Cervera's fleet tried to escape and was sunk in a one-sided running engagement on 3 July 1898. General Toral recognized the hopelessness of his plight, and surrendered Spanish forces on eastern Cuba on 17 July. American forces went on to take Puerto Rico by 9 August and the Spanish sued for peace on 12 August. The next day, unaware that an armistice had been signed, General Merritt's forces captured Manila after token Spanish resistance.

The landings in Cuba were not opposed, and after some hesitation Shafter decided to take Santiago. A skirmish at Las Guasimas caused the Americans to underrate their foe and consequently, on 1 July 1898, Shafter's Corps launched bloody frontal assaults against strong Spanish fortifications at El Caney and San Juan Hill. Small unit leadership, the bravery of the American soldier, and a significant numerical advantage secured these objectives, leaving the Spanish in an untenable position in Santiago.