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Empire’s Mastheads: Rewriting the “Correspondents’ War” from the Edge of Empire

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Following his stint as a war correspondent for Pulitzer’s New York World and Hearst’s New York Journal in Cuba and Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War, Stephen Crane spent the autumn months of 1898 in Havana, where, in addition to writing about postwar life, he reworked many of his previous dispatches into fictional war tales for domestic publication. Presenting the ordinary soldier as a heroic figure of masculine stolidity and courageous nobility, Crane’s stories resonated strongly with the heady romance of war and empire that suffused national culture, finding a welcome audience in the pages of popular periodicals like Cosmopolitan, McClure’s Magazine, and Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly throughout 1899. Crane’s financial straits as well as his growing sense of shame over deserting his wife for Havana led to his departure from Cuba in late December, shortly after the arrival of an American occupation force. Three months later in March 1899, however, Crane would return, in a manner of speaking, to Cuban shores. His Cuban war story, “Marines Signaling Under Fire at Guantanamo”—itself a romantic amplification of an earlier dispatch for Pulitzer’s World, “The Red Badge of Courage was his Wig-Wag Flag”—appeared in redacted form in the pages of the Volunteer, a weekly newspaper published at Trinidad, Cuba, by the Fourth Tennessee Infantry, US Volunteers, during its garrison duty from December 1898 to late March 1899 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Stephen Crane’s “Marines Signaling Under Fire at Guantanamo” as it appeared in the Fourth Tennessee’s Volunteer, March 12, 1899.
Originally published in February in McClure’s Magazine in the same issue as Rudyard Kipling’s exhortation to the United States to take up the “white man’s burden” in the Philippines—a poem, incidentally, that was also reprinted in the Volunteer the week prior to Crane’s story—“Marines Signaling Under Fire at Guantanamo” highlights the heroic stoicism of a solitary signalman atop a craggy ridge, calmly transmitting messages with his wig-wag flag to warships in the harbor, his body perilously silhouetted against the sky, an open target for Spanish sharpshooters. Like much of Crane’s war fiction of this period, the war correspondent figures prominently and his proximity to the signalman’s fraught semaphoric action creates the pathos of the story, not only enabling the very reporting of the signalman’s heroics, but also embedding Crane’s tale in the spectacular logic of contemporaneous popular romantic fiction, a primary medium, according to Amy Kaplan, for imaginatively yoking the fate of American masculinity to national culture’s imperial turn during the 1890s. As a war correspondent and member of the yellow press during the Spanish-American War, Crane himself was heavily implicated in this romancing of empire. Known as the “correspondents’ war” because of the bombastic influence of the yellow press (specifically Crane’s employers) and the dramatic popularity and literary notoriety of war correspondents like Crane, the Spanish-American War was frequently cast as a romantic rescue mission for the domestic audience back home. The work of Crane’s fictional correspondent in “Marines Signaling” thus parallels his own wartime self and journalism, plotting the extraordinary actions of the individual hero of the romantic imagination—the signalman at Guantanamo in this instance—as an imaginative template for the project of empire and its resuscitation of American manhood.

Crane’s thematization of communication in “Marines Signaling,” however, goes beyond the romantic production of extraordinary figures of American tenacity and courage. While his correspondent certainly heroizes the signalman as such a figure, the story itself revolves around the signalman’s work: transmitting messages from soldier to soldier, conveying information to facilitate imperial war, and protecting the community of soldiers engaged in empire-building. While war correspondents like Crane and his fictional doppelganger may have welded a romantic cultural imaginary to the popular imperial ethos at the turn of the century, Crane’s focus on the signalman’s semaphoric labors also spotlights the ordinary soldier as a crucial, if alternative, relay in the information networks of empire. Neither aimed at nor given meaning by a distant domestic audience—unlike the yellow press’s (and Crane’s) war correspondents—the signalman’s wig-wagging helps to consolidate an imagined community of ordinary soldiers whose manifold labors made possible the very empire-building that the romantic imagination projected back to national culture.

In this regard, the appearance of Crane’s “Marines Signaling” in a soldier newspaper founded in March 1899 by and for volunteer soldiers in Cuba takes on added significance. With the majority of their articles and columns composed by
soldiers stationed across the nascent imperial archipelago, soldier newspapers such as the Volunteer not only relied on the on-the-ground reportage of their own war correspondents, but, like Crane’s signalman, also engaged in the work of mediation, communication, and community-building in an imperial occupation force. More than that, the existence of soldier newspapers complicates our understanding of the so-called “correspondents’ war” and its romancing of empire, revealing an extensive and diverse field of war correspondence that standard histories have neglected. Although our critical frameworks often trace the ideological effects of this romancing to the national sphere, they have little to say about the experience of imperial agents on the ground in the Philippines and Cuba. The romantic imaginary was clearly available to imperial foot soldiers, as evidenced by the reprinting of Crane’s story. And yet their imperial experience—often a monotonous procession of the daily minutia of camp life—did not always coincide with its imperial imaginings. Indeed, the romantic ideology of empire underwent a process of revision and remediation in the pages of soldier newspapers as the gap between the romantic imagination and soldiers’ experience forced soldier-writers to accommodate that ideology to their daily lives in an occupation force. On a purely formal level, moreover, a more abstract remediation was taking place on the pages of empire’s mastheads as the juxtaposition of soldiers’ quotidian experiences alongside heroic stories like Crane’s created an imagined community of empire far different from that promised by romantic ideology.

