**The 11th United States Volunteer Cavalry
Served Valiantly with No History and No Future.
Should it be recognized as contributing to the
lineage and heritage of the legendary and famed
11th Cavalry “Blackhorse” Regiment?**

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America's legendary 11th Armored Cavalry "Blackhorse" Regiment (11th ACR) is most famous for its historic combat achievements in South Viet Nam and Cambodia, and as our nation's National Training Center's (NTC) opposing force (OPFOR) where it trained Army battalion and brigade task forces in tactical and operational level skills under near-combat conditions. The task force units were not "combat ready" until they successfully passed extensive simulated combat exercises against the 11th ACR OPFOR in the NTC battlegrounds deep in the Mojave Desert. By most military and civilian experts, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment is considered the best-trained mechanized force in the world.

A little known fact to many military history enthusiasts is that the United States 11th Cavalry was first authorized by Congress during the summer of 1899 as the 11th United States Volunteer Cavalry in the Philippines, a full year before Congress authorized the creation of the 11th U.S. Cavalry as a Regular Army regiment.

**BACKGROUND**

Forty years earlier during the American Civil War, no less than twenty Union and Confederate States fielded cavalry units designated as 11th Cavalry, such as the 11th Texas Cavalry, 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry, 11th Mississippi Cavalry Regiment and the 11th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry Regiment. However, none of these 11th Cavalry units were designated as the United States 11th Cavalry.

The economic and political interests of the United States expanded substantially beyond the shores of the North America continent in the years following the Civil War. The USA began building its "New Navy" in 1890, which included three new battleships, to protect America's shores and its interests overseas. The 1898 onset of the short 10-week duration of the Spanish-American War in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam found the USA ill prepared to defend its growing global economic interests on land. When war with Spain became apparent, USA's entire regular Army had fewer than 30,000 officers and enlisted men, of which less than 6,500 were cavalry. The individual States and Territories of the USA answered the call for volunteers by activating their militias.

The majority of the volunteer units were organized by individual states, and a number of regiments and companies were mustered in under the general title of United States Volunteers, by authority of the acts of Congress in 1898. These acts, specially drawn for war purposes, gave to the President authority to bring about the enrollment from the nation at large approximately 16,500 men, including "10,000 men possessing immunity from disease incident to tropical climates" for warfare in Cuba and the Philippines.

The **1st United States Volunteer Cavalry, better known as The Rough Riders** with Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt as the second commander of the regiment, was raised in 1898 for the Spanish–American War. The Rough Riders along with the regular Army all-black Buffalo Soldiers of the regular 10th Cavalry (Colored) and 24th Infantry (Colored) Regiments charged up Cuba's San Juan Hill and Kettle Hill under the plunging enfilade fire of the improved and newly employed Gatling guns.

First Lieutenant Jules Ord, the white officer leading the charge of the 10th Cavalry (Colored) with his pistol in one hand and his saber in the other, was one of the very first Americans to reach the top of San Juan Hill. He was killed in action shortly afterward as he directed deadly 10th Cavalry (Colored) fire at the retreating Spanish soldiers.

The **10th Cavalry (Colored)** was the only unit that assaulted **both** San Juan Hill and Kettle Hill. Politics and racism in the newspapers, the military and the government in the United States pre-vented 1LT Ord and his Buffalo Soldiers of the 10th Cavalry from receiving their just recognition. Instead, nearly all of the publicity and awards for heroism were politically bestowed upon Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders.

**Admiral Dewey** and his command of six U.S. Navy warships on the other side of the world single handedly defeated the Spanish fleet of seven warships in Manila Bay, three fortified islands guarding the entrance to Manila Bay and 37 Spanish shore batteries on **1 May 1898.** However, his small contingent of U.S. Navy Marines could not occupy Manila until more U.S. ground troops arrived. Meanwhile, up to 15,000 Spanish troops were pinned inside the Walled City of Manila by Filipino rebel forces. By the time American ground forces arrived three months later, the fresh water, food and medical supplies to Manila had been cut off, causing starvation and disease. The Spanish troops and the general Manila population were eating their horses and household pets to survive. America's short battle for the Philippines against the Spanish ended with only three American casualties.

