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THE U.S. NAVY, AND THE
SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR**

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PREFACE

THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR OF 1898 WAS A TURNING POINT in the development of the United States Navy. For at least a decade before the conflict, forward-thinking American political leaders and naval officers had pressed for the creation of a fleet of modern, steel-hulled warships armed with the most powerful weapons. Chief among these advocates for a "new Navy" were Theodore Roosevelt, an accomplished naval historian and Assistant Secretary of the Navy; and Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, persuasive champion at the Naval War College of a strategic theory whose central concept called for command of the sea by an oceangoing fleet of battleships.

The swift and overwhelming U.S. victory in the war validated the views advanced by Roosevelt, Mahan, and other proponents of naval expansion. The American navy, despite problems coordinating all of its operations with the U.S. Army and hitting enemy ships with its gunfire, handily destroyed the Spanish naval squadrons at the battles of Manila Bay and Santiago de Cuba. The Spanish government understood that loss of sea control had doomed its insular empire and promptly sued for peace. Almost overnight, the United States acquired control of Spain's overseas possessions in the Caribbean and the Western Pacific.

The war also had a marked institutional impact on the Department of the Navy in the early years of the twentieth century. Mahan, Stephen B. Luce, Henry C. Taylor, William S. Sims, and other reformist officers pressed successfully for improved management, administration, and logistical support of the Navy and for professionalization of the officer corps. American sailors enjoyed the adulation of the public for their martial performance in the war. Ironically, life in the service for most enlisted men changed little as a result of the victory. Rigid discipline, racial and ethnic discrimination, and the rigors of shipboard life hurt reenlistments and sent desertion rates soaring. The experience of the Spanish-American War provided the U.S. Marine Corps, searching for an expanded mission at the turn of the century, with powerful ammunition. The hard-fought defense of the anchorage at Guantánamo by

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Huntington's 1st Marine Battalion won the admiration of many Americans and provided an example of how similar Marine units could protect the fleet's advance bases in the newly won overseas empire of the United States.

The Spanish-American War was a defining event not only in the evolution of the Navy and Marine Corps but in the life of Theodore Roosevelt. The future commander in chief burnished his considerable political and intellectual skills with a demonstration of leadership and bravery under fire at San Juan Hill and El Caney. This personal experience and the strategic success achieved by the Navy exerted powerful influences on President Roosevelt's subsequent "big stick" foreign policy. Moreover, Theodore Roosevelt's enthusiasm for the Navy and the sea lived long after him in the extended Roosevelt family, and especially in his illustrious cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Victory over the Empire of Spain in this short, sharp conflict marked America's debut on the world stage. An energetic, self-confident, and determined generation of Americans then considered it their duty to spread the blessings of democracy, Christianity, and unbridled capitalism to the world and carve out a place for the United States alongside the great powers of the globe. President Theodore Roosevelt was the driving force behind that ethos, and the U.S. Navy was its symbol.

In commemoration of the Spanish-American War of 1898, on October 21, 1998, the Theodore Roosevelt Association, the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation, and the Naval Historical Center sponsored a symposium entitled "Theodore Roosevelt, the U.S. Navy, and the Spanish-American War." The daylong event was held in the U.S. Navy Memorial's Naval Heritage Center in Washington, D.C. A highlight of the event was an inspiring address by The Honorable John H. Dalton, Secretary of the Navy. Participating in the conference were the Spanish Ambassador to the United States, The Honorable H. E. Antonio de Oyarzabal, and military attachés of the Spanish Embassy. Throughout the day, scholars distinguished by their broad understanding of Theodore Roosevelt, his dynamic impact on the development of the U.S. Navy, and the 1898 war between the United States and Spain presented new interpretations of their subjects. Professor H. W. Brands, author of *T. R.: The Last Romantic*, presented an insightful luncheon address. A reception hosted by the sponsoring organizations concluded the memorable symposium.

Special thanks are due Lawrence H. Budner, President, Theodore Roosevelt Association; Rear Admiral Henry C. McKinney, USN (Ret.), President, U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation; and Dr. William S. Dudley, Director of Naval History, for their gracious sponsorship of this symposium. Also deserving of thanks is Professor Douglas Brinkley of the Eisenhower

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Edward J. Marolda