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ENSIGN KNEPPER'S ACCOUNT.

Thrilling Details of the Manila Battle as He Saw It.

Believing that a Somerset boy's description of the great naval battle fought in Manila harbor will be of interest to our readers, we reproduce the following from the Somerset Democrat:

Last Saturday Oliver Knepper, Esq., of Main street, received a long letter from his son, Ensign Orlo S. Knepper, who read the signals on board the gunboat Concord throughout the thrilling engagement at Manila on May 1, between the Spanish fleet and Admiral Dewey's vessels. The letter was written on May 3, two days after the battle, and contains a thrilling and well written description of that historical naval contest. While not written for publication, anything concerning the Manila fight has become of such public interest that even private letters about it are in a sense considered public property, and are eagerly read by the patriotic people of the United States. Coming from one who was born and reared in Somerset and who is known by a large number of people in this county, Ensign Knepper's letter will prove of especial interest to our readers. Being the signal officer on board the Concord, he had especial advantages to witness every detail of the conflict and he writes entertainingly and instructively about the leading features. The ensign's letters home are directed to his sister in Nebraska, who forwards them to Somerset after she has read them. In order to keep the correspondence straight he has numbered his letters consecutively:

U. S. S. CONCORD,
MANILA BAY, May 3, 1898.

No. 13.
"This is No. 13, but it certainly is for luck—for no army or hostile force has ever been as fortunate, or had a more complete victory than we have had. But I had better begin at the beginning. Suffice it to say that we have no killed and the Spanish fleet is completely destroyed.

We sighted the Philippines at dawn, Saturday, 30th. Then the Concord and Boston were signaled to go ahead and reconnoiter Soubig bay, about thirty miles to the northward of Manila. We went into the bay and inspected it thoroughly, finding not the sign of a vessel there. We thought the entrance was mined, and know now that there were about seventy torpedoes there, but we were fortunate enough to miss them all. Then we joined the fleet and steamed slowly down the coast, intending to enter the bay of Manila during the night; of course we had every light on the ship out or obscured.

We arrived off the entrance about 11 o'clock Saturday night and went to quarters. Then we steamed in slowly, the flagship leading, and saw not a sign of light at any of the forts. We were well in and past the fort at the entrance when suddenly we heard a shell whistle over our heads, immediately followed by another. We answered with one shot from the Raleigh, two from the Concord and one from the Boston. No more shots were fired from the fort and we went on up the bay at about four knots. The bay is large and Manila is about thirty miles from the entrance. Our object was to get off the city at daylight and we timed it exactly. At 4:55 dawn began to break and we could make out ships of Manila, but apparently all merchant ships. At 5 o'clock Sunday morning the Spaniard began firing on our right and we made out their fleet off Cavite—the naval station, five or six miles from Manila. The flagship went column right and we followed. At 5:10 the signal was made to begin general action and we opened fire. The Spanish fleet were well prepared and were under the lee of two forts—one at Manila and the other at Cavite. We steamed past the entire fleet and the cannonading was something terrific, shells literally raining around us. When we reached the end of the fleet we turned and came back the same line, turning again at the other end.

I was on the bridge reading signals and had a splendid view of everything, though most of the time I was too busy with signals to think of anything else—for which I was very glad. Shells burst all around us, but strange to say we were never hit. At 7:30 the commodore made a signal to withdraw from the action, and we steamed out of range. We had been at quarters since 11 o'clock the night before and the men needed a rest and something to eat. At first I felt disheartened, but we soon saw that the Spanish fleet had suffered very much more than we had. Several of their ships were on fire, while as far as we could make out we were not seriously hurt. We had expended nearly half our ammunition and the commodore called all the commanding officers on board the flagship for a consultation.