**The Spanish formally surrendered in August 1898** after the bloodless capture of Manila. By the Treaty of Paris (signed Dec. 10, 1898), Spain renounced all claim to Cuba, ceded Guam and Puerto Rico to the United States, and transferred sovereignty over all of the estimated **7,000 Philippines Islands** to the United States for $20 million. However, after nearly **500 years** as a Spanish colony, most of the Filipino people had no intention of becoming a colony or a territory of another "imperialist" power.

The Filipinos began their fight for independence when they took up arms in 1896 as the **Philippine Revolution** against the Spanish Empire. They had been fighting a bloody revolution for three years prior to the United States defeating the Spanish forces. On 4 February 1899, fighting broke out between the newly occupying American Army and the rebel Filipino forces, starting the Philippine-American War. Some chronicles and historians refer to the war in the Philippines that lasted from February 1899 to July 1902 as variously the Philippine Insurrection, the Filipino-American War, Fil-American War and the Philippine War.

The rebel Filipino forces attacked the thinly manned 10-mile U.S.-Filipino lines on the night of 4 February 1899. The U.S. troops and allied Filipino forces, supported by shelling from Admiral Dewey's naval fleet, repelled the attack and caused hundreds of casualties. Upon the outbreak of hostilities, the American and allied Filipino forces quickly overwhelmed the rebel Filipino positions around Manila while inflicting thousands of casualties. Within days, American forces spread outward from Manila, using superior weapons and tactics, mobile artillery and Admiral Dewey's small fleet of warships to their full effect as they pushed the rebel army north into Luzon's nearly impenetrable jungle covered mountains. While emerging victorious from the first battle of the Philippine-American War, President Teddy Roosevelt and his generals knew the American forces were greatly outnumbered. The small United States occupation force was in no position to fight the estimated 80,000 rebels consisting of primitive tribesmen, anti-colonial Philippine citizen volunteers, and Muslim Moro warriors located primarily on the larger islands of Luzon, Samar and Mindanao.

**BIRTH OF THE UNITED STATES VOLUNTEER FORCES**

Called into existence by the **Army Act of 2 March 1899** which authorized the President to **enlist 35,000 volunteers for service in the Philippines** as Federal Volunteer Regiments. The United States Volunteers were an experiment. The U.S. War Department wanted soldiers who would **combine the best qualities of the State Volunteers as seen during the Civil War and its Regular Army soldiers.** The **Volunteers** generally demonstrated greater initiative, morale, esprit de corps, and an aggressive fighting spirit. A later testimony of the Volunteers’ aggressive fighting ability and heroism was that Volunteers received 17 of the 23 U.S. Medals of Honor awarded in the Philippines. The **Regulars**, on the other hand, brought discipline, years of training, tactics, military experience and proven leadership. The **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry** quickly proved itself as a hard-fighting unit with a combination of the best qualities of both Volunteers and Regulars.

The troopers of the **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry** were recruited in 1899 for two-year enlistments. Most were State Volunteers whose enlistment’s were up in the bloodied State regiments which had shouldered the burden of the Philippines fighting during the recently ended Spanish-American War. Each volunteer received a special $500 bonus to reenlist in the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry or one of two U. S. Volunteer Infantry regiments. They were the sons of fathers who wore Blue or Gray just three decades earlier, and these sons now trained and fought together under one flag. Army Regulars, many of whom fought in the American Indian Wars and the recent Spanish-American War also volunteered to join the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry from other units in the Philippines. Some of the senior officers and NCOs who joined the volunteers were veterans of the American Civil War, bringing proven combat leadership to the federal U.S. Volunteer forces.

The federal volunteer regiments that fought in the Philippine insurgency from 1899 to 1901 were the product of intense political infighting, negotiation and compromise at the highest levels of the American government. **Oddities among military units**, these regiments were neither state militia nor regular army. They were nationalized units filled largely with state volunteers. The federal volunteer regiments were fleeting organizations. **They had no history and no future.** Not only did they lack unit legacies to inspire their soldiers, they were disbanded within two years of their creation. Yet, in 1899, 1900 and 1901, **the United States Volunteer regiments bore the preponderance of the American national war effort in the Philippines.**

*[It is interesting to note that when the three squadrons of the Regular Army’s new 11th Cavalry Regiment were being formed in the USA during 1901, the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry was heavily engaged in its second year of combat in the Luzon.]*

By November of 1899, rebel leader General Aguinaldo and his forces had been pushed further and further into central Luzon (the main Philippine island). He realized he could not fight the Americans with conventional military units and tactics. At this point, he ordered his followers to turn to **guerilla tactics** to combat the American army and its allied Philippine army *(similar to the communist tactics employed against the American and allied South Viet Nam forces through most of the Viet Nam War).* From this point on, the Philippine-American War became a savage, no-holds-barred guerilla conflict made up of ambushes, massacres and retribution. Both sides engaged in wanton violence. It will never be factually known which side began the terror atrocities, but each one committed was reciprocated by the other side.

