

The Philippine Insurrection—100 Years Ago



# WHERE "EVEN MONKEYS FALL FROM TREES"

Story by R. R. Keene • Photos courtesy of Marine Corps University Archives



Above: Co H, 1st Bn posed for this picture taken in 1901 at Olongapo. Although none are identified, members of Co H participated in the Samar Campaign. (Photo courtesy of George H. Trapp)

Right: Second Lieutenant L. W. T. Waller was photographed in 1881. Considered "brilliant but impetuous," he led his battalion into history 20 years later on Samar.



Perhaps if the U.S. Army sentry had only a little more experience he might have noticed something amiss, but perhaps not. Soldiering can be an unforgiving profession where even veterans who should know better can, by a momentary miscalculation, commit a fatal error, for there is an old Asian adage that says, "Even monkeys fall from trees."

The sentry, a private with Company C, 9th U.S. Infantry [Regiment], familiar with his garrison's surroundings near the village of Balangiga, failed to notice that silence hung heavier that September 1901 morning on the southern end of Samar, one of 7,000 isles in the Visayas of the Philippine Archipelago.

The traditionally bland Army breakfast in the mess tents was supplemented with coconuts and sweet rice purchased from the local Visayans who eked out a living from the battalions of trees and low mountains that covered most of Samar. Looking toward the Leyte Gulf and eastward, storm clouds were brewing, foretelling the rainy season that often spawned typhoons. Yet, it was as leisurely a Sunday as one gets on the Oriental side of the international date line. The sentry turned his attention to his comrades and commander Captain Thomas

Connell who were having breakfast, as a long, single-edged bolo knife of the Philippines struck the sentry with deadly force.

Then 450 *insurrectos* (Shafi'i Muslims, called *Moros* by the Spanish) of General Vicente Lukban and Major Eugenio Daza, along with residents of Balangiga with the aid of the town Presidente Pedro Abaya, were everywhere and swinging bolos. Fifty-four of the American soldiers, including Capt Connell, astonished and more than puzzled by the Filipinos who had been so friendly, were hacked to death. Twenty others, including 13 wounded, managed to reach *barotos*, native dugout canoes, and paddled to Basey. In Balangiga, *Moros* ripped open the entrails of murdered Army officers and poured into them jam looted from the mess hall. The rebels absconded with most of the company's rifles and 28,000 rounds of ammunition.

