

# TEN MONTHS WITH THE CUBAN INSURGENTS.

BY EMORY W. FENN,  
Late Major in the Cuban Army.



PREVIOUS to the departure of our expedition, in February, 1897, arrangements were made to meet a large steamer off the English island of San Salvador, where Columbus first landed. There we were to transfer men and cargo. On our arrival, the steamer not being in sight, it was decided to wait a reasonable length of time. A sailing-vessel was sent to purchase such provisions as could be procured on the island, for our stock was nearly exhausted. After eight days the steamer arrived, the cargo was transferred, and we started for Cuba.

Although the departure of our expedition—the largest ever carried by a filibuster—was well known to the Spanish authorities, we easily eluded the large fleet of Spanish cruisers and small gunboats which were constantly patrolling the Cuban coast. A little before midnight, on the twenty-third day out from New York, we dropped anchor a hundred yards from the entrance to the harbor of Banes, on the northeast coast of Cuba, the city having been captured and destroyed some months previous by a Cuban force under General Torres.

Although the night was dark, land could be seen directly in front and on both sides. No lights were in sight, and the death-like stillness was broken only by the waves as they washed the shore.

A small boat was lowered; the harbor was explored to make sure that no enemy was present; and two men were landed to arouse the country people and to bring assistance from the nearest Cuban forces. Torpedoes were laid in the channel, connection by electric wires being made with the shore, and a cannon was landed and planted to command the entrance. Thereupon we entered and proceeded up the long, narrow channel for over half a mile, when a plank was thrown ashore, and the work of discharging the cargo began. Twenty-four hours later our steamer passed out, homeward bound. From the neighboring hilltops two Spanish cruisers could be seen lying quietly at anchor in the bay of Nipe, only eight miles distant.

On the second day a small Cuban force

arrived, under the command of Major Bruno Marino, a full-blooded negro about fifty years of age, standing over seven feet in his stockings, slender in stature, with erect form and broad shoulders—a man unable to read or write, but endowed with intelligence, having considerable experience as a civil engineer, and apparently familiar with every inch of the country. The railroad in the banana plantation at Banes was laid out and constructed under his supervision. He had been sent to the United States to act as guide to General Garcia's expedition. He is now lieutenant-colonel, having been promoted for the assistance given our expedition, and is in charge of the forces near Banes, with headquarters at Tasajeras. His camp is laid out in streets, and good houses have been built for his men.

Unarmed citizens were constantly arriving, and as fast as they could be armed were mustered into service. Eight days after our arrival, everything having been safely placed in deposits, and no enemy having appeared, the members of the expedition were given horses and escorted to a large farm-house in Cortaderas, about fifteen miles from Banes, where we were to remain until the arrival of General Garcia. Two weeks later the general arrived with some four thousand men, mostly infantry, having marched over three hundred miles since being informed of our landing. His troops were poorly armed, many of them, indeed, being without arms. They were representative of the wealthiest as well as of the poorest families of the island. About two thirds of them were blacks. They were poorly clad, many wearing breech-cloths only, and few besides the officers having shoes. Each soldier so fortunate as to have a hammock carried one on his back in a cloth sack, which also contained meat, vegetables, tobacco, and cooking utensils, each soldier doing his own cooking.

Garcia's forces were divided into regiments, but little attention was given to military organization. He ordered our cargo taken inland, where such parts of it as were not needed for immediate use could be more securely deposited until required for distribution to the various forces under his command.

As the Spanish authorities had given no

attention to the making and repairing of roads in time of peace, it was impossible to use carts, the existing roads being, as a rule, only bridle-paths. Our cargo being large, and the available supply of horses and mules being small, it was necessary to carry the greater part of it by hand. For this work General Garcia assigned about one thousand men, under the command of Brigadier-General Mario Menocal, his chief of staff, the remaining forces being assigned to guard duty at the place of deposit and at various distant points from which the enemy might be expected.

General Menocal's forces were soon on the march, each man carrying his rifle and a large box of cartridges, weighing from fifty to seventy-five pounds, either on his head or in his hands. From early morning until late at night they trudged along through rivers, over mountains, at times knee-deep in mud, then over lava stones that would draw blood from less hardened feet. They made few halts during the day, and at night slept either on the ground or in their hammocks. Day after day their march was continued, until the last box had been safely deposited where there could be no possible chance of capture by the enemy.