This essay explores this process of revision and remediation by examining a series of soldier newspapers published in Cuba and the Philippines during the fall of 1898 and the spring of 1899. Despite the dearth of critical attention regarding these imperial mastheads, their establishment across the imperial archipelago was a fairly regular, if short-lived, occurrence, particularly in the Philippines. The Fourth Tennessee’s Volunteer was not, in fact, the first soldier newspaper to appear in Cuba during the war and subsequent occupation. Shortly after the fall of Santiago on July 16, a group of Port Huron printers serving in the Thirty-Third Michigan Volunteers published what was arguably the first newspaper of American empire, a souvenir edition titled Co. F Enterprise, a four-page sheet (plus a two-page supplement) that reported on the regiment’s departure from Port Huron, its current situation in Cuba, its recent battlefield engagements, and its advertising policy. On the other side of the globe, newspapers sprouted up regularly in the Philippines, as enterprising soldier-editors found an eager audience in the barracks and camps that dotted Manila and its surrounding environs. The first newspaper established as a private enterprise by American soldiers in the Philippines was the American Soldier, a weekly paper founded in early September 1898. Launched by George Arthur Smith, a private in Company C, Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteers, the American Soldier served the entire Eighth Army Corp and was financed by advertising revenue from American businessmen in the Philippines, most prominently W.W. “Mayor” Brown and his American Commercial Company. In addition to the American Soldier, individual
regiments and companies in the Philippines also started their own newspapers and periodicals.\textsuperscript{12} The First Colorado Volunteers printed a weekly paper, the \textit{Manila Outpost}, on November 12, 1898, a four-page sheet that focused almost exclusively on the regiment’s individual companies.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Soldier’s Letter}, an illustrated monthly with a decidedly more literary flavor, also appeared in November, courtesy of members of Company C, First California Volunteers, and published literary, travel, and journalistic pieces reminiscent of popular illustrated monthlies that soldiers would have read at home (see Figures 2a–2d).\textsuperscript{14}

Unlike their more famous stateside counterparts who trafficked in national culture’s romantic sensationalism, soldier-correspondents mapped the everyday culture and shared values of their imperial community, reporting on daily life in the imperial outpost like baseball games, debate clubs, popular barbers, robberies, sanitation violations, mail deliveries, and local advertisements. This is not to say that soldier-correspondents were not influenced by the same cultural forces underwriting empire back home; indeed, the appearance of Crane’s “Marines Signaling” shows that the romantic ideology of empire traveled with the troops to the barracks and camps of American empire. However, these imperial mastheads reveal that the romantic rhetoric of the extraordinary and the heroic was only a part of the story of empire; indeed, the formal simultaneity of the newspaper page, as discussed famously by Benedict Anderson, brought this romantic rhetoric into contact with the banal realities of camp life, presenting both as part of the same quotidian world of the imperial soldier.\textsuperscript{15} As the imperial forces on the ground in Cuba and the Philippines shifted their attention from imperial warfare to colonial occupation, the soldier newspapers that served them ultimately revised—quotidianized, one could say—the romantic paradigm into a flat account of empire, an alternative narrative of the personal habits, routines, and desires of imperial soldiers.\textsuperscript{16} As they sketched the daily life of the imperial campground, soldier-correspondents revealed the nonheroic, even ordinary, nature of imperial occupation. Flattening the depiction of empire from the extremes of heroic adventure on the battlefield, soldier newspapers quotidianize empire, remodeling its romantic spaces into the familiar spaces of everyday life and thus making the everyday a central site for the production of empire as a way of life.\textsuperscript{17}
Figure 2a. Empire’s Mastheads: Co. F Enterprise (Santiago, Cuba)
Company C.

Havmg received the last few more orders from the Company to be here, there's are few that hold this office. There is very little requiring in the way of news, but the moral condition of the company will not change.

The Company is in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

The Company is in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

Company I.

Neave, Peters, and Jones, are the last men to leave the Company. They are in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

In the course of business, after taking care of the various orders, the Company is in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

Company L.

C. P. Stansfield is the last man to leave the Company. He is in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

The Company is in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

BRIEF MENTION

Mrs. Wilson, the Company's secretary, is in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

The Company is in the habit of meeting at the office every morning before leaving for the day. The Company is composed of twelve men, all of whom are from the same neighborhood.