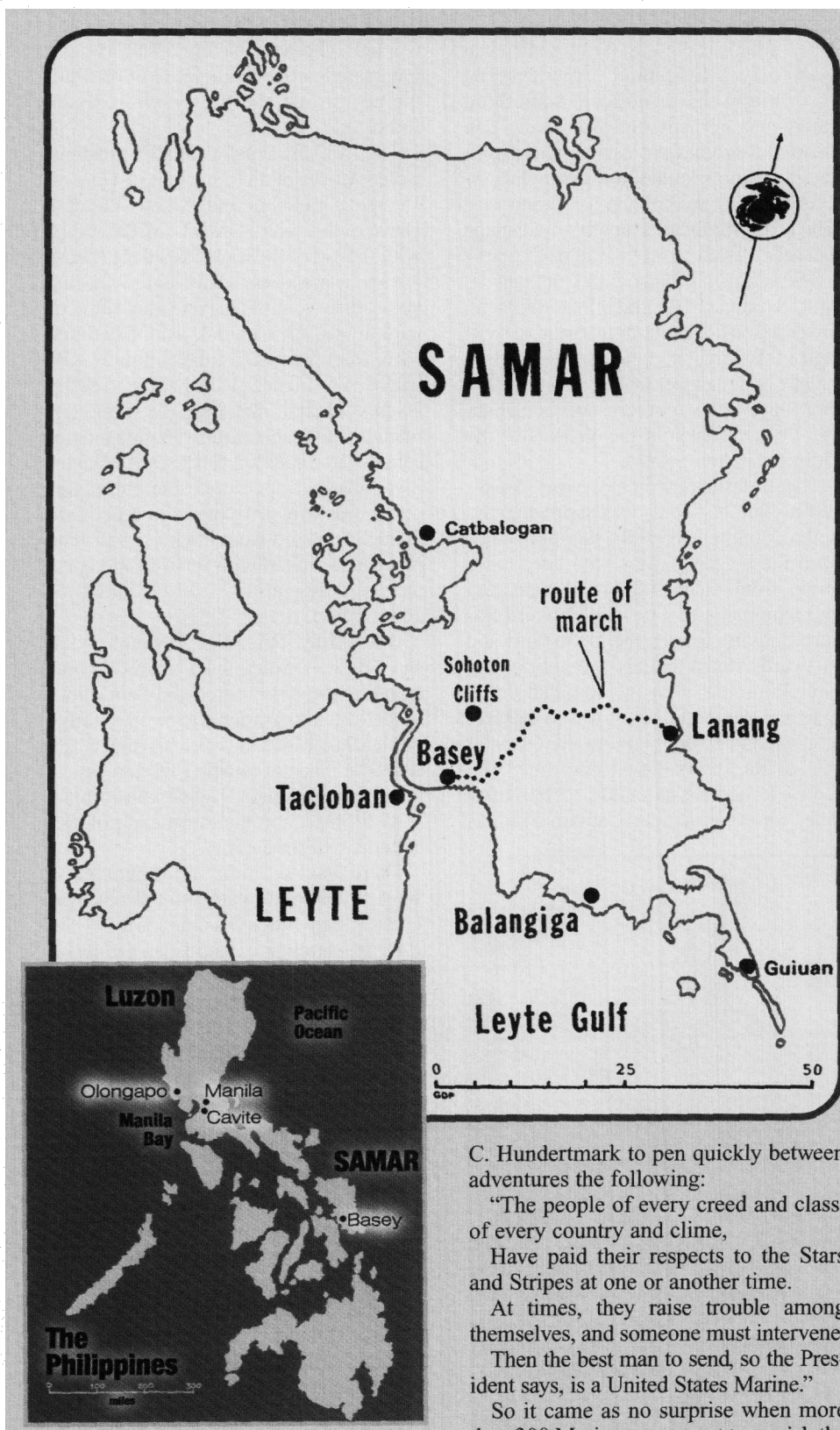
U.S. Army Brigadier General Jacob M. "Hell Roaring Jake" Smith commanding the Army forces on Samar told Maj Littleton Waller Tazewell "Tony" Waller his Marines were to make the island "a place of howling wilderness. ... I want no prisoners. I wish you to burn and kill; the more you burn and kill, the better it will please me."

There was no doubt that America and the Army, in particular, wanted revenge. The 28 Sept. attack came only weeks after an anarchist named Leon Czolgosz shot President William McKinley in Buffalo, N.Y. McKinley died eight days later. Vice President Theodore Roosevelt took the oath of office and surprised practically no one when he ordered a punitive expedition in the Philippines.

It set to boiling again the caldron of hatred that simmered since Filipino rebel leader Emilio Aguinaldo was captured by American forces on 23 March 1901 and the Philippine Insurrection collapsed. The *Moros* were, however, another story and another force to contend with. They had rightfully earned a reputation as fierce fighters. They had pride in their cultural heritage and a strong desire for independence, not only from Christians but also from foreign domination.

The era around the turn of the 20th century was also a time when the Corps was stepping onto the world stage as America's "foreign legion," racking up a list of successful military skirmishes around the world and earning a reputation as professional fighting men. It had run patrols on the Tartar Wall—protecting legations in Peking and Tientsin—and went in hand-to-hand combat with the natives to crush a revolt on the protectorate of Samoa. Marines in ships' de-





tachments had gone ashore at Honduras; then Nicaragua; the Dominican Republic; Beirut, Lebanon; Korea and Morocco. In two situations, the leathernecks landed as a vanguard for a Marine regiment and a brigade—in Panama and Cuba. Marines also escorted American diplomats into Abyssinia and manned sentry posts at the legation in Russia.