At 10:30 we ran in again and opened fire, particularly on the forts. The two largest Spanish ships were soon seen to be so badly on fire that they could do nothing, and about 11 o'clock they hauled down their flags. Shortly after that another ship—the Don Antonio de Ulloa—hauled down her flag, but soon hoisted it again. I had seen her haul down and knew that it was not shot away. On looking at her again I saw that she was sinking rapidly and hoisted the colors so that she would go down

with them flying. I watched her for five minutes, I suppose, though I had no idea of time then, and it was really pathetic to see her go to the bottom. The water was not very deep, so that her colors remained just above water when she settled on the bottom.

Then we, on the Concord, were ordered to burn a transport further up the line, and left to do that. By the time we had shelled her and set her on fire the forts at Cavite had hauled down the Spanish colors and run up a white flag, as had also the navy yard. The remainder of the Spanish fleet had gone behind a break-water and we hauled her off at about 12:30. In the afternoon we came back, but met with no resistance. The remainder of the Spanish fleet had surrendered, and as the ships had been scuttled, we burned eight more—so that day we destroyed twelve ships—the entire fighting Spanish fleet, and had a white flag floating over the navy yard and at the fort at Cavite. We had not had a single man killed and only six men injured on the Baltimore. One man on the McCulloch died of heat or heart failure, I don't know which. The heat here is awful, and most of us are burned in blisters.

The Spanish surprised us very much by putting up the fight they did. We had heard that they were not at all prepared and all sorts of rumors, but they fought splendidly, and fought as long as they had a ship or gun to fight with. When the Don Antonio de Ulloa went down, she went down stern first, and after her stern was under water and just before her bow went under, they fired a shot from one of her fore-castle guns, and the men must have gone down with the ship. The Spanish loss was very heavy. We don't know how many and I suppose never will, but I know it must have been over 500. It was nothing in the world but a miracle that brought us out without loss. We were under fire for over four hours and shells simply rained around us. I don't believe there is a battle in the history of the world where the destruction was so complete on one side and the loss nothing on the other. Most of the boats were shot away from our ships, but so far as the fighting qualities of a ship go, we are as well off to-day as before the engagement, except that over one-half of our ammunition is gone. However, we will have no more fighting out here, for there is nothing to fight.

To-day we have been destroying batteries and I have practically been on the bridge from 5 this morning until 9 to-night, and must close and get some sleep. Until last night I hadn't had my clothes off for four days and haven't been in bed since last Friday. To-night I hope to get a good night's sleep, but it must be nearly 12 o'clock now.

Wednesday morning—we have just heard that we can send a mail to Hong Kong to-morrow, so I will finish this letter this morning. To-day seems hotter than ever. The skin is all coming off the back of my neck from exposure to the sun, but that is too small a matter to consider. The night of May 1 was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen, and I never expect to see as grand a sight and at the same time as sad a sight, especially to a naval officer. We sat up on deck smoking and talking just as though nothing had happened, while in front of us was the entire Spanish fleet in flames. The steel ships had about burned out, but were red hot and looked like huge skeletons of ships. Then several magazines blew up that sent a cloud of flames up into the clouds. It didn't and it doesn't seem possible that we could sit there with our fleet absolutely uninjured and see such destruction before us.

Before I forget it, get the New York Herald and read the account of the fight that will be accurate and probably the only one that will. Mr. Stickney was with us all during the fight on the flagship and he took numerous photographs. He is a graduate of the naval academy and his description can be relied upon.

Since Sunday we have been busy destroying batteries on shore and have now finished that. I have never in my life felt as sorry for any men as I have for several Spanish officers I have met. Not that I don't condemn their whole policy, but there are men among them. Yesterday I went ashore at El Fraile—that is the battery that first fired at us—and destroyed the guns there. A Spanish officer went with us and showed us where the guns were and then stood by while we broke them to pieces and threw every movable part overboard. The poor man had tears in his eyes. I hope I will never live to see the day when I must stand by any guns I have commanded and see a lot of foreigners destroy them.