Allied and rebel villages were destroyed, civilians murdered, prisoners on both sides were tortured for military intelligence, along with other atrocities. Some American officers and noncoms who had served in the American Indian Wars, reciprocated by applying the horrible old wild west belief that "*the only good Indian was a dead Indian*" to their relations with the Filipinos. This attitude, of course, put fear into the hearts of the native rebel forces and also bolstered their re-solve to fight to their death.

*[Viet Nam War veterans may find many eye opening similarities of the warfare in two Southeast Asian wars fought over 60 years apart, one in the Philippines and the other just 500 miles away in Viet Nam and Cambodia. Currently in the 21st Century, the Philippines military and a classified number of United States Special Operations soldiers and Marines are still fighting Muslim terrorists on the very large island of Mindanao and a few smaller islands.]*

The fighting in the Luzon was bitter and brutal with little quarter given or asked. One of the first recorded combat actions of the **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry** took place in December 1899 in the hilly country 20 miles northeast of Manila which was heavily defended by over 1,000 well-armed insurgents. In the midst of a monsoon, General Henry W. Lawton moved battalions from the 27th and 29th U.S. Volunteer Infantry and two squadrons of Col. James Lockett’s 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry to a bluff near the Marikina River. Delayed by rain, mud, and a rapidly rising river, only one infantry battalion and a mounted squadron of the 11th Cavalry reached the rendezvous point on time.

Unable to cross the fast moving river, General Lawton directed his infantry to set up a firing line behind paddy dikes to engage the insurgents on the other side of the river who were bringing heavy rifle fire at the Americans. Lawton then sent the **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry** up river to find a ford, cross over, and attack the enemy flank. After several hours, the *11th Cav found a crossing and conducted* ***a classic mounted charge*** *into the flank of the enemy using newly issued Krag repeating carbines, double action pistols and even a few sabers.* General Lawton, however, was killed by a sniper’s bullet in the chest as he walked along the infantry’s firing line encouraging his infantry soldiers to stand fast.

The beginning of the 20th Century in 1900, converging columns of the **27th and 45th U.S. Volunteer Infantry and the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry** attacked a stronghold across a gorge on the San Mateo River. Dismounting to fight, the platoons of the 11th Cavalry and the 45th Infantry used a new method of advancing by rushes (fire and maneuver) and dropping to the ground to lay down suppressive fire with their Krag repeating carbines as the next platoon rushed forward. The recorded body count was 25 insurgents with over 10,000 rounds of ammo captured.

Later in **January 1900,** the 45th Infantry and the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry again fought side-by-side, this time in the hellish mountains of the Batangas border region. At one point the 11th Cav troopers filed through a mountain pass so narrow that their saddlebags scraped along the sides. During the night, the 11th Cavalry was attacked by groups of howling monkeys that tossed coconuts and handfuls of their feces at the troopers, keeping them awake all night with their howling.

*[****Author note:*** *My 11th ACR "Blackhorse" recon platoon was similarly attacked by a large force of "communist" monkeys with feces, small rocks and branches in the wilderness jungle along the Viet Nam-Cambodia border in 1970]*

The next day the troops reached their objective village of Nasugbu and was immediately fired upon by the guerilla soldiers. The 11th Cavalry lost several hard-to-replace horses in the desperate fighting, but killed four guerillas and found many blood trails as it forced the remaining insurgents out of the village. Later that day, the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry fought off a large guerilla force which ambushed the Cavalry at a river crossing.

