

Fig. 1

# THE GUITAR THAT WENT TO WAR

by Paul Brett

*Here's a unique guitar that could tell a fantastic tale. Whilst the guitar in question itself is rare, it's not all that valuable as a guitar. It's what's written and recorded on the top table that is absolutely mind-blowing and should be a very important addition to American history. It was originally owned by a serving soldier of the 1st California Volunteers, 1st Regiment, Company B and this guy literally took his guitar to war. The American / Spanish War to be precise.*

I've never seen the likes of this and if you look at the photos, you will see many hand written names or signatures of serving soldiers in this unit, including the dates of people who were injured or died.

On May 25th 1898 'The Steamship 'The City of Pekingin' took the 1st California to the Philippines ( FIG 2 )

The unit took part in actions on July 31, 1898 (near Malate) and in the capture of Manila on August 13, 1898. In the former action, it lost one man killed, and ten were wounded, in the latter, one man killed and two wounded. The

Philippine-American War began on February 4, 1899. On July 26, 1899, the First California Volunteer Infantry left the Philippines for the United States, arriving in the U.S. on August 24, 1899. The unit was mustered out of service on



FIG. 2 - 1st California ship - where it arrived on June 30.

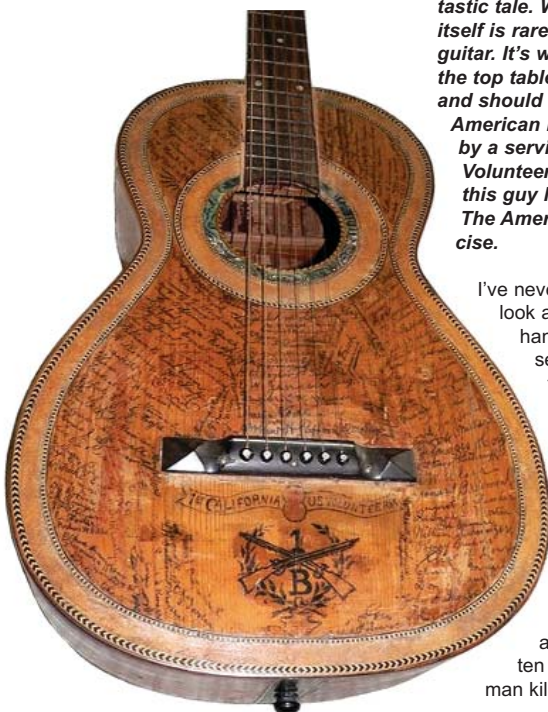




Fig. 3

September 21, 1899. At the time of muster out, the unit consisted of fifty officers and 999 enlisted men.

During its term of service, the unit had one officer who died of wounds

received in battle. In addition, eight enlisted men were killed in action, one man died from wounds received in battle, twenty-four died from disease, two died as the result of accidents and one man drowned. Also forty-three men were discharged on disability and seven men deserted.

Now I know that many guitars have musical and player history, but I have never seen one with a military one. I don't actually know the name of the soldier who created this, as it was handed down to it's current owner, Ramm Armstrong by his best friends widow. Ramm says " As you can see from the photos all the members of the 1st California Volunteers, 1st Regiment, Company B had signed the guitar, the Units insignia is inscribed below the bridge and those members of Company B that died, the place of their death and in one instance John Vincent Dunmore was wounded on Aug 13/98 Died Aug 14 in Manila. Also of an interesting note is

Luther H. Dinsmore's demise on Aug 14/99 on board 115 A. T. (Army Transport) Sherman Japan Sea. Most likely on the return voyage to the States. " ( See Fig. 1)

So what make is the guitar ? I originally thought it may have been a Joseph Bohmann. He was a Czechoslovakian immigrant who went to the States and founded Bohmann's American Musical Industry in 1878. He built mandolins and guitars from 1878 to the 1920's. When his last patent was issued in 1916, he would have been 68, a ripe old age for a guitar maker at that time. No one is sure what happen to the factory and instruments after Bohmann's death. But some instruments have survived over the years. I asked Ramm to check for numbers on the back of the machine heads, as Bohmann used to etch numbers there. Ramm said there were faint markings in the places I described, but they didn't match Bohmann ones. So. it's not a Bohmann.

Over the years, judging by the photographs, it has had quite a few poor repairs.

You can see the lighter wood filler in places and the bridge has been screwed down unsympathetically. (Fig. 3)

This guitar could even have been made in the Phillipines and purchased by the soldier.

So how can you put a value on this piece ? It is in my opinion, a priceless antiquity that should be in the Metropolitan Museum in New York and listed as **THE GUITAR THAT WENT TO WAR - LITERALLY !**

