

Chapter 1

THE BIRTH OF A REGIMENT

MANILA 1916-1918

The 31st Infantry Regiment's insignia, a polar bear, was approved by the War Department in 1924 to reflect service in Siberia from 1918 to 1920. The 31st never served in the United States as a full regiment, earning it the unofficial nickname "American's Foreign Legion." After infantry regiments were discontinued as tactical organizations in 1957, several of the regiment's successor battle groups and subsequently its successor battalions served in the United States, but its Headquarters and 1st Battalion have never "been home." The regiment's only active unit, the 4th Battalion, serves with the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, New York at the time of this writing.



Two earlier 31st Infantry Regiments were formed in 1813 and 1866 but were later incorporated into other regiments. Their lineages are carried by the regiments into which they were absorbed and are therefore unrelated to the present 31st Infantry.¹ Today's 31st Infantry Regiment was authorized by the National Defense Act of 1916 and was formed in the Philippines later that year to strengthen the forces protecting US interests in the Philippines following its capture from Spain in 1898.² Filipinos, although generally inclined toward friendship, did not seek or accept the occupation of their country by another colonial power, prompting a series of guerilla wars against US forces, the last of which ended in 1911. By 1916, six regiments of infantry and a regiment of cavalry remained in the islands, concentrated mainly on Luzon and Mindanao where "Insurrectos" remained troublesome.



Above at left is the regimental shield, a sea lion from the Philippine Department's shoulder insignia, commemorating the regiment's birth and long service in the Philippines. The regimental crest above it and to the right is a polar bear, commemorating the regiment's earliest combat experience during the Siberian Expedition of 1918-1920. The regiment's Latin motto, *Pro Patria*, means "For Country."

¹ The original 31st Infantry Regiment was formed in 1813 for service in the War of 1812. It was consolidated with the Regiment of Light Artillery in 1815 and its numeral disappeared from the active rolls until 1866 when a new 31st Infantry Regiment was formed from the 3rd Battalion 13th Infantry. In 1869, that regiment was consolidated with today's 22nd Infantry. *Army Lineage Series, Infantry*, Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington, DC. 1953, p. 155.

² The National Defense Act of 1916 appropriated funds for the Army's emergency expansion amid a crisis brewing worldwide. It expanded the Army by seven infantry regiments, one each in the Philippines (31st), Hawaii (32nd), and Panama Canal Zone (33rd), and four on the Mexican border (34th through 37th). *Army Lineage Series, Infantry*, Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington, DC. 1972, p. 42.

August 1916 Officers Roster

Commander	COL Wm. H. Gordon
Deputy	LTC Frederic H. Sargent
Adjutant	CPT Charles Weeks
HQ Co	1LT Emile V. Cutrer
MG Co	1LT Max A. Elser
Supply Co	1LT John P. Adams
1st Bn Cdr	MAJ Robert H. Allen
Co A	CPT Thomas L. Brewer
Co B	2LT J. P. Wilson
Co C	1LT R. G. Caldwell
Co D	CPT Walter Harvey
2d Bn Cdr	CPT Colin H. Ball
Co E	CPT William R. Kendrick
Co F	1LT Clark Lynn
Co G	1LT Everett N. Bowman
Co H	1LT Jacob E. Fishel
3d Bn Cdr	MAJ Ben W. Field
Co I	1LT George W. Maddox
Co K	1LT Everett D Barlow
Co L	1LT Richard H. Jacob
Co M	1LT A. Ellicott Brown

Reaction to the National Defense Act of 1916 was not as orderly as Congress might have intended. Since the required manpower for new regiments would take at least a year to recruit, the Army transferred men and equipment from existing regiments, diluting them all. In compliance with the order, the Philippine Department formed the 31st Infantry Regiment's Headquarters, Machinegun, and Supply Companies and 3rd Battalion on August 13, 1916 at Fort William McKinley (Rizal, Luzon), with personnel and equipment from the 8th and 27th Infantry Regiments. 1st Battalion was formed at Regan Barracks (Albay, Luzon) from the 2nd Battalion 15th Infantry. The 2nd Battalion was formed at Camp McGrath (Batangas, Luzon) with personnel and equipment from the 13th Infantry.