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Figure 2b. Empire's Mastheads: Manila Outpost (Manila, P.I.)
Figure 2c. Empire’s Mastheads: Soldier’s Letter (Manila, P.I.)
Figure 2d. Empire’s Mastheads: Volunteer (Trinidad, Cuba)
Incidents of Campaigning Days

Like the war correspondents filing their reports for the domestic audience, soldier-editors also found the romantic script of heroic self-sacrifice an appealing narrative for their soldier-readers. In announcing “Incidents of Campaigning Days,” a new column to memorialize the “Taking of Manila,” the American Soldier employs a heroic romantic tone before imploring its readers to take up the pen and inscribe their adventures in the annals of historical memory: “Never in the history of the world has any body of men indured [sic] greater hardships than has the eighth Army Corps. The results of our work will ever remain as a bright page in America’s history.” The language of strenuous endeavor evoked by the editors is draped in physical imagery in the opening lines of the inaugural “Incidents of Campaigning Days” column: “August the 13th the Day ever memorable! The supreme moment had at last arrived. Crouching down in the grass the first battle line awaited the command to advance. The troops did not wait long. Courageously toward the enemy’s trenches . . . they pressed.” Later, the soldiers are described as “plung[ing] into the Rio de San Antonio and emerg[ing] with dripp[ing] garments on the Manila side of the stream, and push[ing] along the beach to storm the city.” Like Crane’s signalman, these images of action, adventure, physical bravery, and unhesitating courage penned by American soldiers endow the imperial soldier with the attributes of the romantic hero. Even in more mundane, everyday coverage, the American Soldier sometimes presented an image of the American soldier through the lens of romance. An article titled “The Treacherous Spaniard,” written by an anonymous member of the staff, describes the unwavering chivalry of off-duty American soldiers who protect a group of Filipina dancers from the unwelcome and “disagreeable” advances of two Spaniards, exercising, as the paper puts it, “true gallantry” in forcing the Spaniards to desist. Such an incident echoes the rhetoric of knight errantry with which the yellow press had characterized the US mission in Cuba, here transposing the Filipina dancers for the Cuban damsel in distress whom the chivalrous US knight frees from the clutches of Spanish tyranny.

While some stories in soldier newspapers certainly reinforce the dominant romantic heroism meme of the yellow press, other soldier-writers developed an ironic attitude toward the romantic promises of empire and revalued the meaning of heroism and valor by questioning the high premium soldiers themselves placed on the romantic vision of heroic derring-do upon the battlefield. Frederick Healy, a private in Co. L, First California Volunteers, argues as much in an article titled, “In the Entrenchments,” in the inaugural issue of the Soldier’s Letter in November 1898. Although Healy praises American bravery during the “feverish activity of war” and urges his readers to take “a just pride in the splendid excellence of American chivalry,” he cautions his audience against the “erroneous idea” that “their fighting qualities” are the sole index of “military perfection” and suggests that the “mutual patting on the back that is continually going on between the different commands” is
Displacing combat and battlefield heroics, Healy uses the remainder of the article to valorize daily life “in the entrenchments” as the locus of proper heroism. Narrating a day in the life of the soldier, he enumerates his daily hardships: the “wet and muddy blankets,” the “cramped muscles” and “chilled blood,” the “sores which covered the entire body,” the weakness caused by dysentery, the “empty stomachs,” and the interminable wait for “an insufficient breakfast of bad coffee and poor hardtack.” Lest his readers forget, Healy meticulously describes the grueling labor that built those entrenchments: “All day long they had labored digging and filling bags which were no sooner full than they were taken on shoulder and carried to the place they were to occupy in the creation of new works or the strengthening of old. In many cases there had not been enough picks and shovels provided and the supply of bags had run short. Whereupon the boys had turned up the soft muddy ground with sharpened sticks, carried it to the breastworks on flat boards and patted it into place with their bare hands.” After a break for cold coffee and more hardtack, the boys worked, according to Healy, “until darkness made further labor impossible.” Healy’s description of the soldiers’ suffering in the trenches becomes repetitive, as he describes the night filled with rainstorms, muddy boots, wet blankets, cold coffee, and other such trials that “merely served to accentuate the general discomfort.”
And yet Healy’s intention in detailing this “imperial misery” is ironically to relocate the source of martial pride and heroism away from combat proper. Trench duty, according to Healy, “is the thing on which the volunteers should pride themselves and when mutual congratulations are the order of the day, let them be on the fortitude displayed and not the fighting done by the different regiments that took part in the operations against Manila.” Healy reveals a gap between the promise and the reality of empire, one, according to him, produced by the soldiers themselves in their rush to “mutual congratulation.” In his attempt to correct his comrades’ misplaced pride, Healy revises the romantic paradigm itself, displacing it from one extreme—heroic exertion on the battlefield—to another—heroic suffering in the trenches. Although he remains “in the entrenchments” and close to the field of combat, he remakes the extraordinary spectacle of the romantic imagination into an everyday scene of imperial drudgery without ultimately severing the ideological connection between romantic heroism and empire.

