

Part I: Brig. General Perry L. Miles of Johnstown starts his Army Career At West Point

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The career of retired Brigadier General Perry Miles of Johnstown is known by only a few—even though he authored a book on the subject that he titled *Fallen Leaves: Memories of an Old Soldier*. The book begins with his service in Vancouver, Washington, but to know Miles one has to look at his life before that.

Miles was born on October 15, 1873 in Westerville, Ohio to James Alexander and Mary Longwell-Miles. He was their second child. In 1878 the couple welcomed a daughter into their family. Tragedy struck the Miles' household on February 10, 1885 when Mary passed away at age 39.

At the time of his wife's death, James Alexander Miles was a prominent lawyer and was active in Franklin County political circles. His children were brought to Licking County to stay with Mary's parents, James and Judith Longwell, on their farm in Liberty Township. An article in the March 24, 1887 issue of *The Johnstown Independent* states that at the Wolf School, three students merited certification in special testing, one was 13-year-old Perry Miles. His father remarried and the children moved back to Columbus where Perry graduated from Columbus High School in 1891.



Perry received a nomination to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point where he began classes in June 1891. Though Miles had spent just a couple of years in Licking County, he considered it home. In 1894 *The Johnstown Independent* listed him as paying \$.90 for a subscription to the paper to be sent to West Point so he could keep up on the local news. On June 12, 1895, Miles graduated 23rd in his class of 52 cadets and received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army. He was assigned to serve with Company E with the 14th Infantry Division at Vancouver Barracks in Washington. *The Johnstown Independent* mentioned in a September 19, 1895 edition that Miles was spending his furlough at his grandparent's farm on his way to Vancouver to “accept an important military position. He will read the *Independent* regularly.”

Miles reflected on his first assignment in his book, *Fallen Leaves* which he published in 1961. “In the early months of 1898, we at Vancouver Barracks were still living the unperturbed garrison life of the times. Target practice and the annual practice march seemed to be the prime objectives of training for the troops. To most of our people, I suppose the little Regular Army of less than 25,000 of that time seemed ample for the police duties, which then seemed about the only ones the Regular Army would be called upon to do, and even those duties only in case the National Guard or State troops might be

inadequate. Although the international skies had been so clear for a number of years preceding 1898, a small cloud with storm possibilities had been forming near the horizon, from our viewpoint in the United States. Spain, which had been so thoroughly ensconced in power in the Western Hemisphere for so long a time was now confronted by a revolution in Cuba.”

The U.S.S. Maine was sent to Havana, Cuba to protect American interests. On February 15, 1898, the battleship exploded and sank, killing 268 sailors. While it is now believed that a fire on board ignited the ships' ammunition stocks, those who wanted the U.S. to go to war with Spain declared it sabotage and used the motto “Remember the Maine” to gather public sentiment for war. With the explosion of the Maine, Miles' quiet frontier life was about to change.

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