As B Company's First Sergeant Joe Dundas put it; "men went to bed on the night of July 31 as members of B Company 15th Infantry Regiment and awoke the next morning in B Company 31st Infantry Regiment." On its first consolidated morning report, the regiment totaled 35 officers and 1350 enlisted men.



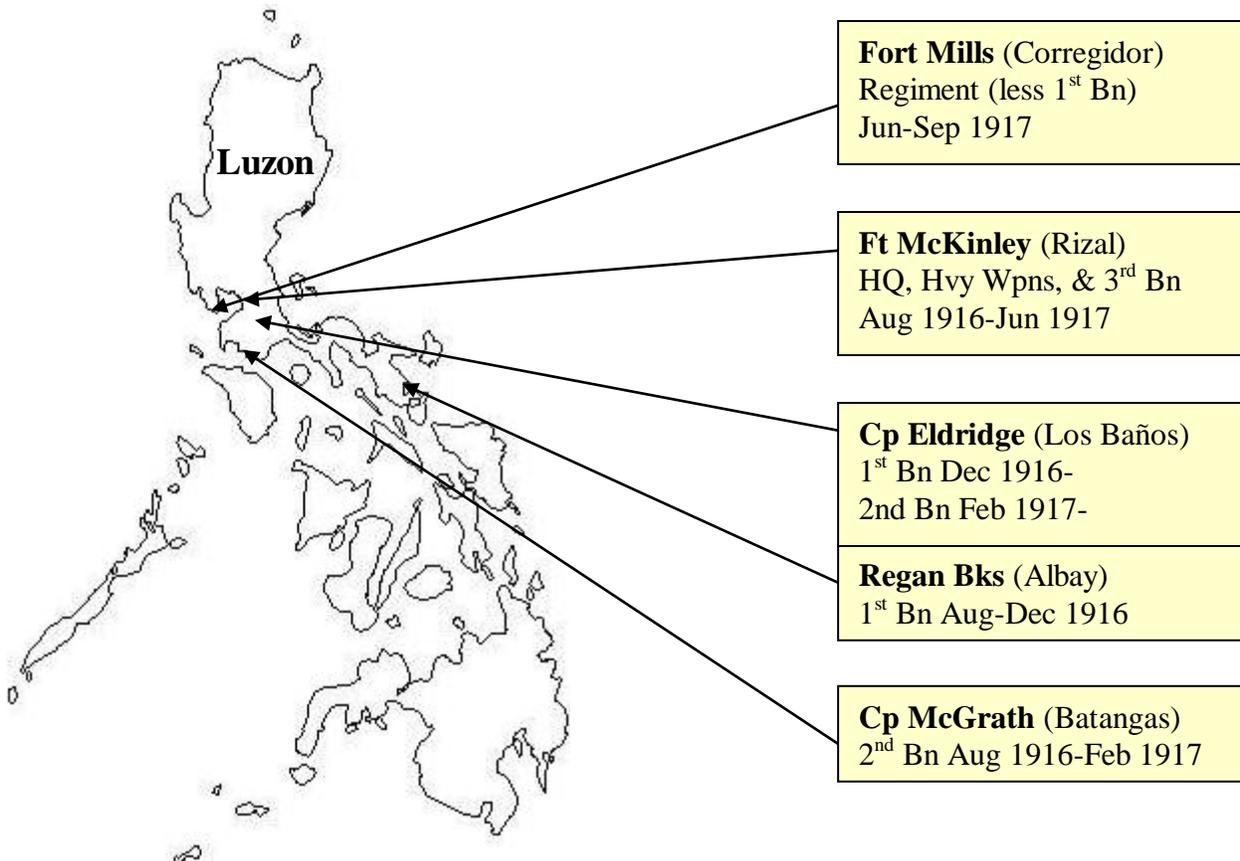
Bottomside Barracks and Officer Housing above at Fort Mills, Corregidor, seen from Malinta Hill
(photo from 31st Infantry Regiment Association archives)

