for **“Grub-spoiler's Tommy”**: a poor military or lumber camp cook's soft bread and fresh provisions, no matter how hastily prepared.

Now our meal-planner may as well be from the

**Banyan** Hindu caste, which abstains from animal-based foods,

**“days avast”**: who will create more and more space between two meals that feature flesh, and then serve only a navy specialty: tinned mystery meat/tinned fish dubbed

**“Admiralty ham”**: touted to be so delicious as to be served only to officers,

**“And worse, “Harriet Lane”**: an unfortunate young woman, victim of an infamous crime in the 19th century who was murdered, chopped up, with her remains undiscovered for a long time; thus, her name is a coarse euphemism for beef jerky.

For can make a tarpaulin  
Leave landlubber,  
To a skulker be  
When a sailor eats and clears his yard-arm.

*In Other Words: Definitions of Stanza Two*

**“Tarpaulin”**: an efficient seaman

**“Leave Landlubber”**: pass a person who does not possess a stomach suited for the sea to be the first one to the ship's rail,

**“To a Sulker”**: one who keeps completely out of the way when any work is to be done; meaning the food served can quickly make even a good worker into one who is unable to attend to any meaningful duties;

**“A sailor eats and “Clears his yard-arm”**: to fold the sail, so the wind can't catch it. However, in this setting the sailor has digestive distress; it's the food's fault [Its wind catches him, regardless of his good intentions.].

Finally all that remains is Black Bess  
Brown George  
Cookhouse rumor  
Europe on the chest, and the sea.



“If you would ever have to eat  
The food which you prepare,  
The doctors soon would give you up  
As you'd do with your bill of fare.”

*In Other Words: Definitions of Stanza Three*

“**Black Bess**”: one’s firelock or firearm

“**Brown George**”: Munion bread, or hard-as-a-bullet flatbread, contracted by and supplied to the Navy; also a reference to the dry salty crusty unsavory toughness of England’s King George IV.

“**Cookhouse rumor**”: the natural result of eating something that doesn’t agree with digestion; i.e. flatulence,

“**Europe on the chest**”: homesickness. From an old reference to being away from home while on the high seas; also perhaps having in possession a small carved personal wooden locker for valuables embossed with the country of origin or coat of arms, inferring “everything of personal value to me is under my crest (heart).”

“**And the sea**”: “We are reduced to the very bare necessities and their influences upon us” and are unable to escape them, because there is always and everywhere the sea.

For additional interesting terminology see [Slang, Today and Yesterday](#) by Eric Partridge, pp. 251-252. (No publication date in the book; perhaps 1964.)

A tattered well-folded paper was found with letters and a military-ration can opener, indicating this Psalm probably travelled into battle. From family archives.

## Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation,  
whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life,  
of whom shall I be afraid?  
Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear,  
Though war rise up against me,  
yet in this will I be confident:  
Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses,  
But I will remember the name  
Of the Lord my God.

—General David

1902 Indian head penny (on right); 5-cent George Washington, 1-cent Ben Franklin and 5-cent Theodore Roosevelt stamps from the engraved Famous American series of the era.



## Buffalo Soldier:<sup>1</sup> A Resume

Son of free black farmers Severn and Elizabeth Bivins, at Age 15 in charge of an 8-horse Virginia tract. Longed for something other than the predictability of crops and animals, Entered Hampton Institute for African Americans.

“Having a very great desire for adventure and to see the Wild West, Joined the army, shipped out to the 10<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry, Missouri, 1887.”<sup>2</sup> Stationed in Arizona Territory 1888 in the campaign against Geronimo, Patrolled, kept peace during the final days of the Apache Wars.

Company clerked 1889-90, then stationed in Dakotas and Montana.

Trained Irish Water Spaniel “Booth” as a messenger dog; inseparable.

Expert marksman: 8 War Department medals in Illinois 1892-94 and more thru 1910. (Only soldier ever to win 3 Army golds in a year.)

Buffalo Bill Cody offered a Wild West Show job, but Bivins declined.

The 2/15/1898 explosion of USS Maine in Havana Harbor triggered war. [Cause of the blast was never determined, but the U.S. was eager to end European colonization in North America, so blamed Spain.<sup>3</sup>] All 4 African American regiments headed across the Midwest toward FL in palace-train coaches bolstered by cheering crowds who gave them gifts. But in the South it was different.

Bivins was taken aback by Jim Crow segregation that had become entrenched in the former Confederate states during his years of western service, calling it “the curse of the South.” The 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry African Americans who were denied basic rights there fought to free Cubans on Spanish soil with Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, 1<sup>st</sup> Volunteer Cavalry.<sup>4</sup>

Bivins wrote a friend, “There is no people on earth more loyal and devoted to country than the Negro. God grant the time will soon come when this country will have the power to enforce the teaching of this heavenly doctrine that all men are created free and equal.”



