

PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN RIFLEMAN

Theodore Roosevelt

By Casey Lane

Theodore Roosevelt was a sickly child, plagued by asthma and poor eyesight. However, with the encouragement of his father, the future 26th and youngest president embarked on a vigorous lifestyle to improve his health. Born to an affluent New York family with a mother of Savannah, Georgia aristocracy, Roosevelt used his advantages to pursue fully what he coined the "strenuous life."

Taking up boxing to increase his strength and health as a boy was the beginning of a lifelong adventurous and sporting lifestyle. He engaged in athletics of all sorts, went west to become a rancher (when the west was still somewhat wild), went on Safari in Africa, and a South American expedition.

While president, Roosevelt completely lost vision in his left eye boxing a young artillery captain at the White House.

Perhaps Roosevelt's most famous adventure was leading the Rough Riders during the Spanish American War. In Cuba, with the Rough Riders, he became, "The Colonel," a moniker he retained the rest of his life. Close friends never referred to him as "Teddy."

As Assistant Secretary of the Navy and an ardent supporter of war with Spain, Roosevelt used his connections to form the First United States Volunteer Cavalry, which became known as the Rough Riders. The regiment was formed in Texas and was composed of cowboys, Indians, Indian fighters, Ivy League College men, lawmen, and outlaws.

The conflict in Cuba inspired 10 American men to fight for every one position available and brought northerners and southerners together again for a common cause.

Lt. Col. Roosevelt deferred command of the regiment to a more experienced officer, but gained the respect of

his men and national notoriety from his exploits with the Rough Riders. Roosevelt's experience with the Rough Riders also strengthened his belief in the importance of rifle marksmanship.

In his second annual message as Governor of New York he remarked "...it should be remembered that target practice proper is the alphabet of the soldier's

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