

Heroes of Peace – A History of the Third Kentucky Infantry in the Spanish-American War

by Colonel Greg Eanes, USAF (Retired), (Crewe: VA. The Eanes Group, LLC. 2016. 200 pages
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When the USS Maine was attacked in February 1898, President William McKinley called upon Kentucky to organize her volunteers for federal service in preparation for conflict between Spain and the United States. The Third Kentucky U.S. Volunteer Infantry was one of four units to respond. Comprised of troops primarily from the western Kentucky communities of the Pennyriple and Jackson Purchase regions, the Third prepared for deployment, but they never saw combat action in Cuba. Instead, they were ultimately sent to the foreign land on a peace-keeping mission.

In *Heroes of Peace*, author Col. Greg Eanes portrays this hardy unit and its eventual role as peace-keeping occupier of Cuba, shortly after Spain's formal surrender.

Colonel Eanes received his master's degree in Military History from the American Military University and he is certified by the Virginia Courts System as an expert witness in military history and veteran's affairs. An experienced military man, Col. Eanes draws upon his thirty-four-plus years in the U.S. Air Force to inform and share his understanding of the sequencing of military events leading up to the Thirds eventual deployment to Cuba.

The Third Kentucky's daily life flows easily through Eanes comprehensive understanding of everyday rituals experienced by military regiments. He tells their story through accounts of provisions, meals, and leisure-time activities, to slang terms and the "re-lettering" of units (e.g. Company A to Company D, etc.) as they were organized into federal service.

The Second and Third Kentucky regiments were mustered-in based upon seniority of their captains. In typical Kentucky fashion, politics got in the middle of such affairs and

problems immediately ensued. Many of the soldiers objected to the appointment of new officers whom they had neither elected, nor did they approve.

Despite political jostling for appointments, Col. Thomas J. Smith was named commanding officer of the Third. By the end of May, he led the troops as they deployed to Camp Thomas, located at the historic Chickamauga battlefield in Georgia, to prepare for war. The increase of troops grew so rapidly there was a lack of organization which led to contaminated water and few supplies. These structural problems quickly translated into unsanitary conditions, thus an outbreak of diarrhea, mumps, measles, and typhoid fever, which soon challenged their ability to serve.

To his credit, Col. Smith ordered a new camp to be laid out for the Third Kentucky to improve conditions for his men. He also identified local wells from which water could be piped in for cooking and bathing. Smith would later testify before the Congressional Commission appointed by the President to investigate the War Department regarding their lack of preparation during the deployment.

Hostilities with Spain soon ended and as there seemed to be no apparent opportunity for the troops to serve overseas, many regiments disbanded and mustered out. While the Third Kentucky had its own difficulties, their military professionalism and eagerness to occupy Cuba on a peace-keeping mission, led them to be selected for retention.

The Third returned to Lexington, Kentucky and within a few months a selection of troops were chosen to serve in a public relations event in nearby Nicholasville. Through media accounts and medical reports, Eanes details one major incident during the Lexington encampment that nearly pitted the Third Kentucky with the Twelfth New York Volunteer Infantry in open combat. He also cites a second episode which involved a murder by a member of the Third. Even with

these significant distractions, an article on November 1, 1898 in the *Paducah Daily Sun*, noted the men of the Third Kentucky... “were anxious to make a reputation in the war which will make all Kentuckians feel proud of them.”

– author unknown (p. 40)

Heroes of Peace is organized chronologically, and Col. Eanes authoritatively incorporates brief narrative excerpts to move the story along. He links medical and other military records with reports from local, regional and state newspapers, diary entries and letters written by the troops themselves, to the political and historical landscape of the times. Numerous photographs and maps round out this detailed narrative which follows the Third throughout its call to serve.

On January 10, 1899, the Third Kentucky traveled on the U.S. Army transport *Minnewaska* for Matanzas, Cuba. For military buffs, the letters written by country boys to family members back home will be of great interest. Some of their correspondence was shared with local newspapers thus providing vivid travelogues, dotted with personal stories of beautiful women, interesting food and unusual critter encounters, some tempered with bouts of seasickness and loneliness. Eanes neatly uses these eyewitness accounts of people and places to bring their experiences to life.

With a mission of pacification, the Third’s primary value was its mere presence in Cuba; to make a safe, secure and stable environment as changes occurred.

Col. Eanes explains how a food shortage occurred and the important role the U.S. Army and Navy played in stabilizing the country during this occupation period. He also shares details of how private foundations such as the Cuban Industrial Relief Fund stepped up to help Cuba recover.

Military buffs will appreciate the chronology of the Spanish American War in relation to the Third Kentucky and the organization of Division and Brigade Assignments, as well as the inclusion of a regimental roster. In addition might improve the book, a complete index of names and locations would be of value.

Eanes' informative book provides a personal encounter with the men who valiantly served in a non-combatative role during the Spanish-American War. The Third Kentucky brought together a disparate group of volunteers to form one of the most effective regiments in the United States Army. Through their efforts, they brought peace and stability to a devastated foreign country. As was their desire, these men of western Kentucky established a reputation which deserves a place in Kentucky's history.

Bobbie Smith Bryant

Kentucky League of Cities