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HISTORICAL DIVISION

STAND, GENTLEMEN, HE SERVED ON SAMAR!

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Table of Contents

On-Line	Original	
	Page	Page
Stand, Gentlemen, He Served On Samar!	1	5

STAND, GENTLEMEN, HE SERVED ON SAMAR!

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For a period of some two years following the cessation of hostilities with Spain, some of the wild pagan tribes of the Philippines (about five per cent of the total population of about seven million) kept the armed forces of the United States busy maintaining order. Although there had been practically no demonstrations by organized insurgents, the U. S. Marines in the district of Subig and Olongapo, Luzon Islands, did good work in ridding the area of various roving bands of ladrones.

The island of Samar had for some time been a veritable hotbed of insurrection. On September 28, 1901, the soldiers of Company C, Ninth Infantry, stationed at Balangiga, while in the mess hall eating dinner, were massacred by the insurrectos. It was this tragedy of Balangiga that caused Brigadier General Jacob M. Smith, U.S.A., who was in command of the military district which included the island of Samar, to call for reinforcements, which brought the U. S. Marines into action on Samar.

On October 20, 1901, a battalion of marines, consisting of Major L. W. T. Waller (commanding), Captains David D. Porter, Robert H. Dunlap, A. J. Matthews and Hirim I. Bearss, First Lieutenants J. T. Bootes, H. J. A. Day, C. C. Carpenter, A. S. Williams and Harry R. Lay, Second Lieutenants J. P. V. Gridley, Frank Halford and M. C. Rogers, Surgeon G. A. Lung, Assistant Surgeon J. M. Brister, and 300 enlisted men, U. S. M. C., was detailed at Cavite (Luzon, P.I.) for duty on the island of Samar, the easternmost of the Visayan group, by Rear Admiral Frederick Rodgers, U.S. Navy, senior squadron commander of the Asiatic station. Although the marines were placed under the command of Brigadier General Smith, U.S.A., to reenforce and cooperate with the U. S. Army troops on Samar, it was also contemplated that Major Waller's movements should be supported, as far as possible, by a vessel of the fleet, to which he should make reports from time to time, and through which supplies for his battalion were to be furnished.

The battalion, composed of Companies C, D and H, First Regiment, and Company F, Second Regiment, equipped in heavy marching order, embarked on the U. S. Flagship NEW YORK at Cavite, October 22, 1901. The battalion arrived at Catbalogan, Samar, on October 24, and the men and supplies were transferred to the U.S.S. ZAFIRO. Preceded by the U.S.S. FROLIC, carrying Rear Admiral Rodgers and staff and Brigadier General Smith and his aides, the ZAFIRO proceeded through the straits between Samar and Leyte to Tacloban, Leyte, and then to Basey, Samar, where Major Waller disembarked his headquarters and two companies and relieved some units of the Ninth Infantry. The remainder of the battalion took aboard a 3-inch gun and a Colt automatic 6-millimeter gun and proceeded to Balangiga, on the south coast of Samar, where Captain David D. Porter was left in command with 159 men, relieving the 17th U. S. Infantry, with instructions to begin operations as soon as possible. Major Waller then returned to Basey.

-1-

The area assigned to the marines embraced the entire southern part of Samar. Active operations were immediately begun, both at Basey and Balangiga; small expeditions were sent out almost daily to clear the country of General

Vicente Lukbam's guerrillas, who usually operated in small, roving bands. The situation in the vicinity was very tense because of the Balangiga massacre and other recent happenings; hence the measures prescribed for crushing the insurrection were somewhat retaliatory. On November 5, Major Waller took a detachment to the Sohoton River and drove the guerrillas from their trenches there; two marines were killed. A number of small expeditions were sent up the Cadacan River; several of these parties were fired on, but the skirmishes were slight. In an engagement, November 8, at Iba, several insurgents were killed and captured. An expedition under Captain Porter, sent out to scout in the vicinity of Balangiga, killed one insurgent and captured seven, and found many relics of the massacred men of the Ninth Infantry.