**Empire as a Way of Life**

Such moments where the lineaments of the romantic imaginary are put under pressure by individual soldier-writers like Healy show the limitations as well as the elasticity of romantic ideology for soldiers in the Philippines and Cuba. Healy’s focus on the everyday conditions of soldiers’ lives was, in fact, the norm in soldier newspapers. If anything, his heroizing of the grueling labor of trench duty was the exception in the newspapers serving soldiers at the edge of empire. The majority of soldier-correspondents for papers like the *American Soldier*, *Manila Outpost*, and *Volunteer* quotidianize empire in a different way, filling their dispatches with the practical details of the soldier’s life, details which endow the project of empire with a sense of the mundane, the uneventful, and the unheroic. Their correspondence reflected the everyday needs, recreations, and customs of the imperial soldier, articulating their shared imperial identity through the experience of camp life. Unlike Healy’s rhetorically-nuanced reworking of romantic ideology in an illustrated monthly, the cumulative appearance and arbitrary juxtapositions of the regimental columns in the pages of soldier newspapers produce a flat account of empire that makes the everyday a central site in the ideological production of empire as a way of life. Soldier-correspondents’ preoccupation with the quotidian served a multivalent function. On the one hand, the quotidian helped soldiers make themselves at home in empire, revealing their daily routines and habits as familiar social practices that ordered their experience into a way of life that they built and shared at the edge of empire. On the other hand, soldier-writers also domesticated the colonial encounter within the register of the quotidian, a strategy that enabled them to discursively manage colonized subjects and subordinate them to reigning imperial ideology.

Although they carried US and world news from the cable service, published “local interest” articles on Philippine history and Cuban geography, and posted news
of military campaigns and diplomatic talks, the soldier-editors of empire’s mastheads envisioned their papers first and foremost as representative of soldier life, with special attention paid to the personal lives of individual soldiers and the social organization of camp life. The American Soldier crystallized this aim in one of its masthead slogans, “a soldier’s paper for the soldiers,” and reminded its readers that “almost every article published in the American Soldier is written in Manila by members of the 8th Army corps; so that it is a representative soldier’s paper.”

As stated in their very first editorial, titled “The Starting of a Newspaper,” the editors “endeavor to make the paper one of interest to the boys here in the field” and “to keep in touch with the daily events in connection with Uncle Sam’s Army in Manila.” Towards this end, soldier newspapers had large and lively regimental departments, enlisting their fellow soldiers in a writer corps, as it were, to complement the official Army Corps. The bulk of their writing concerned daily life in an occupation force, and the columns were composed and submitted by soldier-correspondents from across the campground. Papers like the Volunteer and the Manila Outpost recruited their writers from the volunteer regiments that comprised their primary audience. The American Soldier, on the other hand, had a regular regimental department, with a roster of twenty-five soldier-correspondents assigned to the different regiments and companies that made up the entire Eighth Army Corp. Often scattered throughout the paper, the regimental columns reported camp news of both a personnel and personal nature. One gets a sense of the pedestrian quality of their compositions from the colorful titles of some of the American Soldier’s regimental columns: “Stray Bullets,” “Inklings of Idahoos,” “Artillery Bung Bungs,” “Bum Notes from the Band,” “Co. H Happenings,” “14th Jottings,” “Pencilings from Co. C,” “Gleanings from Co. D,” “Idaho Iotas,” and “Casual Crayons.” Such titles indicate how little the romancing of empire mattered to these soldier-writers. With their suggestion of the minute, the trivial, and the insignificant, their titles point to an imperial correspondent attentive to the ordinary concerns and unheroic desires of daily experience (see Figure 4).