The 31st Infantry's senior officers and some NCOs had served in the Spanish-American War 18 years earlier, gaining insight into expeditionary warfare. Others had served during the more recent Philippine Insurrection, making the regiment more seasoned than its newness would suggest. Colonel William H. Gordon, the Regimental Commander, and Lieutenant Colonel Frederic H. Sargent, his Deputy, had seen action during the closing years of the Indian Wars in the American West, had fought against Spain in 1898 and against insurgents during the Philippine Insurrection. They had seen their Army

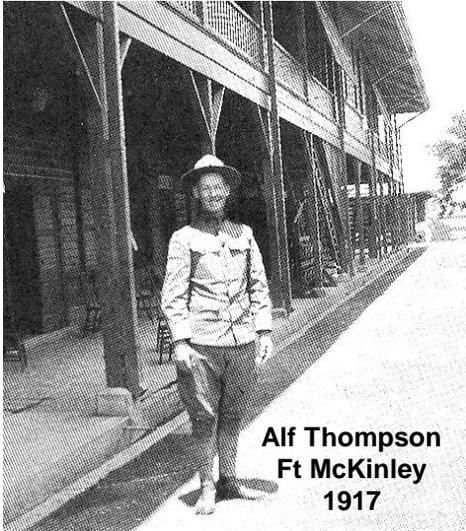
transformed from a pitifully small internal security force to a modern expeditionary Army that would expand to over four million men during the next two years.

In December 1916, the 1st Battalion moved to Camp Eldridge (Los Baños) where it was joined by the 2nd Battalion in February 1917. During February and March, the regiment underwent its first instruction practice, combat firing, and proficiency tests and there were frequent inspections to assure companies attained a common standard. In June, Lieutenant Colonel Sargent, the regiment's deputy commander, was promoted to succeed Colonel Gordon. To guard against a possible surprise attack by Germany to seize the Philippines, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions moved to Fort Mills on Corregidor, an island near the mouth of Manila Bay. They were followed a month later by Headquarters, Machinegun, and Supply Companies. In August and September, all except the 3rd Battalion returned to Fort McKinley.

After the United States entered World War I in April 1917, few additional troops were sent to the Philippines, causing the regiment's strength to plunge as experienced men were sent to training camps in the US to help expand the Army for wartime service. Those left behind feared they would sit out the war in the Philippines while others went to France to win the glory, the medals, and the girls back home. By January 1918, the regiment had dwindled to 55 officers and 865 enlisted men, just enough to fully man one battalion. In February and March of that year, the regiment underwent its second round of record practice, combat firing, and proficiency tests, showing impressive results despite its low strength.



With one of the last contingents of new troops to join the regiment in 1917 was a remarkable 21-year-old who would remain associated with the Army and his regiment to the end of his life at age 100. Alf Thompson joined the Army at Fort Collins, Colorado in the fall of 1917 and was soon sent to the Philippines. Although disappointed that he was not going to war, Thompson was excited to see a part of the world that he had previously known only in school books. Assigned to the 31st Infantry's Machinegun Company on his arrival in Manila, Thompson demonstrated uncommon attention to detail and was



Philippines in 1918.

During the spring of 1918, the regiment's strength grew abruptly. Among the replacements arriving at Pier 7 in Manila was Cesar Pares, a Spaniard by birth, who had been sent to the United States by his wealthy parents to study in New York. Fascinated by stories of the American west, he soon abandoned his studies to work on a ranch in New Mexico. When he turned 18, he and a friend journeyed to Denver by train to see more of the country. After a wild night on the town, they wandered the streets penniless. On a whim, they walked into the Army recruiting station at Fort Logan and enlisted. Pares thought he would soon be returning to his native Europe to fight the Germans. Instead, he was sent to the Philippines and assigned to the 31st Infantry's



Headquarters Company.