Being sent to every clime and place caused one leatherneck private named

C. Hundertmark to pen quickly between adventures the following:

"The people of every creed and class, of every country and clime,

Have paid their respects to the Stars and Stripes at one or another time.

At times, they raise trouble among themselves, and someone must intervene.

Then the best man to send, so the President says, is a United States Marine."

So it came as no surprise when more than 300 Marines were sent to punish the Visayan *Moros*. And those Marines who were sent were considered to be the first team: Waller, a pugnacious veteran of the Boxer Rebellion; Capt Hiram I. "Hiking Hiram" Bearss, a man of little fear and boundless energy; and headstrong but dashing Capt David D. Porter. The top enlisted man was Gunnery Sergeant John H. Quick, hero at Cuzco Well, Cuba, where in 1898 he had won the Medal of Honor.

Waller's command sailed up the straits between Samar and Leyte, and on 24 Oct. landed at Basey and at Balangiga, site of the massacre. Operating in two columns, the Marines were to punish the *Moros* and pacify southern Samar.

They wasted no time, and by 12 Nov., leatherneck patrols killed 39 *insurrectos*, captured 18, torched 225 homes, destroyed all the hemp and rice they found and captured 50 *barotos*. It was slow and dangerous work.

The leathernecks were \$12.80-per-month professionals who received another whopping \$2.56 for foreign duty, all paid in gold. They earned every gram of it.

These were rugged, lean-bodied men who favored the local brew, enjoyed the company of local women, but could afford only a steady diet of coffee, hardtack and beans on the march that was generously salted with epithets from scowling non-commissioned officers. They were allowed few expressions of individuality; most expressed them in the way they styled their broad-brimmed field hats, usually creased fore and aft. The hats functionally provided protection from the tropical sun and monsoon rains. The men's faces nonetheless weathered to a leathery tan that faded into a V at the necklines of their hot and heavy blue flannel shirts that in the field became streaked with salt. Khaki trousers and leggings went over shoes hardly suited for the jungle.

The leathernecks adopted the Filipino practice of carrying a razor-sharp bolo knife, but their standard weapon was the U.S. Krag-Jorgensen Model 1898, .30-caliber, bolt-action rifle. Although the rifle weighed more than 10 pounds dressed out with a bayonet, "Civilize 'em with a Krag!" was more than a response to pacifists. It voiced acceptance of the rifle by the infantrymen who hefted the weapon. And in Samar in the year 1901, foreign policy came down to tracking and killing those who dared to murder American soldiers.

"We drove those devils from point to point," said Waller. It was true; the Marines flushed *Moros* from the trails and from their camps. Many of the Marines had served with members of the 9th Infantry in China. Along the way they found the accoutrements of war that had once belonged to soldiers of Co C, as well as personal and poignant items such as photos, cards and letters that all men of arms keep.

Waller's instruction to his men was clear: "Place no confidence in the natives, and punish treachery immediately with death." He also warned them "to expect no quarter."



**Leathernecks of Co D, 1st Marines at Subic Bay posed in 1901 in their uniform of the day with service rifles. They are identified as (seated left to right) Cpl Jack McDonald, Pvs Wolf, Tingley, Hajek and Hunt; (standing left to right) Cpl James A. Bevan, Pvs Orsoba, Ormsby, Moon, Laub and Casey and Sgt James Bell.**

Nor would the Marines give any. Pvt John H. Clifford wrote of one patrol where uniform items from the 9th Infantry were discovered during the search of a hut. The Marines wasted no time. They burned the hut and executed the natives.

