

Part VII: Perry Miles protects Camp Dewey from the Spanish

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By July 1898, the Spanish Army had retreated to the fortifications that surrounded Manila. The American Army advanced within 2-3 miles of the Spanish line and set up a camp that they named Camp Dewey.

1st Lt. Perry Miles wrote in his memoir, "Fallen Leaves: Memories of an Old Soldier," that the camp was located in an area that flooded easily, but there was no dry ground nearby large enough to hold the troops. Miles reported that during their stay the average height of the water was a foot deep. The men were given bamboo bunks to place their shelter tents on and a few bamboo walkways were built. The soldiers erected a defensive line of six-foot parapets to protect the camp. There were a few bamboo houses along the American line, but there was one large frame building. Miles wrote that it was the most, "Conspicuous object of any kind in the landscape thereabout."



On Aug. 5, Miles, with the 14th infantry, was assigned to the line near the large house.

"The Spaniards were mounting a gun, evidently a light field piece, on the top of the fort," he wrote. "The 600 yards that separated the fort from the house was remarkably short range for any artillery."

Miles joined two other men and climbed onto the roof of the house to see better.

"Captain Murphy was sitting on the roof and the battery commander and I were standing taking a last look. Just then I heard my first Mauser bullet sing. Probably a Spanish sentinel on outpost duty somewhere induced by the perfect target our group made silhouetted on the skyline, took a single shot at us. I don't believe the bullet came very close to us."

However, the three men wasted no time in getting off the roof. Sixty-three years later, Miles reflected on the incident:

"I knew that Mauser missile wasn't very close, but it gave me a peculiar feeling. It was the first time one of those things had whizzed by with my name on it. It was my baptism by fire. Since that time I have

been in a number of situations where bullets and high explosives have been all about but never since have I felt that any particular missile has been meant specifically for me and me exclusively.”

Miles recalled another incident concerning Capt. John Murphy. The men were permitted to smoke during the day, but the captain had ordered that there would be no smoking at night.

“He said something like this: ‘You may think that the enemy can't see the small lights but he has plenty of men posted who can see over the parapet so no smoking at night until I say you can.’ Captain John, who was probably the oldest man at the time in the American Forces in the Philippines, had lost some of the keenness of his eyesight. He evidently had the order he had given about smoking after dark on his mind and intended personally to see that it was strictly enforced. When darkness came, he began walking along the whole battalion line. When he was in my company area, he saw what he was fearing, a number of little lights glowing brightly and then going out.”

The captain shouted at the men to put their cigarettes out. A nearby soldier told the captain that the lights were coming from fireflies. Immediately the captain yelled, “Put them out anyways.” No one had a chance to laugh at the time, hearing all the noise on the parapets the Spanish opened fire.

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