



Always Ready
Always There

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A piece of history: First Idaho Guardsmen deployed with outdated weapons

By Capt. Robert Taylor, Command Historian

When soldiers of the First Idaho Infantry Regiment of United States Volunteers marched off to participate in the Spanish-American War in 1898, they likely carried Springfield Model 1889 rifles.

The conflict, which was over Spain's control of Cuba, was the first time the Idaho Army National Guard participated in a United States war. Since then, the Idaho Army National Guard has participated in every major U.S. conflict since.

Many U.S. soldiers, especially in National Guard units, used the Springfield Model 1889 during the war. Unfortunately, the single-shot, black powder gun was already outdated by then.

The Army developed the gun after the Civil War in order to fulfill the need for a breech-loading rifle. Funds were low at the end of the war, but there was no shortage of muzzle-loading weapons at the time therefore, the Army converted more than 30,000 rifles to "trapdoor" weapons. The trapdoor allowed muzzle-loading weapons to be opened at the top of the breech to



The US Rifle, Springfield Model 1889, front, was used by most Idaho National Guard Soldiers who deployed to the Philippines during the Spanish-American War in 1898. The U.S. Rifle, Krag-Jorgensen Model 1896, back, was a superior weapon and used by some soldiers toward the end of the unit's rotation in the Philippines. Both rifles are part of the Idaho Military Museum's collection of artifacts from that period.

load a cartridge. The Army continued to use the converted weapons until 1868, when the U.S. Rifle Model 1868 was developed with a "trapdoor" manufactured into it. The rifle went through a series of modifications over the next 30 years and was the weapon used by most National Guard units by 1898.

By the time the Spanish-American War began, the Army and National Guard units had a large stockpile of U.S. Rifle Model 1889s, so those units deployed with them. However, smokeless powder weapons were becoming available around the same time and offered a tactical advantage over the Model 1889 rifle. The black powder cartridge left a cloud of black smoke, which gave away

the shooter's position and created a target for the enemy. Soldiers had to wait until the smoke cleared to fire another round. In addition, the weapon was a single-shot weapon and magazine-fed weapons allowed soldiers to fire more rounds faster in battle.

Late into their tour in the Philippines, the First Idaho Infantry received a dozen U.S. Rifle, Krag-Jorgensen Model 1896s per company for scout use. The rifle featured a five-round magazine and smokeless powder.

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