

**PRIMARY SOURCE** from *The Rough Riders*  
by Theodore Roosevelt

*During the Spanish-American-Cuban War, Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt led a charge of two African-American regiments and the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill in Cuba. As you read this excerpt from Roosevelt's account of the battle, visualize what happened during the assault.*

The infantry got nearer and nearer the crest of the hill. At last we could see the Spaniards running from the rifle-pits as the Americans came on in their final rush. Then I stopped my men for fear they should injure their comrades, and called them to charge the next line of trenches, on the hills in our front, from which had been undergoing a good deal of punishment. Thinking that the men would all come, I jumped over the wire fence in front of us and started at the double; but, as a matter of fact, the troopers were so excited, what with shooting and being shot, and shouting and cheering, that they did not hear, or did not heed me; and after running about a hundred yards I found I had only five men along with me. Bullets were ripping the grass all around us, and one of the men, Clay Green, was mortally wounded.

I ran back, jumped over the wire fence, and went over the crest of the hill, filled with anger against the troopers, and especially those of my own regiment, for not having accompanied me. They, of course, were quite innocent of wrongdoing; and even while I taunted them bitterly for not having followed me, it was all I could do not to smile at the look of injury and surprise that came over their faces, while they cried out: "We didn't hear you, we didn't see you go, Colonel; lead on now, we'll sure follow you." I wanted the other regiments to come too, so I ran down to where General Sumner was and asked him if I might make the charge; and he told me to go and that he would see that the men followed. By this time everybody had his attention attracted, and when I leaped over the fence again, with Major Jenkins beside me, the men of the various regiments which were already on the hill came with a rush, and we started across the wide valley which lay between us and the Spanish intrenchments.

Captain Dimmick, now in command of the Ninth, was bringing it forward; Captain McBlain

had a number of Rough Riders mixed with his troop, and led them all together; Captain Taylor had been severely wounded. The long-legged men like Greenway, Goodrich, Sharp-shooter Proffit, and others, outstripped the rest of us, as we had a considerable distance to go. Long before we got near them the Spaniards ran, save a few here and there, who either surrendered or were shot down. When we reached the trenches we found them filled with dead bodies in the light blue and white uniform of the Spanish regular army. . . . There was very great confusion at this time, the different regiments being completely intermingled—white regulars, colored regulars, and Rough Riders. General Sumner had kept a considerable force in reserve on Kettle Hill under Major Jackson of the Third Cavalry. We were still under a heavy fire and I got together a mixed lot of men and pushed on from the trenches and ranch-houses which we had just taken, driving the Spaniards through a line of palm-trees, and over the crest of a chain of hills. When we reached these crests we found ourselves overlooking Santiago.

from Theodore Roosevelt, *The Rough Riders* (New York, 1899). Reprinted in Richard B. Morris and James Woodress, eds., *Voices from America's Past*, Vol. 2, *Backwoods Democracy to World Power* (New York: Dutton, 1963), 276-277.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why was Roosevelt angry with the troopers at first?
2. From reading this account, what conclusions can you draw about the Battle of San Juan Hill?
3. After the battle, Roosevelt wrote to his friend Senator Lodge: "I am entitled to the medal of honor, and I want it." Based on your reading of his account, do you agree with Roosevelt? Why or why not?