

General Shafter Tells of His Fourth of July at Santiago



MAJ GENL. SHAFTER BUJNELL FOR



GENERAL LAWTON O. T. S. B.



GENERAL SHAFTER AND HIS STAFF ON VERANDA OF TAMPA HOTEL AT TAMPA PRIOR TO THEIR SAILING



I REMEMBER I ATE MY LUNCH UNDER A TREE



ON the morning of July 4 everybody in our army was too tired and worn out to enter into a celebration of the Fourth of July in the good old American fashion. The troops had been under fire almost all the day before and had worked until late at night entrenching themselves in front of the Spaniards, who had been driven back to their second line of defense. It had been raining hard, so only it can rain in a tropical country. For three days soldiers had seen their old friends and comrades carried to hospitals in the rear, wounded, and burying parties had been all over the battle fields burying the dead, so that our surroundings were such as to make any lively celebration a little out of place.

It was unfortunate that our surroundings should have been of such a character because Santiago, for the American people, is a place of romance. From Santiago Cortez sailed to conquer Mexico; from Santiago De Soto sailed to discover the Mighty Father of Waters; from Santiago Menendez sailed to found St. Augustine; from Santiago Ponce de Leon sailed to find the fountain of youth. With these surroundings what a grand old celebration we could have had if death had been a stranger to us and peace had reigned supreme.

However, we had some things to cheer us up and to rejoice over. Admiral Cervera had left the harbor the day before and his fleet had been absolutely annihilated, so that the influence of that sea power whose galleons had crossed and recrossed the Spanish main was a thing of the past forever. Complete reports of the sinking of the Spanish fleet reached us on the morning of the Fourth and were received with yells and other manifestations of rejoicing among the troops. The hands along the line played patriotic airs. We knew that part of the work the army had been sent there to do had been accomplished; the Bay of Santiago had been

tendered untenable for the Spanish fleet. With their fleet destroyed I felt sure that it would only be a question of time before the Spanish commander would be forced to surrender. The news of the naval victory was, therefore, transmitted, under flag of truce, to the Spanish commander without delay, and the suggestion again made that he surrender to save needless bloodshed.

By an agreement between General Toral and myself there had been a suspension in hostilities during the Fourth, to enable the women, children and non-combatants to come out of Santiago. I had stopped the firing along the lines for the purpose of sending the following letter within the Spanish lines:

Headquarters United States Forces,
Near San Juan River, July 2, 1898, 8:20 a. m.

To the Commanding General of the Spanish Forces, Santiago de Cuba—Sir: I shall be obliged, unless you surrender, to shell Santiago de Cuba. Please inform the citizens of foreign countries and all women and children that they should leave the city before 10 o'clock to-morrow morning. Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
WILLIAM R. SHAFTER,
Major General, U. S. A.

To this letter I received the following reply:

SANTIAGO DE CUBA, July 3, 1898.

His Excellency the General Commanding Forces of the United States, Near San Juan River—Sir: I have the honor to reply to your communication of to-day, written at 8:30 a. m. and received at 1 p. m., demanding the surrender of this city, or in the contrary case to bombard it, and that I advise the foreigners, women and children that they must leave the city before 10 o'clock to-morrow morning.

It is my duty to say to you that this city will not surrender and that I will inform the

foreign consuls and inhabitants of the contents of your message. Very respectfully,
JOSE TORAL,
Commander in Chief, Fourth Corps.

Several of the foreign consuls came into my lines and asked that the time given for them, the women and children, to depart from the city be extended until 10 o'clock on July 3. To this I consented and wrote a second letter as follows:

The Commanding General Spanish Forces, Santiago de Cuba, July 2, 1898—Sir: In consideration of a request of the consular officers in your city for further delay in carrying out my intentions to fire on the city, and in the interests of the poor women and children, who will suffer very greatly by their hasty departure from the city, I have the honor to announce that I will delay such action solely in their interests until noon of the 3d, provided that during the interim your forces make no demonstration whatever upon those of my own, and, with great respect, your obedient servant,
WILLIAM R. SHAFTER,
Major General, U. S. A.

The effort to permit women, children and non-combatants to leave Santiago was made entirely in the interests of humanity, as I thought it was too late in the century for an American army to fire upon a town filled with women and children. I therefore spent some little time making arrangements for the care and subsistence of the refugees.

It was an interesting but sorrowful sight to see the thousands of poor creatures, principally Cubans, and, consequently, our friends, coming out of the city carrying their babies and bundles. They were obliged to carry any luggage they might wish to take with them, as no horses or vehicles of any kind were allowed to be taken from the city. Everything they brought out was carried upon

their backs. Of course, there was a great deal of excitement attending such a departure to evade a bombardment, but there was considerably more anxiety among the Spaniards than the Cubans, who felt a confidence in the American army. A surprisingly large number of men, Spaniards as well as Cubans, found their way out of the city to avoid the terrors of a bombardment.

The cessation of hostilities during the Fourth gave my troops a chance to recover from fatigue, while I was enabled to hurry up some reinforcements for the purpose of completing the investment of Santiago on the north. I wanted to strengthen my position as much as possible on my right, for I knew that thirty miles from me, at San Luis, there were thirty-five hundred Spanish troops, and forty miles beyond, at Holguin, still farther north, ten thousand. From reports I expected these troops hourly to put in an appearance and attack me on the right.

This delay also gave an opportunity to get up some batteries of light artillery and place them in the line, also to inspect the entire length of the line (a ride of about twenty-five miles), which I did that day.

I was fully convinced from my knowledge of the amount of their supplies that the Spaniards would be forced to surrender if given a little time, and I thought the result would be hastened if the men of their army could be made to understand

that they would be treated well as prisoners of war. I learned from the wounded Spanish officers and men captured at El Caney that they expected to be killed as soon as they fell into our hands. Acting upon this information, I determined to offer to return all the wounded Spanish officers at El Caney who were able to bear transportation and who were willing to give their paroles not to serve against the forces of the United States until regularly exchanged. This offer was made and courteously accepted by the Spanish officer, General Toral. These officers, as well as several of the wounded Spanish privates, twenty-seven in all, were sent to their lines under the escort of a troop of cavalry. The troops, together with ambulances containing wounded, were permitted to pass inside the Spanish lines—in fact, almost to the edge of the city—and were received with honors, the Spanish troops presenting arms to them.

I have every reason to believe the return of the Spanish prisoners had the desired effect, correcting among the troops in Santiago the false reports that had been circulated. Of this I was assured by the English Consul, who was thoroughly in touch with the sentiment of the city

and was a very true friend of the American army.

A couple of hundred of our wounded from the battles of the preceding day were placed in ambulances and wagons and sent down to Siboney, where they were placed in hospital until they could be sent back to the United States.

I visited all the general officers at their various quarters. I also communicated with Admiral Sampson and suggested his forcing his way into the harbor, a suggestion that was not favorably regarded. It was a busy day. There were a great many questions to answer and orders to be given. It was only when interruptions were least numerous that I could stop for a cup of coffee, some bacon and beans and a little hard bread. I remember that I

my lunch under a tree with General Lawton, who accompanied me during my three-mile inspection of his lines.

With an army of about twenty-one thousand men engaged in investing a city a commander could hardly expect to have a very quiet Fourth; but there certainly have been but few Fourth's of July to which we can look back with more satisfaction than July 4, 1898, as well as the preceding days and the one following.

W. M. Shafter