Patrols and raids by avenging leathernecks quickly forced the *insurrectos* farther into the jungles. In the rugged mountains of Samar, concealed in the volcanic cliffs along the Sohoton River, was the impregnable lair of Vincente Lukban, the *Moro* chieftain. Stories from captive laborers who had escaped the camp revealed it was a labyrinth of hidden trails, camouflaged pits with punji stakes, poisonous snakes and vine nets that when tripped would release boulders. It also was said that no white man had ever seen the fortress.

It took several tries, but by 17 Nov. Marines had penetrated the jungle, scaled the cliffs and caught a few *Moro* lookouts unaware while the rest were preparing food for breakfast. Capt Porter's Marines brought their Colt-Browning 6 mm automatic gun to bear, and every leatherneck fired his rifle. It was over in less than 10 minutes. The *Moros* were astonished. Thirty of them never got over the surprise and died where they

stood. The rest, including Gen Lukban, fled in panic into the jungle and abandoned the last *Moro* rallying position. (Lukban would be captured in February.) The soldiers of Co C, 9th Infantry had been avenged in a fashion very similar to the way they had been dispatched.

Washington and the Army's thirst to turn Samar into a "howling wilderness" were, at least temporarily, sated thanks to the Marines. Porter and Bearss would much later be awarded Medals of Honor.

Had it all ended there this account



would be over. Fate, however, often changes the fortunes of men and even Marines to a point where the name Samar would become synonymous with ordeal. And to make matters worse, it wasn't bolo-wielding *Moros* who shook the Marines to the brink of disaster. Instead, it resulted from poor planning, treachery, the ravages of nature and the Philippine jungle.

The Army, pleased with Waller and his men's performance, wanted them to map routes that would lead to telegraph wire strung between the military strong points of southern Samar. Waller accepted the assignment because, as he later stated, he had "a desire for some further knowledge of the people and nature of this heretofore impenetrable country. I decided to make the trail with 50 men and the necessary carriers."

With the *Moros* subdued, for all intents and purposes, Waller did not expect to encounter enemy resistance. It was estimated to be a 42-mile trek across the uncharted portion of Samar from La-

**Capt Hiram I. "Hiking Hiram" Bearss, shown here as a lieutenant colonel in 1918 France, was a man of little fear and boundless energy. He was one of two Marines to earn the Medal of Honor during action on Samar.**



nang to Basey on the west coast. The Marine expedition consisted of 50 enlisted men, with Quick as gunnery sergeant. Waller's officers were Capts Porter and Bearss, First Lieutenant Alexander S. Williams, Second Lieutenant Frank Halford and Army 2LT C. DeW. Lyles. There were also two Filipino scouts and 33 native carriers or bearers.

Waller assigned a young officer, Capt Robert H. Dunlap, to ready supplies and to later meet with the expedition. The expeditionary force, with three days' rations, formed a column, stepped out from Basey destined to Balangiga and began marching in route step. From this point on, things did not go well and eventually went terribly wrong.

It seldom drizzles in Southeast Asia. The monsoon rains cascade straight down—heavy, stinging, deafening and flooding. The waters soak right through the body and dampen the soul. The rain-swept jungle becomes even more impenetrable and steadfastly resists the will of men.

Nonetheless, Waller led a column along the coast. Bearss led a column on a par-

allel route farther inland. Waller's men marched into swollen rivers and sank to their bandannas. Bearss' men ran into *Moros* who, that time, were not subdued. (The leathernecks sent a patrol back to where they'd taken fire. The Marines again surprised the *insurrectos*, killed 15 and destroyed the main food supply of those who had escaped.) It took Waller four days to reach Balangiga. His men were exhausted, and everything was thoroughly waterlogged.

Three days before the new year, Waller's expedition set out from Lanang for the interior. Waller's plan was to go as far as possible up the Lanang River by boat. He was keen to rumors of an old Spanish trail that supposedly went up and through the mountains. An Army captain named Pickering commanded the garrison at Lanang. He told Waller that the soldiers had heard such stories too, but never found anything resembling a trail. Pickering explained that his garrison was waiting to be resupplied and could spare only three days' rations. Wait until the monsoons subsided and the garrison was resupplied, he urged,

and then attempt to march overland to Basey. Waller politely dismissed such advice.

