

Part III: Perry Miles describes journey to Philippines, his first ocean voyage

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When war was declared on Spain in April 1898, the first problem the U.S. government had was finding naval ships to transport American troops to the Philippines. Perry Miles, who was a 1st Lieutenant at the time with the 14th Infantry Regiment wrote about his experiences in his memoir, *Fallen Leaves: Memories of an Old Soldier*. While troops gathered at San Francisco, the army chartered three private ships, the City of Sydney, the Peking and the Australia to ferry the men to the islands.

On May 24, 1898, Miles and the rest of the 14th boarded the City of Sydney. They found that the ship had had little to no renovations made to accommodate troops. Since Miles was an officer he had a private room but his men were placed below deck. Miles described what they found, "The troop space, however, was meager, to say the least. There were no troop galleys nor mess decks, and the berths for the enlisted men were those habitually used for the steerage transport of Chinese laborers. Two decks of hard wooden bunks each separated from its neighbor on each side by a narrow partition, ran back six deep from the only aisle to the bulkhead. That arrangement meant that if the unlucky man next to the bulkhead became seasick, he would have to crawl or scramble over five comrades in his attempt to reach the aisle, an attempt which might prove, if unsuccessful, irrevolving to the five-bed fellows and as messy to them as the poor devil who started it."

Miles went on to record that even though there was plenty of food on board, the galley was too small to accommodate the feeding of the troops more than two meals a day. The men took turns eating throughout the day. "But young men of health and spirit would stand a great deal of discomfort and hardship to be part of this great venture into the unknown. This was to be the first time in the Nation's history that an expedition of Army troops would cross an ocean. There was romance ahead and perhaps the makings of history in which we might find ourselves participants. We supposed, of course, that we would be expected to land somewhere in the vicinity of Manila, but we knew nothing about the strength of the Spanish garrison there or in other parts of the islands."

On May 25, at five o'clock in the evening, the convoy set sail from San Francisco for the Philippines on what was Miles' first ocean voyage. He wrote that he went to the stern of the ship to watch the city fade away in the distance. "I enjoyed the clean, fresh smell of the ocean breeze on my face and the enlivening feel of the deck beneath my feet. It was but a short time before we reached the Golden Gate,



were crossing the bar and heading out into the wide waters which all at once had become more turbulent. The ship had taken on much more motion. I was standing where I was getting the maximum effect of the ship's pitching. I thought it wise to sit down on a nearby coil of rope. The joy of living and the thrill of the sea were fast losing their zest." Miles decided to make his way to his quarters. "On reaching my room and glancing into the mirror, I saw that my face had a greenish pallor and then I no longer suspected, but definitely knew from the evidence furnished at once by the handy receptacle on my bunk, I was indisputably and embarrassingly seasick." (To be continued.)

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