A week after the arrival of General Garcia, the members of the expedition received their reward for the work which they had performed in safely landing over twenty-three hundred rifles, one and a half million rifle-cartridges, some five hundred machetes, two cannon (a twelve-pounder Hotchkiss and a dynamite-gun), three thousand rounds of cannon ammunition, three thousand pounds of dynamite, a large supply of electric wire, batteries, etc., together with medical supplies and various other items too numerous to mention. Their reward was, as a rule, a commission as second lieutenant; but in some cases, for special work, a first lieutenantcy, and in two cases a captaincy, was given. We were then assigned to duty. I, having been appointed chief of the torpedo department, was attached temporarily to the staff of General Mariano Torres, commanding the Division of Holguin. General Torres is a veteran of the ten years' war, about sixty-three years of age, short and stout, with a full gray beard and the appearance of a well-to-do farmer. Since the ten years' war he has passed seventeen years in Jamaica, but he cannot speak English. He is a poor organizer, with no knowledge of military tactics, but a good strategist, always selecting good positions, and holding them against large odds until driven away by

flank movements. He assumes entire charge of everything in his division, sending commissions for cattle, distributing cartridges, meat, salt, and sugar to his forces, and taking personal supervision of his detail of horses. In fact, nothing can be done without his orders.

The headquarters of General Torres were in Veguitas, some fifteen miles from Cortaderas, in a large house which had formerly been used as a country store.

Torres had under his command thirty-one hundred men; but as his forces were divided into small bands stationed in various parts of the division, his force in Veguitas was a little under three hundred, and was encamped in small shelters built by driving four forked sticks into the ground; sticks were laid in the forks, and other sticks were placed over these to support the roofing of banana- or palm-leaves. These houses were a protection from the sun, and, as a rule, were dry.

Six weeks after our landing, a large Spanish force, consisting of three gunboats and transports carrying three thousand infantry, entered Banes, six miles from Veguitas, in the hope of finding our cargo. They were soon driven out by the forces under General Garcia, with heavy loss. About two weeks later, General Garcia having departed, leaving only the forces under General Torres, the Spaniards returned with five gunboats. To prevent this force from landing, General Torres sent thirty men, with instructions to conceal themselves in the woods and open fire on the gunboats. This was done, and for two days and nights a heavy artillery fire was kept up from the gunboats, which at last went away without having made a landing. The Cuban loss was one killed and two wounded, while, according to the Spanish report published in the daily papers at Gibara, their loss in killed and wounded was thirty-six. During a part of this engagement, as the roar of heavy artillery firing reached our ears, General Torres was reclining in his hammock in Veguitas, with a smile on his face.

Two weeks later the general decided to attack Sama, a small port on the northern coast, about seventeen miles distant, the twelve-pounder Hotchkiss cannon recently landed having been left in his division. Major Frederick Funston, with several other Americans, commanding the artillery under General Garcia, having arrived, marching orders were given on the morning of May 9. After many difficulties, in many cases cutting roads through the dense underbrush, we went

into camp late in the afternoon, just back of the high hills surrounding the city. During the night a long trench was dug, under the direction of Major Bruno Marino, on the ridge of a high hill overlooking the town, and a little before dawn the cannon was placed in position. At daylight the order to fire was given, and a twelve-pounder shell was sent crashing through the roof of a small wooden fort eight hundred yards distant. This was answered almost immediately by a volley from the many small forts surrounding the town. At the fifth shot our cannon was disabled, the carriage having broken near the axle. It being impossible to repair it there, or to continue firing, we were obliged to retire to the nearest repair-shop, some thirty miles distant. But the infantry continued the attack for four days, burning several buildings, and capturing many cattle and some horses, when they were driven back by a large Spanish force under General Luque, which had arrived to reinforce the garrison.

After returning to Veguitas, a two weeks' vacation was given to the troops, that they might go to their homes for a much-needed rest; for they had been in actual service, without rest, for over four months.

Our operations were confined to the province of Santiago de Cuba, a large proportion of the inhabitants of which are blacks, descendants of native Africans imported in the days of slavery. Most of the men are of medium stature, with broad shoulders and well-developed muscles. They are peaceful in disposition, seldom, if ever, quarreling among themselves, and are brave and fearless in battle. As no attention has been given by the Spanish authorities to their education, less than one quarter of the country people in this province are able to read and write; but they are gifted by nature with a large amount of intelligence. Their homes are hardly more than roofs. The families are large, often numbering from sixteen to eighteen. Children under five years seldom wear clothing. Lamps are almost unknown, candles being generally used.