The 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry’s Commander LTC Charles G. Starr selected LT George Wray, an officer who had already demonstrated his proficiency as a hard-hitting platoon leader, in **July 1900** to head an elite 25-man strike force to find and destroy guerrilla cells. In the **latter months of 1900, Wray’s Scouts conducted nearly half of the 11th U. S. Volunteer Cavalry’s expeditions and fought in four of its six major engagements.**

*[The 11th ACR's Aerial Rifle Platoon in Viet Nam functioned similarly to Wray's Scouts in many ways in Viet Nam.]*

With most of the fighting in southern Luzon against large enemy units tapering down in the **Fall of 1900**, the **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry** was given hundreds of square miles to secure. **The army controlled the towns, but the guerrillas controlled the jungles.** The eight troops of the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry were split among garrison duty, convoy escorts, and a mobile strike force. Small guerilla units of three to nine soldiers would fire into marching columns and then simply vanish, often reappearing as peaceful “amigos” *(a tactic also employed some 60 years later by the Viet Cong in South Viet Nam)*. The guerillas also proved highly adept at building deadly booby traps that severely restricted American infantry and cavalry operations, all of which was repeated in Viet Nam.

On **8 December 1900**, 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry's M Troop engaged a force of approximately 200 insurgents on Boot Peninsula, dispersing them in a running fight of two and one-half hours duration.

**THE DEMISE OF THE 11th U.S. VOLUNTEER CAVALRY REGIMENT AND BIRTH OF THE U.S. REGULAR ARMY 11th CAVALRY REGIMENT**

On **2 February 1901**, with the two-year enlistments of the Volunteers about to expire and the end of occupation duties and fighting in the Philippines appeared to be nowhere in sight, **Congress passed an act that provided for an increase in the regular Army combat arms of cavalry, infantry and artillery.** The increase in cavalry included five new regular regiments, numbered the **11th U.S. Cavalry through the 15th U.S. Cavalry Regiments.**

After the **March 1901** capture of rebel General Aguinaldo, the leader of the Filipino independence movement, the **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry mission changed** to daily and nightly patrols by small detachments commanded by junior officers. These patrols often encountered large bands of insurgents armed with bolos and stolen U.S. rifles.

On **5 May 1901**, K Troop engaged about 250 insurgents at Mount Solo, driving them from three separate positions, killing one, capturing three, plus six horses, three rifles, and three bolos. The battle was the **last significant combat of the United States 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment.**

As the end of the two-year enlistments for most of the U.S. Volunteer troopers was approaching during the **last six months of 1901**, the war continued unabated through 1901 and was expanding to other islands. **The U.S. Volunteer Regiment was disbanded on 2 July 1901.** Meanwhile, the first recruits of the **new regular Army 11th Cavalry Regiment** were reporting for training at Fort Myer, Virginia. The diminutive staffing, resources and training facilities of the regular army at the beginning of the 20th Century was dismal. The first training report rendered by a Major in the 3d Squadron famously reported, ***"I have 400 men who have never seen a horse, I have 400 horses who have never seen a man, and I have 15 Officers who have never seen a man or a horse."***

Fighting flared with increased bitterness on the island of Samar later in 1901. At 0645 **28 September 1901**, 400-500 rebels in seven well organized assault units attacked and **massacred C Company, 9th Infantry** during breakfast in a small U.S. Army garrison adjacent to the town of **Balangiga**. After stealthy killing the U.S. guards, the mess tent and the barracks were attacked. Of C Company's original 74 man garrison, 48 were killed and 26 survived, 22 of them severely wounded, some of which died later from their wounds. The dead included all of C Company's commissioned officers. Many of the Americans were hacked to death before they could grab their firearms. The few who escaped the main attack on the mess tent fought back with kitchen utensils, steak knives, and chairs. News of the American military defeat at Balangiga shocked the U.S. public when newspapers equated the massacre to [George Armstrong Custer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Armstrong_Custer)'s Last Stand at the [Battle of the Little Bighorn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Little_Bighorn) in 1876, considering the incident as one of the worst defeats of the U.S. Army to date.

U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt ordered his military governor of the Philippines to pacify Samar. Brigadier General Jacob "Howling Jake" Smith was appointed to accomplish the task. General Smith, who was enraged by the guerrilla massacre, launched a ferocious retaliatory campaign. He ordered, ***"I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; and the more you burn and kill, the better it will please me."*** and further ordered U.S. Marine Major Littleton Waller to have his 315 Marines to ***"Kill Everyone Over Ten".*** These retaliation measures obviously were not what President Teddy Roosevelt meant when he ordered the pacification of Samar. The indiscriminate ferocity resulted in the courts-martial of the two United States field commanders, Brigadier General "Howling Jake" Smith and Marine Major Littleton Waller. General Smith was convicted, admonished and forced to retire.

