

Part X: Miles walks unarmed into Spanish-held Bishop's Palace to gather intel

By Doug Stout

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While the world welcomed in the new year of 1899, 1st Lt. Perry Miles was stationed with the United States Army in Manila. The war with Spain was over, and the Spanish had ceded the Philippines to the United States, a fact the new Philippine government, led by President Emilio Aguinaldo, wasn't happy about.

In Miles' memoir, "Fallen Leaves: Memories of an Old Soldier," he wrote, the Filipinos believed "Manila, and also Luzon and all the other islands were certainly lost to them, certainly for an indefinitely long time unless they could recover them by force of arms."

The American troops held their lines in Manila, occupying blockhouses left by the Spanish, while the insurrectionists surrounded the city with a no-man's-land in between. One evening Miles was with the 14th Infantry on outpost duty at Blockhouse 13, when he was approached by Gen. Arthur MacArthur Jr., father of future Gen. Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur told him that the previous night, several armed "insurrectos" had entered no-man's-land and taken possession of the Bishop's Palace.



"He then directed me to find out about how many were in the party and give him an estimate of the number of arms they had with them," Miles wrote. "I didn't know how to go about getting this information. This was out of my line. If it were a question of attacking the place, I would have made a try for it, but everyone was under orders not to bring on an engagement. Our leaning over backward to avoid the issue was the probable reason this bantering party had come over to test the extent to which they could go."

Miles decided to go alone and unarmed to see what he could learn. As he approached the sentry at the palace gate, "I told the sentinel in my very broken Spanish that I was looking for a drunken American soldier that I believed was somewhere in this neighborhood."

The guard made no reply, and Miles walked right by him. Inside the grounds, he found what he estimated to be 75 men "milling around." Miles then entered the palace and reported that he saw: "no stacks of arms nor bunks. A few of the men there had rifles in their hands. The bunks and arm racks were doubtless upstairs, but when I started to go up I was stopped and no drunken soldiers' story could get me any further."

Miles reported to his superiors that he estimated there were 100 occupants at the palace: "I don't know whether these insurrectos were ever moved back again before February or not. As it chanced, my outpost duties were in the Blockhouse 14 area after that.

"Shortly after this, a sergeant and four privates of Company A of the Battalion of Engineers were arrested by insurgents. The insurgents claimed that the engineers were within the insurgent's lines. These soldiers were held captive (for) several days and as a result of some heated correspondence they were released."

As Miles turned his calendar to February, the trouble between the Americans and Filipinos was about to erupt.

You are invited to visit the Downtown Newark location of the Licking County Library to view the May Collective exhibit. On display are the names of the 1,098 men and women who lived, died or were buried in Licking County while they were serving their country. Doug Stout is the Licking County Library Local History Coordinator. You may contact him at 740.349.5571 or dstout@lickingcountylibrary.org.