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THE ARMY WAR COLLEGE

[redacted]

FORT HUMPHREYS, D.C.

May 23, 1935

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
120 East Nineteenth Street,
New York City.

My dear Miss Tarbell:

Your inquirey of April 5, 1935, addressed to The Adjutant General of the Army, as to whether or no barbed wire was used in the War with Spain, has been referred to this Section for reply.

If you mean use by the American army, there is no record of its employment by the troops or purchase by any agency of the War Department. The Quartermaster General reports as follows:

> "The records on file in this office do not show any reference to the use of barbed wire by the Army during the period of the Spanish-American War. The soldiers were provided with wire-cutters for use in cutting through barbed wire fences of the enemy in Cuba."

Neither the Engineer nor Ordnance Departments have any records of the employment or procurement of barbed wire by the United States Government for combat or defense purposes during the War with Spain.

The Spanish forces in Cuba made extensive use of barbed wire enganglements around their block-houses, but the extent to which it was used, can not even be approximated by the War Department here.

The following quotation from an article in the "Army Ordnance," Vol. XV, No. 87, November-December, 1934, pp. 147-148, headed "A Chronicle of Ordnance - II. The Story of Barbed Wire and Machine Guns," by Aiken Simons, may be of interest to you:

> "Barbed wire was patented in the United States in 1874 by Joseph F. Gledden of DeKalb, Illinois. Forty thousand tons were produced in 1880 in this country where its use was general. In England and some continental countries its use was prohibited by law on the humanitarian grounds that it would lacerate cattle, hence it does not seem to have come to the attention of European military engineers. When General Gordon entered Khartoum in February, 1884, he ordered the construction of wire entanglements in front of the earthworks along the river front. These, however, were of smooth (telegraph)wire.

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"The first reference to barbed wire by the Oxford English Dictionary is in 1881, and a British Manual of Field Engineering, dated 1888, discusses and illustrates a barbed wire entanglement. Barbed wire was used extensively by the Spaniards in Cuba in and before 1897, and by the British in the Boer War in 1900. The Russian permanent fortification of Port Arthur designed in 1900, made extensive use of barbed wire entanglements.

" From then on its use became universal with increasing depth and complexity. In 1918, a normal entanglement was considered to be three separate lines about 50 feet thick each."

Very truly yours,

P. R. DAVISON,
Major, Cavalry,
Secretary, Historical Section.

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