Vegetables are plentiful, and meat is now furnished to the families by the prefect, an officer of the civil government appointed for each township to protect and care for the families, also to furnish horses, vegetables, and other articles necessary for the troops in his vicinity. As the Cuban soldier relies mainly upon vegetables, and, when the enemy is not near at hand, often camps in the same place for weeks at a time, it is necessary, in order not to exhaust the supply, to divide

the forces into small bands of from fifty to five hundred men, according to circumstances. The vegetables chiefly used are green plantains (a banana, but not the variety sold in this market), green bananas, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, and the nutritious yucca. These vegetables are either boiled or roasted on the coals.

The camp is usually chosen in an opening near a road, where fresh water may be had and grass found for the horses, the officers and assistants being, as a rule, mounted. If the camp is for a short time only, no huts are built; but if it is expected to remain for several days, the soldiers erect small shelters. A majority of the officers are provided with a large piece of canvas, which is stretched as a roof over their hammocks. The hammocks are hung to trees, or to posts driven into the ground. Each soldier does his own cooking, but each officer is attended by an assistant. Fires are started with flint and steel, no matches being used, except, perhaps, for a short time after the capture of a town. The principal fire-wood is cedar.

As soon as a camp site has been selected, guards are placed, but only on the roads, as the Spanish troops never enter the woods. The horses are then unsaddled and taken to pasture, hammocks are hung, and fires are built. Soldiers who are not supplied with vegetables are allowed to look for them; and while usually they are to be found near at hand, it is sometimes necessary to go several miles before finding them. At night staff-officers are required to do guard duty near headquarters, to receive any messages that may arrive, and to see that all is quiet in camp. Reveille is sounded on the bugle at daylight, and every one, officers included, is obliged to turn out. Coffee or *sambumbia* (sweetened water) is then made, and about one hour later roll-call is sounded, after which the soldier has very little to do but rest until 5 P. M., when roll-call is again sounded. Retreat is sounded at eight, when every man must be in camp, and at nine "silence" is sounded, and all remove their clothing and retire for the night.

The Cubans eat but two meals a day, one about 11 A. M., and the other about 6 P. M. They often march by moonlight, and many of their attacks are made at night, while the Spanish forces never march or attack except by day. In a Spanish camp the horses are not unsaddled during the day, and at night the men often do not remove their clothing, and the entire camp is well guarded.

Medicine is scarce, and fever is common

with all classes. The few small sugar-plantations which are still grinding, by special permission of the Cuban government, are required to furnish one third of their production to the forces, the remaining two thirds being sold to families. In Santiago de Cuba cattle are scarce, and in order to furnish meat special commissions are sent to Camagüey, each commission bringing from fifty to five hundred head at a time. When meat is required for the troops, the animal is usually killed in the morning; each man is then given his ration, which he cuts into thin strips about two inches wide, which are salted and dried in the sun. Everything that cannot be used is left to the vultures, which always appear in large numbers; nothing within their reach is left to decay in the open air.

Under the orders of the civil government, tanneries and small factories have been established at various points, where hides are tanned, saddles and a few shoes made, and rifles repaired.

THE vacation being at an end, by special orders of General Garcia our attention was given to the railroad line running from Holguin to Gibara. This is a narrow-gage road, twenty-seven miles long, stone-ballasted, and well built. It is protected by some seventy-five small forts and by a large number of small towns garrisoned with Spanish troops. All supplies entering Holguin are shipped over this line.

Our force being insufficient to attack and destroy the road without heavy loss, it was decided to destroy the bridges, made of heavy timbers resting on stone foundations. As this work devolved upon the torpedo department, I prepared several small bombs made of bamboo cut into the required lengths (open at one end only), and loaded with dynamite. A small electric fuse was then inserted, and the opening stopped up with a cork made of wood and fastened with wire to notches cut in the bamboo.