As a result of the continual harassing by the marines along the southern coast of Samar, the insurgents fell back from that region and occupied their fortified defenses on the Sohoton cliffs, along the Sohoton River. About the middle of November three columns of marines were sent into the Sohoton region to attack this stronghold, which had been reported to be practically impregnable. Two of the columns, under the command of Captains Porter and Bearss, marched on shore, while the third column, commanded by Major Waller, went up the river in boats. The plan of attack was for the three columns to unit on November 16 at the enemy's stronghold and make a combined assault.

On November 17, the shore column struck the enemy's trail and soon came upon a number of bamboo guns. One of these guns, emplaced to command the trail, had the fuse burning. Acting corporal Harry Glenn rushed forward and pulled out the fuse. The attack of the marines was a complete surprise, and the enemy was routed. After driving the insurgents from their positions the marines crossed the river and assaulted the cliff defenses. In order to reach the enemy's position, the marines had to climb the cliffs, which rose sheer from the river to the height of about 200 feet and were honeycombed with caves, to which access was had by means of bamboo ladders, and also by narrow ledges with bamboo hand rails. Tons of rocks were suspended in cages held in position by vine cables (known as bejuco), in readiness to be precipitated upon people and boats below. The marines scaled the cliffs, drove the insurgents from their positions and destroyed their camps. Major Waller's detachment, coming up the river in boats, did not arrive in time for the attack, which fact probably saved it from disaster; instant destruction would have undoubtedly been the fate of the boats had they undertaken the ascent of the river before the shore column had dislodged the insurgents.

Further pursuit of the enemy at this time was abandoned because the rations were exhausted and the men were in bad shape. The volcanic stone had cut the men's shoes to pieces, many of them were barefooted, and all had bad feet. The men had overcome incredible difficulties and dangers in their heroic march. The positions which they had destroyed must have taken several years to prepare. Reports from old prisoners said they had been there years working on the defenses. No white troops had ever penetrated to these

positions, and they were held as a final rallying point.

-2-

The insurrectos of Samar had spent years of labor on the defenses, and considered the cliff fortifications impregnable.

In a communication dated December 5, 1901, Major Waller refers to General Smith's desire that the marines make the march from Basey across the island of Samar to Hernani, for the purpose of selecting a route for for a telegraph wire to connect the east and west coasts. General Smith also asked Major Waller to run wires from Basey to Balangiga, and left to the major's discretion the point of departure from the east coast, either from Hernani or Lanang.

On December 8, two columns left Basey for Balangiga, one, under command of Major Waller, proceeding along the shore line, and the other, under Captain Bearss, marching about two miles inland. Stores were sent by the cutter which was kept abreast of the beach column. Although the marines did not encounter any organized resistance, the obstacles of nature which they encountered proved far more deadly than the natives and their many contrivances. Major Waller decided to start his ill-fated march across Samar from Lanang, work up the Lanang River as far as possible, then march to the vicinity of the Sohoton cliffs, which his marines had recently captured.

On arriving at Lanang, Major Waller was urged not to make the attempt, however, he says in his report:

Remembering the general's (General Smith's) several talks on the subject and his evident desire to know the terrain and run wires across, coupled with my own desire for some further knowledge of the people and the nature of this heretofore impenetrable country, I decided to make the trial with 50 men and the necessary carriers.

The detachment started from Lanang on the morning of December 28, 1901, and was composed of the following personnel: Major Littleton W. T. Waller, Captain David D. Porter, Captain Hirim I. Bearss, First Lieutenant A. S. Williams, Second Lieutenant A. C. DeW. Lyles, U. S. Army (Aid sent by General Smith), Second Lieutenant Frank Halford, 50 enlisted U. S. Marines, 2 native scouts and 33 native carriers. The start was made in boats but when Lagitao was reached, it was found impossible to use them further on account of the numerous rapids; the remainder of the distance was made on foot. One of the most trying features of the march was the necessity for crossing and recrossing the swollen river many times, which kept the men's clothing wet continually. On December 30, it was necessary to issue reduced rations, and the next day the rations had to be cut down to one-half and the number of

meals per day to two. The march was continued across the rugged mountains on January 1 and 2. On January 3, the rapidly vanishing food supply and the serious condition of the troops made the situation very critical. The men were becoming ill, their clothing were in rags, their feet were swollen and bleeding, and the trail was lost. After a conference with his officers, Major Waller decided to take Lieutenant Halford and thirteen of the men who were in the best condition and push forward as rapidly as possible and send back a relief party for the main column, which was placed under the command of Captain Porter with