Two days out and the rain-fed river, filled to capacity, had turned into swift-moving, dirty, brown rapids. The boats foundered, provisions spilled. What was not lost was soaked down to the matches. Afoot and on the march, Waller and his men found what for lack of a better word might be called a trail. Unfortunately, it zigzagged back and forth across the river. The Marines nonetheless followed the path, which eventually led them well into the mountain jungles.

It was as if the jungle was playing a cruel joke. The trail was a maze that meandered back and forth, sometimes in circles. At other times the trail disappeared completely. The sound of bolos cutting a trail could be heard through the sheets of rain. It was undoubtedly frustrating. The trail took 12 miles of march to advance four to five miles.

The Marines hacked at the jungle vines and cut their way through the thorny undergrowth that tore at their uniforms while volcanic muck ruined their



The Philippine Insurrection, thought to be crushed in 1901, flared again when *Moros* massacred U.S. Army soldiers at Balangiga on Samar. Marines, photographed during a skirmish (above), were sent to punish the *insurrectos*.

boondockers and leeches ruined their days and nights. It was painstakingly slow and physically draining work accompanied as always by unrelenting rain.

The jungle exacted a toll. Too wet to build a fire, the men were chilled to the bone during the days and enveloped by nearly intolerable darkness at night. Their skin chafed under wet leather and canvas equipment. The chaffing turned into sores, along with immersion foot and the fever.

Spirits plummeted when a promising water route, the Suribao River, turned back east rather than westward toward Basey. Morale hit bottom when it was discovered that some thoughtless idiot had dumped the hardtack after deeming it to be rain damaged. Rations were down to a few pieces of raw bacon. Good men, normally physically dependable, were becoming weak from hunger and delirious with fever.

Waller realized that at this rate the jungle would swallow his command before it ever reached civilization. Rest and food were of paramount importance for those too ill to march farther. The major chose former collegiate athlete Lt Frank Halford and 12 of his stronger Marines to accompany him with some of the stronger bearers to go on ahead of the others in an attempt to find and link up with Capt Dunlap and bring help.

Waller put Porter in command. He also left Bearss and Williams with the main party. On the sixth day, Waller set out in the direction of Basey, marking his trail so Porter and the rest could easily follow at a slower pace.

Waller had some success. His Marines found a clearing with bananas, succulent coconut palms and sweet potatoes, which they devoured. Waller, however, realized his party, although fed, could go no farther. He sent a runner to tell Porter he would soon be returning. Waller further instructed Porter to return to the river and build rafts so the entire force could float back to Lanang.

Porter made an attempt to build rafts, but the wood was porous and waterlogged and not strong enough to hold and float even a single man. There was also a more ominous development.

The native bearers were becoming less than friendly and more than belligerent. They refused to cut wood for the expedition. It took the fists of GySgt Quick to pound the reluctant bearers into cooperating. Uncertainty set in. Bearss thought it important to report the situation to Waller. Porter agreed and sent Bearss, a Corporal Murphy and a Filipino scout named Victor to find Waller. They found



**Capt David D. Porter, pictured here as a major in 1915, was considered headstrong and dashing. While Maj Waller led one group of the expedition, he appointed Porter to lead another that eventually reached the coast. Porter later was awarded the Medal of Honor for combat on Samar.**

him at the clearing. Waller decided to send for Porter and the others. He sent the Filipino scout to fetch Porter.

When Bearss hadn't returned by mid-afternoon, Porter became concerned. With their men suffering from fever and soon to be out of food, Porter and Williams weren't sure what to do but knew they must do something.

