Autobiography of George Dewey, Admiral of the Navy

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PREFACE

It was my fortune to be in command on May 1, 1898, of an American squadron in the first important naval action against a foreign foe since the War of 1812. The morning that we steamed into Manila Bay marked an epoch in the history of our navy and in that of our country in its relations with other great nations. A battle in a harbor whose name was unknown to our average citizen made us a world-power, with a resultant impetus to the national imagination and a new entail of national responsibilities. My orders were to capture or destroy the enemy’s force, and to conduct offensive operations in the Philippine Islands. These orders I endeavored to obey with all possible expedition, in keeping with the traditions of our navy.

After the battle I received so many requests from publishers and editors for contributions in any form under my name that I might well have concluded that the victory which had come as the climax of my naval career was about to embark me on a literary career, toward which I naturally had the disinclination of a man of action. Urgings from many quarters to write my reminiscences have continued
to the present time. My answer invariably has been that my record up to the time of the battle had not in itself sufficient personal significance to warrant an autobiography; for the life of every naval officer doing his duty as it comes to him, under the authority of the President and of Congress, merges into the life of the whole navy as a unit of service in preparedness for national defence in a crisis.

In keeping with the decision made when I was at Manila, my official reports have been thus far my only public account of the battle. However, after my return to Washington, for the sake of historical accuracy I wrote, with the assistance of my aide, the late Commander Nathan Sargent, U. S. N., a complete account of my command of the Asiatic Squadron from the time I hoisted my commodore’s pennant until my return home in 1899. My plan was not to have this published until after my death. But now, fifteen years after the battle, I am yielding to the arguments of my friends, not only to have it published, but also to write my recollections of my career before Manila Bay brought me into prominent public notice.

It is fifty-nine years since I became an acting midshipman. Thanks to the creation of the grade of admiral of the navy by Congress in 1899, I was not retired at the usual retiring age, but kept on the active list for life. My memory stretches from an apprenticeship under the veterans of the War of