-3-

instructions to go slowly and follow Major Waller's trail. The advance column was afterwards joined by Captain Bearss and a corporal, the former carrying a message from Captain Porter. A message was sent back to Captain Porter, directing him to follow the advanced column to a clearing which had been found where there was a quantity of sweet potatoes, bananas and young cocoanut palms, and to rest there until his men were in condition to continue the march. This message did not reach Porter, however, as the native by whom it was sent returned two days later, stating that there were so many insurrectos about that he was afraid.

On January 4, Major Waller's party rushed a shack and captured five natives, among whom were a man and a boy who stated that they knew the way to Basey. After crossing the Sohoton River, the famous Spanish trail leading from the Sohoton caves to the Suribao River was discovered and followed. The party crossed the Loog River and proceeded through the valley to Banglay, on the Cadacan River. Near this point the party came upon the camp which Captain Dunlap had established to await their arrival. Major Waller's party went aboard Captain Dunlap's cutter and started for Basey, where they arrived on January 6, 1902.

Concerning the condition of the men of his party, Major Waller says:

The men, realizing that all was over and that they were safe and once more near home, gave up. Some quietly wept; others laughed hysterically....Most of them had no shoes. Cut, torn, bruised and dilapidated, they had marched without murmur for twenty-nine days.

Immediately after the arrival of the detachment at Basey, a relief party was sent back to locate Captain Porter's party. The following day Major Waller joined this relief party, and remained out nine days searching for signs of Captain Porter without success. The floods were terrific and several of the former camp sites were many feet under water. The members of the relief party began to break down, due to the many hardships and the lack of

food, and the party had to return to Basey. Upon returning to Basey, Major Waller was taken sick with fever.

Meanwhile Captain Porter had decided to retrace the trail to Lanang and ask for a relief party to be sent out for his men, the most of whom were unable to march. He chose seven marines who were in the best condition and with six natives, set out January 3 for Lanang. He left Lieutenant Williams in charge of the remainder of the detachment with orders to follow as the condition of the men would permit. Lieutenant Porter's return to Lanang was made under difficulties many times greater than those encountered during the march to the interior. Food was almost totally lacking, and heavy rains filled the streams making it almost impossible to follow down their banks or cross them as was so often necessary. On January 11, Captain Porter reached Lanang and reported the situation to Captain Pickering, the Army Commander at that place. A relief expedition was organized to go for the remainder of the marines but it was unable to start for several days because of the swollen Lanang River. Without food, yet realizing that starvation was certain if they remained in camp, Lieutenant Williams and his men slowly followed Captain Porter's trail, leaving men behind one by one to die beside the trail when it was no longer possible for them

-4-

to continue. One man went insane; the native carriers became mutinous and some of them attacked Lieutenant Williams with bolos. After having left ten marines to die along the trail, Lieutenant Williams was finally met by the relief party on the morning of January 18 and taken back to Lanang.

Lieutenant Williams, left in charge of the weakest men of the expedition, undoubtedly had the most trying task of the whole unfortunate affair. The full circumstances of his attempt to extricate these exhausted men from the midst of that wild tropical jungle is one of the most tragic yet the most heroic episode in Marine Corps history. The entire march across Samar was about 190 miles. Major Waller's march, including his return with the party searching for Captain Porter, was about 250 miles.

Major Waller's detachment of marines was withdrawn from Samar and returned to Cavite on March 2, 1902, after having been relieved by troops of the U. S. Army.

For many years, thereafter, officers and men of the United States Marine Corps paid a traditional tribute to the indomitable courage of these marines by rising in their presence with the following words of homage: "STAND, GENTLEMEN, HE SERVED ON SAMAR!"

-5-

Enclosure: STAND, GENTLEMEN, HE SERVED ON SAMAR!  
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