When the 8th and 13th Infantry Regiments departed the Philippines in December 1917 to form part of the 8th Division in California, members of the 31st assumed it was only a matter of time before their regiment received similar orders. The 31st was one of only two US infantry regiments left in the Philippines, the other being the 27th in Manila.

On July 11, 1918, a War Department cable queried the U.S. Philippine Department Commander, Major General Charles Bailey, how many men and how much equipment he could deploy and how soon. In Europe, a German offensive was running out of steam but the war's outcome was still far from clear.

When his tour of duty was done in 1920, Alf Thompson left the Army. When World War II came, Alf was too old to enlist so he organized the American Red Cross effort supporting American troops in the Mediterranean Theater. A full generation later, Alf organized a welcome home program for Vietnam veterans in Illinois and helped raise funds for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. When the 31st Infantry Regiment Association was formed, he was among its earliest members and attended its reunions until he became unable to walk. He celebrated his 100th birthday on November 11, 1995 and died the following spring.

In those days, OCS was taken mainly by correspondence, supplemented by local instruction and testing at the candidate's home station. Although Thompson passed every test with ease, publication of orders making him a second lieutenant had not yet arrived when the regiment left the

Rumors flew in Manila that another regiment would soon depart for Europe. The 8th and 13th Infantry had already departed to form the nucleus of a new division in California and the 27th Infantry Regiment had begun training for trench warfare. The 31st launched its own intensified training but its objective was less clear. The two battalions at Fort McKinley were unexpectedly assembled for an extended fitness march with full field gear, rations, and full canteens. As the march began, the troops were told training would continue 7 days a week until the war was won. That sounded foolish to men stationed 8000 miles from the war zone. What could training in the Philippines possibly contribute to winning the war in Europe unless the 31st was to be sent there? Without further explanation, long marches, and squad and platoon battle drills continued for weeks on end, strengthening muscles but taking a toll on morale.

Letters home were filled with a mix of frustration, speculation, and eagerness. Troops were growing impatient to “get on with it”. Most wanted to play a role in ending the war but trudging all over Luzon in intense tropical heat was not their idea of a path to victory. Amid heavy grouching, bets were made on the regiment’s departure date for France. There would be no winner. By late summer, news of events in Siberia had begun to spread, giving some an inkling of where they might be headed. Private Alan

Ferguson of B Company, later the 31st Infantry’s wrestling champ, wrote his parents on July 27, “There have been lots of rumors lately of one or both regiments going to Siberia, and when the *Sheridan* was held over here and the 27th was making such thorough preparations, it seemed likely that they were going, but most of the excitement died down when the *Sheridan* left without them.”

On August 7, 1918, the 27th Infantry departed for Siberia, a place few Americans knew anything about. Two days later, Colonel Frederick Sargent, the 31st Infantry’s Commander, received a letter of instruction from Headquarters, Philippine Department ordering him to prepare his regiment (45 officers and 1379 enlisted men) for movement. Like the 27th, its destination was Siberia. The rumors

Chain of Command on August 12, 1918	
Regiment	COL Frederick H. Sargent
Headquarters Company	CPT John M. Boon
Machinegun Company	CPT Allen T. Veatch
Supply Company	CPT Raymond H. Bishop
Medical Detachment	MAJ Miller E. Preston
1st Battalion	MAJ E. V. Heidt
A Company	1LT Roy F. Lynd
B Company	CPT Henry W. Lee
C Company	CPT William H. Bittenbender
D Company	CPT William H. Joiner
2nd Battalion	LTC Ode C. Nichols
E Company	CPT Laird E. Richards
F Company	CPT William E. Fentress
G Company	1LT Nolie E. Felix
H Company	CPT John H. Haynes
3rd Battalion	MAJ Sylvester C. Loring
I Company	CPT Schiller A. Scroggs
K Company	CPT William H. Crom
L Company	CPT Francis G. Bishop
M Company	1LT Leo M. Johnson

Alan Ferguson had heard became reality.