The dates vary, but it was probably the morning of 5 Jan. when Porter, Quick, six Marines and six Filipinos headed back east toward Lanang to get help. Williams was left with those too ill to



**GySgt John Quick, shown here as a sergeant major, was the senior enlisted man on the expedition. A proven veteran and winner of the Medal of Honor at Cuba, Quick used his fists on reluctant Filipino bearers.**

march and was told to wait a while longer for Waller. If Waller or Bearss did not show, Williams was to follow Porter as best he could to Lanang. Unknowingly, the divided expedition, one force led by Waller and the other by Porter, was moving in opposite directions.

Meanwhile, Victor the scout returned to Waller's camp saying a band of *insurrectos* had prevented him from reaching Porter. Waller nonetheless reasoned Porter's group would eventually show up. As the rain continued unabated, Waller's men worked their way through the mountains, fording streams and rivers. As they worked, Waller also noticed a pall of silence had darkened the dispositions of the bearers, who became sullen. That night Waller prudently ordered the Filipinos' bolo knives collected and placed the bearers under guard.

The guard apparently did not stop someone from using the steady drumming of the rain to muffle sound as he slipped close to Waller in an attempt to lift the major's bolo. As it turned out Waller stuck a cocked pistol to the intruder's head and ordered the man to remain very still. In the darkness, Waller pushed back a native hat and made out the face of Victor the scout.

It was a dreary dawn that announced the 10th day of what had become the ordeal of Samar. By chance Waller's column came upon several Filipinos who helped guide them to the Cadacan River where in another stroke of luck they found Capt Dunlap, who had persevered and moved his column steadily along to establish a supply camp near Sohoton. Dunlap ensured the exhausted men were boarded onto a cutter, and by 6 Jan., they were at Basey.

Waller wrote: "My heart bled for those men while I looked at them. Most of them had no shoes, cut, torn, bruised and dilapidated they marched without murmur ... and having accomplished what no white troops had done before, they thought not of it, but of each other."

Waller was nothing if not pugnacious. His physical endurance and tenacity allowed him, despite having a fever, to walk back into the jungle and spend the next nine days searching for Porter. His fever soared dangerously, his eyes were swollen, and he hobbled on a badly sprained ankle. He barely made it back to Basey, where he finally collapsed.

In the meantime Porter and those with him had straggled into Lanang. Porter later stated, "Words are inadequate to describe the suffering and hardships endured." Four Marines too weak and too sick to continue had been left on the trail near a patch of yams, which they ate until



JOHN BOD

**The authenticity of this Department of Defense photo (Marine Corps), supposedly taken during a skirmish between Marines and insurgents in the Philippines, is questionable. In it, Marines are using the 1903 model Springfield rifle and wearing khaki rather than blue flannel shirts.**

rescued several days later by soldiers.

Lt Williams with the remaining 34 Marines and approximately 20 Filipinos had rested and waited for more than an hour for Waller or Bearss and then slowly took up the trail to Lanang.

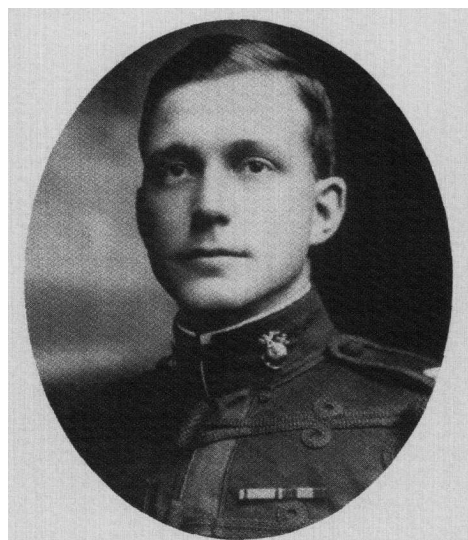
It soon became obvious to Williams that some very important choices would have to be made. A number of his men were too weak to go any farther. They had managed to forage some edible roots and a few sweet potatoes. It wasn't anywhere near enough. Williams knew if they remained in one place they'd starve.

