

# KANSAS HISTORY

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Frederick Funston, ca. 1897.

This year, 1998, marks the one hundredth anniversary of the "Splendid Little War," known officially in the United States as the Spanish-American War. The conflict, of course, was not so splendid for those 5,462 Americans who died from disease and battle wounds or for their more numerous counterparts among their Cuban allies or Spanish adversaries. Neither so for Filipinos who resisted American domination as they had Spanish or for those Americans who opposed U.S. imperialism. But the anniversary does afford the opportunity to explore some very real and significant Kansas connections with that international conflict, and no one was more identified with the conflict than Kansas's own Frederick Funston, pictured above in the uniform of the Cuban insurgent army.

An adventuresome young man, Fred Funston left his father's Allen County farm to attend the University of Kansas, and subsequently worked as a reporter and as an employee of the Santa Fe railroad, before obtaining a position with the U.S. Department of Agriculture that took him on expeditions to the desert Southwest, the Rocky Mountains, and Alaska. Always looking for lucrative financial opportunities as well as adventure, Funston spent some time on the lecture circuit and then set out for Central America to study prospects for establishing a coffee plantation. Unable to organize a company, he traveled to New York where he made contact with the Cuban junta and soon was sailing to Cuba where he joined the insurrectionary army fighting to rid the island of Spanish domination.

Although Funston made his journey as a journalist, by early March 1897 he informed his father that he was "chief of Artillery . . . under General Calix Garcia. . . . He has taken a great liking to me

and I find my position rather enjoyable. He is almost sure to be the first President of Cuba after independence is achieved and as I have some big schemes in regard to railroad franchises in my head, I am glad to stand in with him." Like many Americans of his era, Funston had pecuniary interests in the struggle, but he also was committed to the cause, believing Spain had imposed an "unjust government on the people whom she has robbed and plundered for generations."

Nearly "broken down by the hardships" and believing he had done his "share for Cuban Independence," Funston returned to the U.S. to recuperate in December 1897. Ironically, after the U.S. declared war on the Spanish government in April 1898, Funston took no part in the Cuban phase of the war. Instead, he was given command of the Twentieth Kansas Volunteer Infantry, which sailed to the Philippines where it helped end the insurrection that had broken out there after the defeat of the Spanish. For his distinguished service, Colonel Funston was promoted to brigadier general of volunteers and awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for gallantry.

Thus, "Fighting Fred" Funston won much fame and glory for a campaign that most would now consider a rather inglorious chapter in American history. To his own generation, however, Funston and all the other soldiers of the Spanish-American War had "broken down the doors of medieval superstition, and permitted millions of serfs to breathe the free air of modern civilization. Their heroic achievements," wrote one prominent Kansan, "are the crowning glory of the closing century."

This year Kansas History will highlight the state's role in the 1898 war in a four-part series of photographs on the inside front cover of each issue.

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VIRGIL W. DEAN  
Editor

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depicts one of many interactions  
between American Indians  
and the military. Indian  
relationships with Fort Riley  
are the subject of "A Richly  
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Cover: Painting by Samuel J.  
Reader of the 1856 Battle of  
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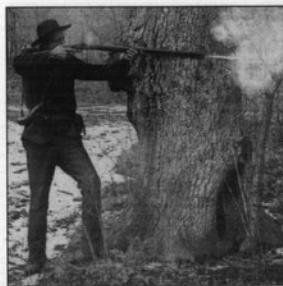
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