Monday we went ashore—the captain, navigator, Davidson, and myself—to take a look around. Of course we wore side arms with a revolver. On the beach we saw a party coming toward us with a hospital flag. They were two doctors and three Sisters of Charity, and I think they really thought we were coming ashore to murder the wounded in the hospitals. That proclamation of the beggarly governor gave them the idea. He is the only man here that I don't feel sorry for. I would like to make him eat that proclamation. When we got it we called all hands to muster on the ships and read it to the crews. I think it did us more good than it did him. I will send you a copy

of the proclamation. It would be a good thing for the Democrat to publish [The proclamation is reproduced below.—Ed.]

Manila proper has not surrendered, because we don't want it. If it surrendered to us we would be responsible for the policing of it and we haven't the men, nor are our orders to take it. Our orders were, 'You must capture or destroy the Spanish fleet,' and never have orders been more effectually carried out.

How long we will be here, where we will go or what we will do are questions that we cannot answer. The war out here is over, because there is nothing left to oppose us. I only hope the North Atlantic squadron was as successful.

Yours affectionately,
ORLO KNEPPER."

PROCLAMATION ISSUED BY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF THE PHILIPPINES.

Following is the war proclamation which was issued by the Governor General of the Philippine Islands referred to in above letter:

"Spaniards:—Between Spain and the United States of North America hostilities have broken out. The moment has arrived to prove to the world that we possess the spirit to conquer those who, pretending to be loyal friends, take advantage of our misfortunes and abuse our hospitality, using means which civilized nations count unworthy and disreputable.

The North American people, constituted of all the social excrescences, have exhausted our patience and provoked war with their perfidious machinations, with their acts of treachery, with their outrages against the law of the nations and international conventions.

The struggle will be short and decisive. The God of Victories will give us one as brilliant as the justice of our cause demands. Spain, which counts upon the sympathies of all nations, will emerge triumphantly from this new test, humiliating and blasting the adventurers from those States that, without cohesion and without a history, offer to humanity only infamous traditions and the ungrateful spectacle of Chambers in which appear united insolence and defamation, cowardice and cynicism.

A squadron manned by foreigners, possessing neither instruction nor discipline, is preparing to come to this archipelago with the ruffianly intention of robbing us of all that means life, honor and liberty. Pretending to be inspired by a courage of which they are incapable, the North American seamen undertake as an enterprise capable of realization the substitution of Protestantism for the Catholic religion you profess, to treat you as tribes refractory to civilization, to take possession of your riches as if they were unacquainted with the rights of property, and to kidnap those persons whom they consider useful to man their ships or to be exploited in agricultural or industrial labor.

Vain designs! Ridiculous boasting! Your indomitable bravery will suffice to frustrate the attempt to carry them to realization. You will not allow the faith you profess to be made a mock of impious hands in the temple of the true God; the images you adore to be thrown down by unbelief. The aggressor shall not profane the tombs of your fathers, they shall not gratify their lustful passions at the cost of your wives and daughters' honor nor appropriate the property that your industry has accumulated as a provision for your old age. No, they shall not perpetrate any of the crimes inspired by their wickedness and covetousness, because your valor and patriotism will suffice to punish and abuse the people that, claiming to be civilized and cultivated, have exterminated the natives of North America instead of bringing to them the life of civilization and of progress.

Philippines, prepare for the struggle, and, united under the glorious Spanish flag, which is ever covered with laurels, let us fight with the conviction that victory will crown our efforts, and to the calls of our enemies let us oppose with the decision of the Christian and the patriot the cry 'Viva Espana!'

Your general,
BASILIO AGUSTIN DAVILA."

Manila, 23d April, 1898.

Baptist Young Peoples Union of America, Buffalo, N. Y, July 14-17, 1898, B. & O. R. R.

For the occasion tickets will be sold at the low rate of one fare for the round trip, from points on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Tickets will be good going July 12th to 15th inclusive, with privilege of extension until September 1st inclusive, if ticket is deposited with joint agent at Buffalo on July 17th, 18th or 19th and payment of fee of 50 cents. The Royal Blue Line between Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York are the finest and fastest trains in the world. Call on nearest agent B. & O. R. R. for routes and detailed information.

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