On the night of June 9, 1897, with a force of fifty men, three bridges were completely destroyed, including their foundations, blocking traffic for twenty-eight days. No enemy was met, and no shots were exchanged. Early in the morning of July 6, with a force of seventy-five men, the largest locomotive on the line was completely destroyed, one and a half miles from Gibara. For this operation I utilized an old iron soda-water tank found in the ruins of Banes. This was in two parts, one half only being used. In this forty-two pounds of dynamite were placed, and tamped

with a large stick; two electric caps were then inserted, and a cover of hard wood three inches thick was tightly bolted on. This was carried to the line on the back of a mule, and under cover of darkness placed under one rail, opposite a telegraph-pole which was to act as a mark. An electric wire was then run under the grass to a point a hundred and fifty feet distant, near a small patch of woods where our small force was concealed. After removing all signs of our work, and sweeping the track with a small branch, we lay down to wait for daylight. The track inspector passed at six, evidently reporting the track clear, for shortly after seven the train, consisting of the locomotive and two cars, one an armed car and the other a passenger-coach, came in sight. It was moving very slowly, and as the locomotive arrived opposite the telegraph-pole the explosion occurred, and nothing remained but the cars. A charge was ordered, but under a terrific fire from the armed car it was impossible for our small force to reach the line without heavy loss; and as we were surrounded by no fewer than nine small forts, we were obliged to return to our base at once, fearing delay would give time to mobilize troops and block our retreat. Our loss in this operation was three wounded. On the night of July 22, with a force of sixty men, two bridges were destroyed. A few shots were fired from a small fort on the line not one hundred yards from one of the bridges, but no one was injured.

On August 7, by special orders from General Garcia, I was sent with eighty-six men to Los Pilonos, fifteen miles from Tunas. We arrived there August 22, without having seen any Spanish troops. Here I received permission to visit the seat of the Cuban government in Camagüey. The capital consists of a large number of wooden buildings, built in a beautiful valley, and surrounded by high hills. It is protected by a small force of from one to two hundred men. Each official has a house of his own, and one for his assistant. As the law does not allow a visitor to remain at the capital over twenty-four hours, my stay was necessarily short, and, with a guide furnished by General Roloff, Secretary of War, I returned in time to be present at the siege of Victoria de las Tunas. In this engagement the Cubans had seventeen hundred men—twelve hundred taking part in the siege, and the remaining forces being stationed on the road to Puerto del Padre to intercept any Spanish forces that might be sent to reinforce the garrison. Trenches were built on the night of August

27, and our cannon, consisting of one twelve-pounder Driggs-Schroeder, two twelve-pounder Hotchkiss, two two-pounder Hotchkiss, and one dynamite-gun, were placed in position. At daylight on the morning of August 28 the firing began, and it continued until the morning of August 30, when the garrison surrendered. We captured two Krupp cannon, with over one hundred rounds of ammunition, some six hundred rifles, several hundred thousand rifle-cartridges, and over two hundred prisoners. Our loss was about one hundred and six in killed and wounded, nearly one half being officers. It was not possible to learn the exact Spanish loss; but judging from the dead and wounded found in the town when we entered, and the wounded sent out to us during the fight, it must have been very heavy.

In this engagement the dynamite-gun was used with perfect success for the first time, over one hundred shots being fired, and only one shell failing to explode.

The prisoners were returned, and a receipt was taken for them. The wounded were taken to a fort on the road to Puerto del Padre, twelve miles from Tunas, and word was sent to the Spanish commander at Puerto del Padre that they could be moved by an unarmed force with safety, but that no armed force would be allowed to come for them. In accordance with this order from General Garcia, they were taken to Puerto del Padre by an unarmed force.

A few days later a Spanish armed force three thousand strong left Puerto del Padre to reconnoiter Tunas. After marching ten miles they were turned back by Colonel Carlos Garcia with a force of four hundred and fifty men, after one hour's hard fighting. Colonel Garcia is a son of General Garcia, is about thirty years of age, and a dentist by profession. Although he has never received a military education, by his bravery and ability in battle, he has won the rank he now holds in a little less than two years. His troops are well organized, and he has given special attention to the matter of supplies. He is fond of good living himself, and has two milch cows taken wherever he goes, to supply his own mess. At the siege of Tunas he led one of the best infantry charges made during the war, taking the cavalry headquarters, a large stone fort, by storm, after it had been partly destroyed by the artillery. For this he was placed in command of a brigade.

Our loss in this operation was two killed and three wounded, while the Spanish loss in killed and wounded was over one hundred.

On account of the tactics employed by the Cuban forces, and the divisions made in them, together with the fact that small bands often operate alone, there is not a sufficient number of doctors properly to attend to the wounded. One doctor, and in some cases two, are assigned to an entire division. These doctors appoint assistants from the men in the ranks, who, after a little instruction, are given a few bandages, cotton, carbolic acid, quinine, etc., and assigned to the various regiments in the division. These men are expected to give the first aid to the wounded, and administer such medicines as they may have when they are required; but even then it often happens that they are not present when the men are wounded, and it is necessary to take them many miles on horseback, or in hammocks hung on a long pole, before their wounds are dressed. Owing to this delay, small wounds often prove very serious. After their wounds are attended to, they are taken, as soon as practicable, to one of the many small hospitals in the woods, where they are given every attention possible under the circumstances.