Figure 4.
A typical regimental column from the American Soldier, September 24, 1898.
Indeed, the subject matter of the *American Soldier*’s regimental columns is hardly remarkable. The regimental beat certainly covered personnel matters (illnesses, deaths, discharges, and promotions), but their columns more frequently document the routine affairs and personal habits of individual soldiers. Rather than the romantic spectacle of the yellow press, the *American Soldier*’s regimental department scours this spectacle of the heroism, adventure, and honor that we associate with the “correspondents’ war.” Across its pages are scattered diverse reports of gustatory delights and recreational diversions, of personal grooming habits and novelty medical remedies, of barracks-room pets and philatelic pleasures; in short, a spectacle—or perhaps, anti-spectacle—of the everyday life of the imperial camp. Given the repetitive and unexceptional nature of these regimental columns, almost every issue contains examples of this everydayness. In the inaugural issue of the paper, one finds “Stray Bullets” on the second page, reporting Lieutenant Clark’s christening of a monkey named Amigo and Lieutenant Snow’s plans to organize a ball club to make a tour of the islands. In other recreational pursuits, Ben Williams “is attending Spanish evening school” and hopes to “smoke [sic] Spanish before long just as well as the grandest Don.” Another sergeant reports “learning to smoke cigarettes” to “keep in tune with his new girl,” while Charley Meacham laments that he hasn’t “made a mash since he struck town.” The Thirteenth Minnesota’s correspondent speculates about many soldiers’ “unusual interest” in learning Spanish (attributed to the “undeniable beauty of these Spanish ladies”) and details Private Perrine’s souvenir collection (including a new 280-lb. shell, a 150-lb. cannonball, four machetes, a payroll pen, and a Spanish prisoner’s gold filling). The October 8 issue shows that little has changed in these columns, with the exception of a greater number of regiments covered and a smaller focus on personnel matters. Wortser’s Pain Cure, a remedy for cramps and dysentery concocted by a private in South Dakota’s Company E, is announced in the First South Dakota’s column. Alongside this notice, the “Inklings of Idahos” correspondent reports on the death of their pet monkey; on the following page, the Nebraska regiment reports its acquisition of 7 pet monkeys, explaining that its regimental mascot, a goat named Dewey, is “as lively as ever but doesn’t like monkeys.” The Thirteenth Minnesota’s column reports that Company H’s shoemaker, private Bugton, “works like a beaver,” that their “tonsorial artists, Egbert and Postel are having an easy time of it now as the boys are all leaving their moustaches grow and all they need to shave is a few hairs on the chins of some of the old men,” and that “if you want any pointers on baking biscuits give Al Erikson a call. Kelly can turn out a few sinkers himself.” The same page also finds a report that Sergeant Lamber of Minnesota’s Company D is “collecting old coins and has now some very fine specimens of cannibal coinage” and that Private Sutton “is in charge of the culinary department [and] has exceptional ability as a pastry cook and we have had pie and doughnuts in plenty several times.”

This phenomenon was not confined to the pages of the *American Soldier*. Across the imperial archipelago, the regimental pages of soldier newspapers ripple
with items and observations of this nature. The Manila Outpost prominently displayed its regimental columns on its front page, suggesting the primacy of this kind of camp news for the volunteers of Colorado. Much space is taken up in its inaugural issue with personnel matters, as one learns of discharges, promotions, and jobs in the bakery, canteen, and subsistence sales depot. W.G. Bolton’s Tonsorial Parlor has undergone changes, with his purchase of a new chair, as has Company I’s mess table, newly “adorned with a table cloth, white plates and cups, and new knives, forks, and spoons, a result of Pay Day.” One Company M private, Michael Walsh, “challenges any and all comers to a ‘bread cultury’ matching,” while the Company M correspondent also reports that the company monkey is “carrying a pretty good jag,” after the company “put in our time giving [him] whiskey straight.” The Volunteer’s company news in Trinidad, Cuba, in 1899 is no different nor is the regimental column in the Co. F Enterprise in Santiago in the summer of 1898. The Volunteer’s Company F column on January 22 indicates that Sergeant Scheitlin is the “proud possessor of a fine set of ruddy whiskers, and he seems to glory in the fact that he alone can ‘raise’ them.” The band treated the company to “The Girl I Left Behind” and “Home, Sweet Home,” leading Sergeant Heggie to suggest that “the regulations should prohibit the band playing those tunes in Cuba.” Elsewhere one learns that among Lieutenant Warfield’s impressive souvenir collection is one hairless dog and that Sergeant Brewer owns the “most popular parrot in the camp.” Many of the boys have “adopted the Cuban style of footwear,” while Private Lewis Brown has “received some postage stamps in one of his letters last week,” a sign that “someone appreciates Lewis’ letters.” The Co. F Enterprise’s column, “Among the Boys of Co. F,” provides quick snippets and evaluations of camp life (see Figure 5). One learns that Corporal Reynolds “can’t stand the ferocious crab, consequently he now sleeps between two trees in a hammock.” Corporal Petit “holds his own in making the nice, juicy pancake,” while Charlie Hill failed “in trading his can of beef for two nice cans of peaches.” The column also pokes fun at some of the soldiers, remarking that “if Rudolph Papst is not a lieutenant before he gets home it will not be because he does not talk about it.” Apparently Private Willis Pace thinks that the post office is “very corrupt” because “he mails two eight page letters every other day and has not received one for a month. He eats mangoes to drown his sorrow.”

