

Part XII: Miles' memoir details how Philippine-American War started

By Doug Stout

Local History Coordinator

Licking County Library

The Philippine Insurrection, also known as the Philippine-American War, is a forgotten chapter in America's history, even though it lasted over three years and claimed 4,200 American lives.

Participants in this war are grouped with Spanish-American War Veterans, though that war was only eight months long. Because of this, very little is written on this bloody chapter in American history. This makes Johnstown resident and retired Brig. Gen. Perry Miles's memoirs, "Fallen Leaves: Memories of an Old Soldier," of primary importance.

On the night of February 10, 1899, the then-First Lieutenant Miles was on outpost duty in Manila when the Philippine insurgents attacked another point on the American line. Miles noted that the war had begun.



Miles was with recruits that evening from Company I:

“Another thing that surprised me that night was the unperturbed way that these recruits, who had never been under fire, slept through the night, trusting to the sentinels on the watch to give them ample notice of attack; nor did they seem to lose any sleep in contemplation of the probable next day's battle. Of course, this was all to the good and their steadiness of nerve the gift of ignorance. It was a God-given blessing that they didn't realize in any measure that within a few hours half their number would be killed or wounded.”

In the morning Miles received an order to advance his troops and capture a blockhouse:

“I deployed my attachment across the cleared space and advanced at a brisk walk. When we cleared an irregular hedge across the zone of our advance about two hundred yards after starting, it seemed that all the powers of hell had been concentrated on this one spot. We were met by a violent short-range rifle fire from our left flank and front. The insurgents had evidently been waiting for us to walk into a trap which they had just sprung. The men dropped to the ground and began firing excitedly and ineffectively. To make matters worse, just at this time, I was joined by Company M, with Lieutenant Mitchell commanding. There were entirely too many men for this narrow front. The men from Company M also went prone to the ground wherever they happened to be and commenced firing. It was a terrible ordeal for men to experience in their first engagement with the enemy.

“Almost at once, Lieutenant Mitchell was mortally wounded and I immediately fell heir to the command of his company too. Men in places were two or three deep, all firing. Our own men in rear were endangering those in front without materially injuring the enemy. I saw that my first urgent task was to get the firing stopped so that I could get control of the men again and then to get out of there as fast as we could.

“My voice was lost in the uproar so I waded into the men in the rear who were firing behind others and slapped them with the flat of my naked sword which I carried at all times in my hand without a scabbard to get between my legs. By this means I could make some of the men understand what I wanted, but there was still as much noise as before since most of our own fire was continuing and that of the enemy, some of which on our flank could not have been more than one hundred yards away, seemed to have increased in intensity.”

Doug Stout is the Licking County Library Local History Coordinator. You may contact him at 740.349.5571 or dstout@lickingcountylibrary.org.