

Part V: Miles takes Spanish Fort San Luis in Guam

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On June 20, 1898 First Lieutenant Perry Miles was part of a convoy traveling to the Spanish controlled island of Guam. The transports the soldiers were on had no guns, so Navy escort ship U.S.S. Charleston led the way. Miles wrote in his memoir *Fallen Leaves: Memories of an Old Soldier*, that there was a small island about two miles from the mainland of Guam. Within a mile or so of the nearest corner of the island's vertical bluff there was a Spanish fort named San Luis. As soon as the Charleston came within range of the fort, it fired a shot over San Luis as a warning.

“After a half minute or so, the Charleston fired a second shot into the island itself, I suppose into what appeared to the fire director to be the fortification that gave name to the place. After waiting a minute or so for a response that never came, the Charleston steamed farther out towards the small island, an easy target for the guns of Fort San Luis, if there were any such things.



The next thing we could see through our glasses were the preparations for lowering boats for a landing party. About this time, a single rowboat was seen threading its torturous way through the coral reefs from a little village which appeared from the skipper's chart to be the only port from the island's capital of Agana, five miles distant. The small boat was also seen by the crew of one of the lifeboats from the Charleston and they rowed out to the small craft to meet them. Once the boats met it was found that the Governor of Guam was onboard, he told the sailors, that he had heard the salute from the ship's guns and welcomed this unusual and unexpected visit and that he was greatly embarrassed to have to acknowledge that it was impossible for his forces to return the salute because he had no powder. He said that he was supplied from Manila and that his ship sent there for powder and other supplies was long overdue, and that he feared that some accident or disaster had happened to it. The Governor was then informed that what he heard was not a salute; that the United States and Spain were at war; that the Spanish fleet in Philippine waters had been destroyed; and that the Governor could see that he had no power to resist the man of war and three shiploads of soldiers and must surrender the island, with himself and all military forces." The governor had no choice but to surrender the Spanish garrison—a total of 50 men.

The Spanish governor and soldiers were brought aboard the transports and the ships headed for the Philippines. Miles wrote, "The prisoners had as much freedom aboard ship as we did ourselves. Most of the men, I believe, looked upon this event as the first step towards their return to Spain and home.

A day or so after we left Guam, when we went down for dinner, we had our attention called at once and with anticipatory smacking of lips to the days' menu. There was the piece de resistance in satisfying type: 'Pigeons a la Guam.' By this time, we had been getting pretty tired of the lack of variety in our diet in which pork and beans had been the most frequent offender. Pigeons in any shape that 'a la Guam' might prove to be as welcome a change for us. We took little interest in the soup, but in good time what we were waiting for arrived under its ample cover to keep it warm. As our mouths watered someone whisked off the cover. But horrors! What we saw was the same old mess of pork and beans. It was the kind of joke that only the steward could enjoy and it was well for him that evening that his whereabouts were unknown." (To be continued.)

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