What can be said about columns like this? On the one hand, this quotidianizing of empire also obscures the violent material realities of imperial encounter. Like Francis Benjamin Johnston’s domestic photographs of Admiral Dewey’s flagship, Olympia, that Laura Wexler has analyzed so brilliantly, the regimental columns’ preoccupation with the quotidian domesticates imperial aggression, presenting the American occupation force “on its time off, that is, in domestic time.” Although the newspapers carried stories about the war and the soldiers’ experiences therein, such stories represented a small portion of any issue’s newsprint in comparison to the regimental columns. To be sure, the notices about soldier deaths and illnesses, the descriptions of souvenir collections of leftover munitions, and the references to
soldiers’ “new girls” and to Spanish beauty that one finds in the regimental columns reveal the material traces of the imperial encounter and show that empire remains a contested space of potential violence. However, these remain just traces, and the overwhelming focus on the domestic concerns of camp life marginalizes and disavows the harsh realities of imperial intervention. Indeed, by alluding to soldiers’ amorous entanglements with the occupied population, these regimental columns rewrite the imperial encounter within a different romantic register, one anchored in the sentimental preoccupations of *daily life*, not the heroic potentialities of the battlefield.

Figure 5.
“Among the Boys of Co. F,” Co. F Enterprise, July 26, 1898.

On the other hand, this hodge-podge of quotidian material is also rather mundane, boring, and insignificant; it is the stuff of daily life in all its minute and tedious detail. That is, however, precisely my point. Far from the romantic spectacle of imperial warfare described by the yellow press’s correspondents or the daily hardships of trench duty revalued by Frederick Healy, the soldier-correspondents writing for the regimental department produce a flat account of empire, one that
makes empire into just another ordinary experience. Not only is the subject matter of these columns decidedly quotidian, but their very presentation on the page—the “arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition,” as Benedict Anderson might say—illustrates the cultural work of mediation and remediation that soldier newspapers perform. It is true that these soldier-correspondents seem to remain influenced by romantic values, but their writing recasts the heroic tenor of the romantic imagination and traffics instead in the trivial and routine details of camp life. One soldier finds “glory” in his “fine set of ruddy whiskers,” not in his martial prowess in battle. Craving perhaps the competition and struggle of the battlefield, another challenges his peers to a “bread culture” contest. Others are lauded for their “exceptional abilities” in the kitchen, heroes of the doughnut and pancake. However, whereas an individual like Healy recasts empire’s romantic promise by heroizing soldiers’ sufferings in the trenches, the very mundanity of these regimental columns hollows out that heroic ideology and severs the link between empire and romance. Instead, it is the everyday that holds value for these soldier-writers and their columns’ subjects.

Soldiers turned to the quotidiant in order to write their imperial experience as a way of life, to make empire into an everyday space that was at once familiar and meaningful outside of the ideological structures of the romantic imagination. Camp life—and empire more generally—was not the romantic adventure they had been promised. Arriving in Manila or Trinidad, they found, as the American Soldier’s Idaho correspondent put it on October 8, that “it was not given to them to fight for their country and that it was not all the vivid succession of intense and pleasing emotions they had thought it.” Soldiers turned to their daily lives for the meaning they thought they would find in the strenuous life of empire and in the process made themselves at home in empire. Indeed, by focusing on such things as haircuts, biscuits, pet parrots, stamps, and coin collections, soldier newspapers reproduced the everyday practices and structures of social life that they left behind when they embarked on the imperial adventure. Moreover, the activities described in their columns—cooking and eating, sleeping and grooming, bathing and health care, entertainment and recreation, etc.—represent the set of practices that helps us to organize the messy and unstructured flow of experience into some kind of meaningful structure. The imperial quotidiant they documented in their columns thus helped make empire into a way of life that they shared at the edge of empire. In order to “sluff[] off” some of the mopes and the miserables of camp life, as Idaho’s correspondent also said, these soldiers quotidianized empire to make it livable, casting their everyday experience as the literary currency of the imagined community they were creating in the pages of empire’s mastheads.

While this focus on the minutiae of their experience helped soldiers imagine and produce their imperial community, soldier newspapers also quotidianized the colonial encounter itself. In addition to the regimental columns analyzed above, these newspapers often published short fictional pieces with decidedly quotidian
settings and themes. One such piece, “The Manila Postoffice,” appeared in late November in the American Soldier. Ostensibly about the difficulties of running the post office in Manila, the article stages the colonial encounter as a comic and increasingly dangerous exchange between an American Postmaster, portrayed as a serene model of urbane civilization, and a “dusky,” “coffee-colored” Filipino, caricatured as a semi-literate and violently intemperate savage chieftain dressed “in all the glory of a cretonne sofa over a sailor’s cap.” Unfamiliar with the conventions of modern postal communications, the caricatured Filipino—whose name is Guahano—demands a letter from the Postmaster. Informed that there is no letter for him, Guahano angrily cuts short the Postmaster’s explanation of how the post works and why his tribesman, Inoso, received a letter. Couched in the imperative and punctuated by exclamation points, Guahano’s response appears childish and impetuous: “Me chief! Inoso no chief!...Give Inoso letter! No give Guahano letter! I fight! I kill! Want letter!” Despite the Postmaster’s attempt at explanation, the situation quickly escalates to possible violence with Guahano drawing his knife. At this moment of heightened tension, an “old American resident” breaks into the scene, a kind of imperial deus ex machina, to diffuse the tension and contain its violent escalation. Admonishing the baffled and frightened Postmaster, the American resident declares, “Pshaw! Just tear off a piece of wrapping paper, throw some ink over it and give it to him. You’ve got to show some tact and judgment in running this office, old chap.”

