

Part XII: Miles' company ambushed while advancing on Philippine-held blockhouse

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On Feb. 11, 1898, 1st Lt. Perry Miles was commanding Company I of the 14th Infantry advancing on a blockhouse that had been captured by Philippine insurrectionists.

On his left flank was Company M, commanded by a Lieutenant Mitchell. As the soldiers passed through a hedge into an open field, they were ambushed. The soldiers went prone to the ground firing at the insurgents. Miles realized he had to get the men moving or they would all be killed. He yelled for the troops to cease fire but realized that his voice was lost in the din of battle. Miles then took the flat of his sword and moved along the line striking the men to get their attention.

Miles wrote in his memoir, "Fallen Leaves: Memories of an Old Soldier":



"Some of the men said afterward that I swore and cursed as I belabored them with my sword and kept shouting, 'Cease fire.' I have no memory of cursing. If I did, it was the first and only time I ever indulged in this unusually senseless outlet to one's feelings in my contacts with enlisted men."

As Miles moved along the line he encountered the mortally wounded Lieutenant Mitchell:

"I asked him if I could do anything for him, but I could see that I could do nothing. He was on his back with an abdominal wound that had traverses this vital region from side to side. His answer to me was: 'Go ahead, don't mind me.' Those were the words of self-sacrifice, of the hero who puts his country above his life. There was much yet to be done to accomplish for our country what we started out to do, this older man of iron gray hair and beard while suffering the agony of his death wound showed his much younger and junior fellow officer how to die and how in the most desperate situation to place duty first.

"To go ahead is what I had already resolved to do as soon as possible. I had hoped to advance as a unit. Ducks on the wing of course, can be brought down, but never are as vulnerable as when pot shot from a blind. My men about this hedge were being pot shot. If we didn't take flight forward soon the remnant would be sure to fly shamefully in the opposite position.

"I soon realized that I could not advance as a unit, but I felt sure that if I led the way, some of the men near me, who could see me, would follow. Then others would come along and eventually our line could be built up some place forward, I hoped in Blockhouse 14 and vicinity. I dashed forward and saw that a few men were close behind me. The atmosphere here seemed less oppressive than back there at the hedge

where we had furnished another gory installment to those several former unhappy, experiences which gave to this short unimproved roadway the suggestive name, Bloody Lane.

“I don’t believe I looked back again, but within five minutes we were abreast of the blockhouse, which was a few yards west of the road. Five or six men were right behind me and the insurgents left the blockhouse and made for the trenches across the lateral road as my little group of close followers came up. As I arrived, I saw an insurgent standing on the parapet of the trenches across the lateral road who was probably an officer directing the operations of the men left in the blockhouse.

“For the first and only time in my Army career, which included three wars and other disturbances during which I always carried a revolver or pistol in campaign, I drew my revolver, cocked it, took careful aim and fired at this man on the parapet. As I fired, he either fell or jumped back into the trench. I never wanted to know which.”

Miles and six other men had assaulted the blockhouse and driven the insurgents to the rear.

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