America's army was weak and ill prepared when President William McKinley and the U.S. Congress led the nation to war with Spain in April 1898. To remedy this situation Congress authorized a volunteer force of two hundred thousand on April 22 and increased the size of the regular army from thirty- to sixty thousand men. Under the authority of the president's first call for troops, People's Party (Populist) Governor John W. Geary authorized the recruitment of three Kansas regiments; a subsequent call resulted in the recruitment of a fourth.

The Twentieth Kansas Volunteer Infantry organized at Topeka on May 9–13, 1896, and arrived by rail in San Francisco, where it trained for overseas duty, on May 20. The Twenty-third Kansas, the all-black regiment, mustered in July and trained in camp at Topeka until departing for garrison duty in Cuba via New York on August 22. The Twenty-first and Twenty-second regiments were organized in mid-May and spent the duration plus several more weeks in training camps in Georgia, Kentucky, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, where they battled only boredom and the diseases that commonly afflict soldiers of that era.

The photograph above was made at Camp Russell A. Alger, Falls Church, Virginia, where the Twenty-second Kansas Volunteer Infantry spent most of its period of service. The regiment was under the command of Colonel Henry L. Lindsey, a Kansas Populist, and Lieutenant Colonel James Graham. Here Graham is shown presenting a pair of socks to Congressman Jeremiah "Sockless Jerry" Simpson of Medicine Lodge, who visited the camp, located very near the nation's capital, on at least one occasion in late May 1898. Simpson, one of the country's most recognized Populist characters, acquired his nickname in 1890 during his first contest for the congressional seat. As a political ploy during a debate with his Republican opponent, Colonel James R. "Prince Hal" Hallowell, Simpson informed the audience that the "Prince" wore silk stockings while the "humble" Simpson wore none at all. The dapper congressman depicted here obviously was not without proper coverings for his feet, but he used the moniker for all it was worth politically, and by 1898 it had become, at least among his fellow Populists, an endearing appellation.

This is the second in a four-part series of photographs on the inside front covers of Kansas History highlighting the state's role in the Spanish-American War.
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