Clearly participating in the rhetoric and rationale of the US program of benevolent assimilation, the article portrays the colonial encounter as an everyday exchange in a post office, eventually domesticating the potential violence of empire as a relationship between a solicitous parent and an unruly child. As Vicente Rafael observes, “benevolent assimilation infantilized [Filipinos] as racial others in need of nurturance and tutelage.” Interestingly for my purposes, not only is the setting of this imperial encounter decidedly pedestrian, but it is the stuff of daily life—clothing, reading and writing, speech patterns, social interaction—that produces this racialized and paternalistic relationship. Guahano’s problem in the eyes of the postmaster—and the source of comedy for the paper’s soldier-readers, we can assume—resides in his lack of understanding of the social norms governing everyday life in the imperial outpost. His unfamiliarity with the modern postal system—and writing in general, as suggested by the American resident’s patronizing solution—his uncouth attire, his elementary use of language, and his intemperate outbursts coalesce in this story to place him at a distant remove from the literate, temperate, rational, and civilized character of the American postmaster and resident. In the figure of Guahano, Filipinos are rendered uncivilized and in need of colonial intervention through various markers of the everyday. Such an article thus demonstrates how the quotidianizing of empire that I have been tracing in soldier newspapers not only allowed soldiers to make themselves at home in empire, but also served as a strategy for discursively managing and subordinating Filipino subjects within reigning imperial ideology.
The stories and poems that soldiers wrote were their literary attempts to combat the tedium of the imperial quotidian by making it into the subject matter of empire and its mastheads. Indeed, I want to close by suggesting that soldier newspapers themselves, while certainly illustrating the everyday culture of the imperial soldier, exemplify this quotidianizing of empire. In an article written for stateside publication, George Arthur Smith, the founding editor of the American Soldier, narrates the origins of the first soldier newspaper in Manila. Smith’s narrative focuses on the daily work of a newspaper, soliciting copy, procuring financing, setting type, and promoting it to retailers. However, he begins by explaining why he decided “to try the experiment of getting out an American newspaper.” According to Smith, “when we first got into these quarters we had practically nothing to do, and being naturally discontented when idle, I cast about for something to engross my mind.” As for so many of his future correspondents and readers, the promised romance of empire had not materialized and Smith was bored and dissatisfied with camp life. To cope with that boredom, he turned to the everyday practice of writing and in the process created a newspaper that made empire into an ordinary way of life for its soldier-readers.

Notes

1 During this time in Cuba, Linda Davis notes, Crane “recycled stories from his war tales, and in his war tales he used bits from his reporting work” (Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998: 286).

2 “The Price of the Harness” appeared in The Cosmopolitan in December 1898 under the title, “The Woof of Thin Red Threads.” “Marines Signaling Under Fire at Guantanamo” was published in McClure’s in February 1899 as was “The Lone Charge of William Perkins” in July 1899. Finally, a version of “Virtue in War” was published in Leslie’s Monthly in November 1899.

3 Crane’s story appeared under the revised title, “At Guantanamo. Marines There Signal Under Heavy Fire,” in the March 12th issue of the Volunteer. I wish to thank Larry Butler at the Tennessee State Library and Archives for locating this newspaper and producing a microfilm of it for me.


8 The critical literature on these soldier newspapers has been sparse, confined to historical treatments of the American press in the Philippines that too often fold soldier newspapers into accounts of the larger commercial papers that emerged at the same time. I have been unable to find references to soldier newspapers in Cuba, but on the Philippines, see Carson Taylor, History of the Philippine Press (Manila, P.I.: n.p, 1927), 30–42; Jesús Valenzuela, History of Journalism in the Philippine Islands (Manila, P.I.: n.p., 1933), 114–22; Lewis Gleeck, American Institutions in the Philippines (1898–1941) (Manila, P.I.: Historical Conservation Society, 1976), 178–85; John Lent, The Philippine Press During the Revolution and the Filipino-American War (Philadelphia: s.n., 1977), 12; and Carmen Nakpil, “The first English-language papers in Manila,” Archipelago 5 (1978): 8–10.

9 Illustrating the intra-imperial network across the emerging imperial archipelago, American Soldier, the first soldier newspaper in the Philippines, hailed the Co. F Enterprise as “the first American paper published in Santiago” in early October (“Newspapers at Santiago,” American Soldier, October 1, 1898).