These hospitals are nothing more than deserted country houses, with beds made by driving four forked sticks into the ground, two at the head and two at the foot; a heavy stick is then laid in each pair of forks, and thin sticks, laid lengthwise of the bed, rest on these. The frame is then covered with banana-leaves, and, if it is possible to procure it, a sheet completes the bed. These hospitals are in charge of a *practicante*, but under the general supervision of the doctor, who visits them as often as possible; and in some cases, as after a heavy engagement, a doctor or several doctors are assigned to them, and remain as long as their services are required. As soon as a new patient arrives he is placed on a new bed, as the same bed is never used twice, and is given an attendant to do his cooking and attend to his wants.

These hospitals are well supplied with bandages and medicine, and the prefect is required to keep them supplied with vegetables, sugar, milk, etc. The general in whose division they are furnishes meat, and the country people bring chickens, eggs, and any little dainties they may have. As the wounds are mostly from Mauser balls, few amputations are necessary, and the patients recover rapidly; but when the wounds are from Remingtons with the ordinary lead ball, or the lead ball with a thin brass jacket (explosive ball), they often prove fatal, and if the patient recovers, the improvement is slow.

After several other small engagements I returned to General Torres, making the trip from Los Pilonos to his camp near Holguin with one guide, and without meeting the enemy. On the night of November 19 two railroad bridges, and on other nights large sections of track, were destroyed.

With a force of three hundred men, General Torres was encamped for over a month within less than five miles of Holguin, which at the time was garrisoned by fifteen hundred Spanish troops. Prisoners captured near the town were taken to camp and then given their freedom, that they might inform the Spanish commander of our presence; but no move was made to molest us. Spanish forces seldom sally forth in the east; so, in order to fight, the Cubans were obliged to attack fortified towns. With the exception of the large cities on the seaboard, and a few large inland towns, the entire eastern part of Cuba was free, and might truthfully be called "Cuba libre."

On January 23, 1898, I received from General Garcia a pass to the Cuban government, with permission to ask for a leave of absence, so that I might return to the United States in order to arrange some personal matters. I left his camp at Mejia the next day, and as I was familiar with the roads did not take a guide. That night I camped in a house near the river Cauto, and on the morning of the 25th, as I was about to cross the road between Bagüano and Holguin, I ran into a Spanish force, two thousand strong, under Major-General Linares. Owing to the dense woods I did not discover this force until less than twenty feet from them. I was immediately surrounded, my revolver taken from me, and I was ordered to dismount. I was then taken before Brigadier-General Joaquin Vara de Rey, who after asking my destination ordered me taken to General Linares; and by him I was ordered to the rear, under guard, as a prisoner of war. A rope was then fastened to my left arm, the other

end being held by a private. The march to Holguin was then continued.

My clothing at this time consisted of an old pair of patent-leather shoes, many sizes too large, and a pair of trousers (both given to me by Major Joyce when he returned in December); also an old undershirt and a straw hat. Not being accustomed to walking, my feet soon became blistered and swollen, and my back was blistered by the hot sun. In this condition I was hardly able to keep up with the troops; and when they went into camp for the night I dropped from exhaustion. Captain Armando Mantilla de los Rios, of the Eighth Regular Infantry, searched me for papers. He found the pass from General Garcia, also several letters from members of General Garcia's staff which I was carrying to their friends in America. These papers proved the truthfulness of my statements as to my destination, and that I was not on official business. He then reported to General Linares, stating my condition, and requesting that he be allowed to remove the rope and become responsible for me. This request was granted. A sergeant and three soldiers were ordered to guard me, and the captain sent me supper from his own mess.

The next morning I was obliged to cut my shoes in order to get them on; and when we camped for lunch at about eleven, I was unable to march farther, and Captain Rios obtained permission for me to mount. That night I was allowed to sleep in my hammock, under guard; and as we were to enter Holguin the next day, Captain Rios gave me a shirt and an old coat. Several members of General Linares's staff, among them Major Don Domingo Arrairs, ex-instructor in the Military Academy at Madrid, had interceded in my behalf; and when we arrived in Holguin I was sent to Havana, under guard, with a request that I be allowed to return to America. There General Fitzhugh Lee furnished me with a passport and my passage.

