

SUBMISSION TEMPLATE

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FILIPINO AMERICANS AND THE US CIVIL WAR

Filipino Americans served in the US Civil War for both the United States (US) and Confederate States (CS). The Civil War was fought from 1861 to 1865 between the Union and the Confederacy, eleven Southern states that seceded from the US and formed the Confederate States of America. The primary objective of the CS was to maintain the right to enslave Black people. The war began shortly after the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln when Confederate troops attacked Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. The two sides mobilized close to three million men to fight in the four-year conflict. Although foreign-born non-citizens were not required to enlist by either side, a number of Filipino Americans volunteered to fight. For some, military service provided fair pay and steady employment at a time when their options were limited; for others it was an opportunity to demonstrate allegiance to an adopted community.

Filipino American Seamen

By the 1860s, Filipinos could be found in most major US port cities. They worked on whaling vessels based out of New Bedford and aboard merchant ships sailing out of Union ports like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, and Confederate ports like New Orleans, Charleston, and Mobile. Those who left the seaman's life worked as carpenters, cooks, fishermen, and farmhands. They were part of the large immigrant population that was building the country. The Civil War disrupted economic growth and shifted labor opportunities to wartime activities. By the 1860s Filipinos had established their fitness as sailors. When war broke out, they were presented with an opportunity to earn a good wage by serving in the US or CS Navy.

US Navy Enlistment

The rapid expansion of the US Navy during the Civil War required a pool of experienced sailors. The Union recruited heavily in port cities, offering high wages and the promise of bounties for the capture of enemy ships. Filipinos enlisted at all three enlistment ranks: Seamen, sailors who could name and attend to each rope on a sailing vessel; Ordinary Seamen, sailors who could splice and handle lines; and Landsman, sailing novices. On

March 3, 1863 the US Congress implemented a draft of males between the ages of twenty and forty-five that included residents who intended to become citizens. Perhaps indicating a desire to seek citizenship, more Filipinos enlisted in this second wave of recruitment.

CS Navy Enlistment

The US Navy from the very beginning had the advantage at sea. The South was an agrarian society without enough skilled seamen or an established war fleet. Despite a nativist distrust of foreign-born residents, the CS recruited Filipino mariners as Seamen, the highest paying enlistment rank. A number of Filipino sailors enlisted in the CS Navy. Perhaps because they had few other options. A US Navy blockade limited the number of merchant vessels entering Southern ports, reducing employment opportunities for sailors. The blockade induced at least one Filipino to sail with a CS privateer, a private ship authorized by the Confederacy to capture foreign vessels. Joseph Cruz del Carno sailed on the *Savannah*, a privateer that attacked one merchant ship before being captured by the *USS Perry*. Carno and his shipmates were put on trial, where Carno argued that he held no allegiance to the Confederacy, that he joined the *Savannah* for money. He explained that he was in Charleston when the war started and could find no other employment.

Battle of Mobile Bay

Filipinos fought on both sides of the Battle of Mobile Bay, serving on several US and at least one CS vessel involved in the sea battle. Charles Mine, a Filipino American who served as a diver on the *USS Hartford*, played a significant role in the US Navy's victory at Mobile Bay. He swam around the bay to locate and disarm mines, which allowed the US fleet to navigate the Confederate minefield and capture the port. Filipino sailors aboard the *CSS Gaines* were on the losing side of the battle. The *CSS Gaines* was heavily damaged by US gunships and was forced to retreat. The crew beached the vessel and escaped to land.

Filipino American Infantrymen

A few Filipino Americans enlisted in the US and CS infantries. While these men may have been motivated to enlist by an income, they also would have been compelled by their ties to a local community. Infantry service was one way that foreign-born residents could demonstrate loyalty to their community and demonstrate their ties to a place.

Union Infantryman

Felix Balderry was one of the few Filipino Americans to join an infantry unit. Service in infantries allowed neighbors to fight together and represent their region. Balderry, who worked as a farmhand in Michigan, served as a foot-soldier in the 11th Michigan Infantry with other young men from the region. In the summer of 1864, the 11th Michigan fought in the Atlanta Campaign, a Union offensive to capture the capital of Georgia. The 11th Infantry marched for weeks, engaging in intermittent battles to push Confederate lines back. With little shelter and orders to hold their positions on the battlefield, the soldiers were constantly exposed to inclement weather. Balderry contracted a respiratory infection during a summer storm. He survived the

illness, but it left him paralyzed in one arm. After the war he resettled in Michigan, where his defense of the Union would have been a testament to his loyalty to the community.

Spanish Regiment

In Louisiana, where Filipino fisherman had established the village of St. Malo, some Filipinos felt compelled to join the fight in order to protect New Orleans. On April 2, 1962, weeks before the city fell to Union forces, a number of Filipino fishermen joined the Spanish Regiment of the European Brigade. With the US Navy steaming up the Mississippi River, Confederate troops retreated from the city, causing residents to panic. The European Brigade restored order and protected businesses from a mob of looters. Once Union troops established control of the city a few weeks later, the brigade disbanded.

Randy Gonzales

FURTHER READINGS

Mercene, Floro L. (2007). *Manila Men in the World*. Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press.

Louisiana, Filipinos in
Manilamen
Settlement in St. Malo, Louisiana
South, Filipinos in the
Spanish-Galleon Trade
U.S. Military, Filipino Americans in
U.S. Navy, Filipino Americans in
Veterans, Filipino