10 There is some dispute over the first American newspaper in the Philippines, a dispute that stems from the difficulty of categorizing papers that were printed aboard steamships for their passengers. Carson Taylor and Jesús Valenzuela cite The Bounding Billow, a monthly newsheet printed aboard Admiral Dewey's flagship, Olympia, during their voyage from Nagasaki, Japan, to the Philippines, as the first American paper in the Philippines. John Lent, however, disagrees, citing the Bounding Billow’s origins prior to the war in the Philippines. The question of classification aside, press historians generally agree that Official Gazette, a newspaper launched by the US military for official purposes on August 23, 1898, was the first “Yankee publication on Philippine soil” (Taylor 30). See


12 Although this essay focuses on soldier newspapers, there were a number of daily and weekly American papers of the commercial variety in Manila in the fall of 1898, including Manila Times, American, and Freedom. The American Soldier published a list of “Manila Newspaperdom” on December 5, including five English titles and ten Spanish titles (“Manila Newspaperdom,” American Soldier, December 5, 1898).

13 The Outpost was managed by George Fairchild, a corporal in Company G. As an example of our critical neglect of these papers, a recent history of the Colorado Volunteers, Colorado’s Volunteer Infantry in the Philippine Wars, 1898–1899, by Geoffrey Hunt, makes no mention of this camp paper.

14 Edited by A.J. Martineau, a private in Company C, Soldier’s Letter had a short-lived publication history, appearing in November and December 1898. For information on the First California Regiment, see Philip Montague’s ornately designed valedictory tribute, First to the Front: 1st California, U.S.V. (San Francisco: Patriotic Publishing Company, 1898).

15 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 33–36.

16 Indeed, this quotidianizing of war’s romantic underpinnings is not unique to the imperial wars of 1898. In her recent book on the romantic invention of modern wartime, Mary Favret notes that since at least the Napoleonic wars, soldiers’ writings “brought home the fighting precisely as ordinary experience, thus publicizing a new terrain for the everyday.” Moreover, changing historical and social conditions led to the modern inseparability of war and the everyday: “By the time of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, when ordinary men rather than battle-trained elites assembled on ship and in camp, the quotidian redefined itself both as the goal of warfare, what one was fighting for; and as the very practice of waging war, the daily routine of ordinary men” (War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010], 150, 151). We can also see a similar quotidianizing subversion of romantic ideologies of war in memoirs and published blogs from recent American military conflicts, including Anthony Swofford’s Jarhead: A Marine’s Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles, Colby Buzzell’s My War: Killing Time in Iraq, and Jason Christopher Hartley’s Just Another Soldier: A Year on the Ground in Iraq, among others.

17 I am indebted to William Appleman Williams’ conception of empire as a way of life, although my analysis differs significantly from his macro-historical focus on political economy and diplomatic history. See Williams, Empire as a Way of Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).


20 Ibid.


23 F.A. Healy, “In the Entrenchments,” *Soldier’s Letter* 1.1 (November 1898): 1–6. All quotations in the following paragraphs come from this text.

24 Healy’s ironic take on the “assault” on Manila stems from the actual charade manufactured by American and Spanish officers to end the war in Manila. In order to prevent Filipino forces from entering Manila alongside American occupiers and to salvage Spanish honor and manhood, an “opera-bouffe assault,” as Stuart Creighton Miller calls it, was staged on August 13, 1898, complete with a mock battle, white-flag raising, and Spanish surrender (“Benevolent Assimilation”: *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982], 43).


26 *American Soldier*, December 18, 1898. The paper started carrying the slogan, “a soldier’s paper for the soldiers,” on October 29, a change instituted by the transfer of ownership and editorship from George Arthur Smith to Isaac Russell, a private in the Utah battery. In Cuba, the *Volunteer* used a similar formulation in reminiscing about the paper when it announced its last edition on Cuban soil, writing that it had been “printed by soldiers for soldiers” (“Forward, March,” *Volunteer*, March 26, 1899).

27 “The Starting of a Newspaper,” *American Soldier*, September 10, 1898. The *Volunteer*’s inaugural issue included similar professions of representativeness, claiming that “the boys of the regiment should feel that The Volunteer is published for them and in their interest; that it is their friend and mouthpiece” (Editorial, *Volunteer*, December 25, 1898).

28 Most columns simply identified the regiment (e.g., 1st North Dakota, 14th Infantry, or Astor Battery), but as we can see, there were a number of playful, humorous correspondents personalizing their columns.

30 See American Soldier, September 10, 1898.

31 See American Soldier, October 8, 1898.

32 See the front page, Manila Outpost, November 12, 1898.

33 See Volunteer, January 22, 1899.

34 “Among the Boys of Co. F,” Co. F Enterprise, July 26, 1898.


36 In fact, the American Soldier’s “Incidents of Campaigning Days” was a bit of a dud, appearing only once after its inaugural column.

37 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 33.

38 “Inklings of Idahos,” American Soldier, October 8, 1898.


41 Smith, “Our First Manila Newspaper.”