Buffalo Soldier Horace Waymon Bivins, (1862–1937) with his messenger dog, Booth. Public Domain.



June 24, 1898, Gunner Corporal Bivins took up the call to attend the Spanish American War at the site of skirmishes between Spanish troops and Cuban insurgents. Casualties were very high, but the Americans drove the Spanish from position. July 1: San Juan Hill. “Hot day, we had no water. Some canteens, but they had been pierced by bullets. We were under a terrific fire,” Corporal Bivins recalled.<sup>5</sup> Operating a 3-man Hotchkiss breech-loading cannon alone, he suffered a head wound: a Spanish bullet bounced to glance off his temple.<sup>6</sup> “It stunned me for about 2 minutes. I recovered, re-sighted my gun, pulled the lanyard, then watched with my [field] glasses the result of the shot.”<sup>7</sup>

Medal of Bravery 1901. Dog “Booth” protected dead soldiers until they were retrieved. Bivins authored a book: Under Fire with the Tenth Cavalry. President McKinley acknowledged Black soldiers’ contributions in the war: “They vindicated their own liberty on the field, and with other brave soldiers gave the priceless gift of liberty to another suffering race.”<sup>7</sup>

Captain: served 6 months in the Philippines leading patrols against the forces of Emilio Aguinaldo (pre-Panama Canal<sup>8</sup>). Ordinance Specialist Bivins stationed in Montana, California, Wyoming, New York, and Vermont.<sup>9</sup> Married Claudia Browning from early Fort Custer days; settled in Billings, Montana. He had 3 children and retired 7/19/1913.

Horace, age 55, volunteered for U.S. Army service again in WWI as Supply Captain at Fort Dix, NJ. Liberia, the African settlement for freed U.S. slaves, asked Bivins to train 115,000 planning to fight against the Germans in W. Africa. He declined, returned to Billings to study taxidermy and grow lush gardens with his family for many years.

—With Antonio Bivins, Horace’s great-great-grand nephew, Chaska, MN.

<sup>1</sup>“Buffalo Soldier”: name Native Americans used to describe Negro troopers.

<sup>2</sup>African Americans in the Military, Catherine Reef, pp. 29-32.

<sup>3</sup><http://billingsgazette.com/news/features/magazine/much-decorated-soldierservedmany-years...>

<sup>4</sup>The Rough Riders

<sup>5-7, 9</sup><http://www.blackpast.org/aah/bivans-horace-w-1862-1937>

<sup>8</sup>President Theodore Roosevelt oversaw the work for a trans-isthmian canal in 1903-13.



Commemorative Buffalo stamp.

Note from his nephew Antonio Bivens: “When I first moved to Minnesota for university, a man heard my last name and said it sounded familiar. Since there are not many people by this name, I became curious. It turns out Horace was quite a natural scientist who chronicled many species he encountered. He brought back from the Philippines a Monkey-eating Eagle. After it died, he had it taxidermied. It resides at the Bell Museum of Natural History at the U of M to this day, the reason the man was familiar with my name. There is also a display of Horace’s life and extensive collection of his natural-history artifacts of rare birds, lizards, snakes and other items at the Yellowstone Museum. Horace knew Teddy Roosevelt personally from his experiences in Cuba. President Roosevelt, a fellow naturalist, created the U.S. Forest Service and established 150 National Forests and 5 National Parks during his presidency (1901-1909). Roosevelt went out to Billings to see both Yellowstone and Horace, but Horace was at Fort Dix at the time.”

## Thor<sup>1</sup>

I poured white-hot rain into molds  
 Then released soft breathing ingots;  
 I witnessed the velvet heart of iron  
 Then rolled it into red-violet veins  
 That flattened with a ten-pound hammer  
 Into ribbons of gloaming might;  
 I bent and shaped sorrel blanks on the anvil  
 Swedged out holes pink pink pink;  
 Plunged ‘em into a tepid tank to temper  
 Gave each chestnut steed a pedicure, then  
 Het, pinched, spread, nipped, crimped,  
 Wedged a fit and shod the huffing Morgans<sup>2</sup> of war,  
 Who pawed brown ground with fresh blue-grey muscle,  
 Impatient for battle.

—In memory of 120-pound soft spoken Andy Stockholm, Farrier, Finlayson, MN, and with thanks to Robert Burns, Blacksmith, Carver, MN.

<sup>1</sup>God of War in Norse Mythology.