By the time the first elements of the **U. S. Army Regular 11th Cavalry Regiment** reached the Philippines in **early 1902**, the 11th U. S. Volunteer Cavalry virtually ceased to exist as its ranks were severely depleted when most of the volunteers’ enlistments ended during the second half of 1901. *Several veterans from the former 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry who had just returned from the Philippines enlisted into the newly formed 11th Cavalry before it was deployed to the Philippines.*

Scores of **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry** troopers remained in the Philippines after discharge and some became permanent residents in the new U.S. Colony, Some joined other U.S. Regular Army units fighting in the Philippine Islands and **some integrated into the newly arrived 11th Cavalry Regiment**. The First Squadron was dispatched to Samar to complete the island's pacification, Second Squadron was sent to Batangas Province, and Third Squadron to northern Luzon. The Blackhorse Regiment’s first official battle streamer was earned on **Samar** by the 1st Squadron, 11th Cavalry in 1902 and the Blackhorse Regiment's first trooper Killed In Action was Private Clarence L. Gibbs, **KIA 4 March 1902.**

A few of the proven combat veterans from the disbanded **11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry received** **Regular Army Commissions**, carrying the little known legacy of the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry forward into the 11th Cavalry "Blackhorse" Regiment and other Regular Army units. The official history and lineage of the regular army 11th U.S. Cavalry "Blackhorse" Regiment **does not** recognize the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry.

However, it can be argued that the 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry's two-year creation by Congress to fight in the Philippines to secure USA's newly acquired territory **did** contribute to the rapid battlefield success on the U. S. Army Regular 11th Cavalry Regiment. In addition to enlisting a number of former 11th U.S. Volunteer Cavalry combat veterans ***"with a combination of the best qualities of both Volunteers and Regulars"***, the fearsome battlefield reputation of Volunteer 11th Cavalry established against the rebels was passed on by the rebels to the Regular 11th Cavalry as there was little discernable difference between the combat patrols of the two 11th Cavalry's units. One initial notable difference was that Colonel Francis Moore, **the commander of the new 11th Cavalry, ordered the Regiment to fight dismounted.** As the Regiment became more experienced jungle fighters as the Volunteer 11th Cavalry was, the Regular 11th Cavalry was given back their horses for their appropriate combat patrols.

President Theodore Roosevelt declared the official end to hostilities on **4 July 1902**, which terminated USA's military rule of the Philippine Islands. However, guerilla warfare continued from individual tribes on Luzon, Leyte and the Muslim Moros of Samar and other southern Philippine islands as they launched further uprisings for another decade. The tropical climate, illness and guerrilla warfare gradually depleted the Regiment to one-third strength. Orders home were is-sued to the Regiment in March 1904 and within a month, the Regiment was scattered around the United States once more.

**AFTER THE U.S. REGULAR 11th CAVALRY REGIMENT RETURNS TO THE USA**

The Philippine Constabulary was established after the military rule was terminated on 4 July 1902 as an archipelago-wide police force and to deal with the remnants of the insurgent movement. The Philippine Constabulary gradually took over the responsibility for suppressing guerrilla and bandit activities from United States Army units. Resistance groups remained active fighting the United States military and Philippine Constabulary forces until the 5-day Battle of Bud Bagsak on the island of Jolo in June 1913, which marked the end of Moro rebellion and the organized Philippine Insurrection. The defending Moro fighters were fortified at the top of Mount Bagsak on the island of Jolo, The attacking Americans were led by General John 'Black Jack' Pershing. The Moros were entirely annihilated, including their leader, Datu Amil. General Pershing later wrote of the Moro Muslim terrorists: ***"The fighting was the fiercest I have ever seen. They are absolutely fearless, and once committed to combat they count death as a mere incident."***

One hundred years later in the 21st Century, the United States Armed Forces including the 11th Cavalry Regiment continues to defend the United States of America, her global interests and assist her Allies in the fight against extremist Muslim terrorist organizations.

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