<sup>2</sup>Morgans: stocky-bodied sorrel (rust-colored) or chestnut (dark brown) horses with short legs known for their endurance, quick and agile step, healthy legs and feet, and notorious calmness in battle. Though General Stonewall Jackson received a mortal wound in battle, his horse, Little Sorrel, lived to be a regular visitor at wounded soldier’s homes throughout the South for years after the war and died at the age of 36 (in about 1898), after which he was stuffed by a taxidermist and remains in a museum to this day.



Individually forged horseshoe and brass harness cleats. From family archives.



It was considered a tragedy to kill a horse in battle. To the victor go the spoils, including 4-year-old horses. Yearlings are trained to a bridle; 2-year-olds are broken to a saddle and know basic commands; 3-year-olds overcome the fear of water, shadows, gunshots, tight places, and walking backwards. A well-trained 4-year-old is an asset to any war campaign.

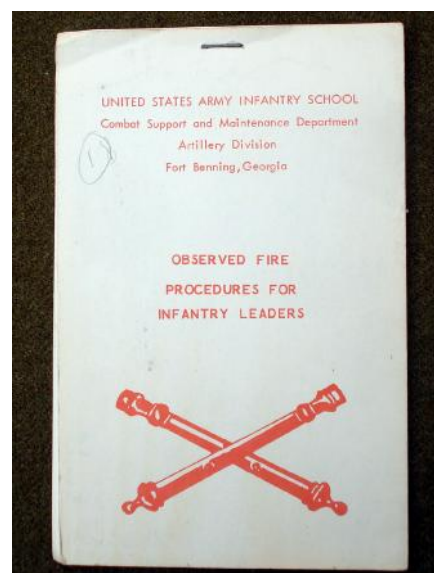
At the close of the Spanish-American War and the beginning of the 20th Century, it went without saying that man relied not only on water, but also upon the horse for travel and battle. Gas-powered machines were considered experimental, unreliable and limited (due to unimproved roads), so horses were used extensively through World War I. Millions of well-trained horses grew up on U.S. farms, were requisitioned for Europe and smelled death. Some were shot, all were overworked, and despite promises from the government, most were never returned to the farms that lent them. Even as mechanized as our nation was in WWII, the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps was responsible for the professional care of over 56,000 horses and mules that were employed as cavalry and field artillery draft animals for supply trains at the beginning of our part in the war. By 1943, however, only 3 horses were procured. [http://olive-drab.com/od\\_army-horses-mules\\_ww2.php](http://olive-drab.com/od_army-horses-mules_ww2.php)

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him think." —The author

## After the Battle

There is a time after battle  
when winning or losing  
doesn't matter anymore,  
when the wreckage of it  
is bigger than the cause,  
when the line that dared  
us to take sides has blended  
like blood into the sand,  
when a weariness sets in  
like a tide overtopping  
the beachhead of silence,  
we cling to in the darkness  
after the storm has passed.

This is a time when regrets  
outpace the dreams of glory,  
a time when we see at last



Observed Fire Procedures for Infantry Leaders, circa 1898. It established the standard for U.S. modern warfare: Our guys had to be shot at before they could shoot. Therefore, it was determined the U.S. would not be the aggressor.

how the great steeds of war  
pulled us, winners and losers,  
heads lowered, unswerving,  
to the same dark place.

—John Thornberg, 12/10/2010, Veteran, and member of writer’s groups in  
Chisago and Stillwater, MN.

## For My Country

I ought to love my country,  
The land in which I live,  
Yes, I am very sure my heart  
Its truest love should give.

I must be good and honest,  
I must be kind and true,  
I never should be lazy,  
I must be gentle, too.

For, if I love my country,  
I’ll try to be a man  
My country may be proud of;  
And if I try, I can.

She wants men brave and noble,  
She needs men brave and kind,  
My country needs that I should be  
The best man She can find.

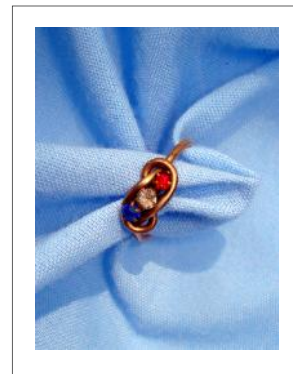
—Listed as “Anonymous” in several sources for education or recitation.  
Handwritten copy signed “Lloyd H. Bates (age 9)” circa 1898. Family archives.

*Note: During the Expansion Era patriotic pieces written in a child’s voice were popular for memorization and handwriting practice in schools, and could be found in major magazines of the time. Looking back, did they act as propaganda to create a feeder program for the next war?*

“America does not go abroad for monsters to destroy.” —John Quincy Adams



U.S. Commemorative stamp for centennial of Spanish-American War, 1897-1997.



Red, white and blue ring my grandmother found in 1902 as a prize in canned Pet Milk.