The bearers, in better shape, built shelters for themselves, volunteered to carry some of the very sick Marines' weapons, but refused to do anything more in rendering assistance to the sick. The column moved agonizingly slow.

One by one those unable to march farther dropped behind. It was tantamount to a death sentence. Pvt Woods, whose feet had swollen terribly and who was blind from leech bites, stumbled into a ravine and had no strength to drag himself out. He asked Sergeant Dooley to leave him. It was similar with Pvt Baroni, who told Dooley he was dying. Three others told the frustrated sergeant, himself too weak to discourage them, "Leave us. We all came into this outfit

together and we've decided to go out together." Poor Pvt Murray took to barking like a dog and whistling. He refused all efforts to help him. He had lost his mind and eventually was lost in the jungle. All told, 10 Marines would die similarly.

Maybe it was the fact that 18 straight



**Capt Robert Dunlap led the supply column along at a steady rate and eventually ran into Waller's exhausted column. Dunlap ensured that Waller's men were boarded onto a cutter and sent to civilization for medical treatment.**

days of rain in the jungle is all most men can take, because that's when three of the native bearers made their move and tried to shoot Williams with his own pistol. When the weapon wouldn't fire, one frustrated native hacked the Marine officer repeatedly with a bolo. Another of the bearers tried to strangle him. Fending them off with cut and bloodied hands, Williams called to Slim, a trusted scout, for help. Slim did nothing but watch and thereby sealed his fate.

Marines limped and crawled to Williams' defense and beat back the three assailants who fled into the jungle. Williams, although covered with his own blood, suffered only superficial wounds. Fearing reprisal from the remaining bearers, the Marines huddled together through the night—their rifles too caked with mud to work and their strength completely sapped.

The Army relief column from Lanang found them "just in time" the next morning, 17 Jan. Only eight of the Marines were able to stand; the rest were carried out on stretchers. Two would later die. One survivor recalled the soldiers "carried us in their arms, cut off our clothes, washed, bandaged and fed us, put us to bed like babies."

Pvt Harold Kinman would later write



an angry letter to his sister bemoaning the loss: "Ten men were left on the trail to die. Ten men left in the mountains to die, and 30 rifles lost."

From their hospital beds in Tacloban, Porter and Williams detailed the events to GySgt Quick. Porter concluded: "From my conversation with Lieutenant Williams ... and most of the men ... these natives should have been shot at the time to insure safety, but the men were so weak they could hardly handle their rifles."

Quick returned to Basey and reported to Waller, who was still recovering and whose fever was still dangerously high. Waller had recently learned that Victor the scout was also Victor the *insurrecto* and had participated in the slaughter of the U.S. soldiers at Balangiga. Waller asked Quick what he thought of Porter's recommendation. The "gunny" is said to have answered, "I would have shot them all down like mad dogs."

Waller called in Dunlap and 1stLt John H. Day, briefed them and ordered Day to form a firing squad. He then had Victor taken from the guardhouse and brought before him. The prisoner stood in silence as Waller ordered Day to have him shot.

Victor was promptly escorted to the middle of a street where all could see. The Marines dutifully shot him to death and, as a warning to others, left Victor where he fell.

Day then marched out 10 other mutineers, including Slim, the once-trusted scout. Day gave the command to fire as nine prisoners were executed. The first lieutenant, out of deference to Slim who had once worked with Day as a policeman in Basey, declined to oversee the man's execution. Waller had Slim shot unceremoniously by two Marines.

On 22 Jan. Waller notified BGen "Hell Roaring Jake" Smith: "It became necessary to expend 11 prisoners. Ten who were implemented [sic] in the attack on Lt Williams and one who plotted against me."

Once he recovered, Maj Waller returned on 29 Feb. to his base on Luzon. "Leaving Samar without the faintest suspicion of anything wrong, we reached Cavite," stated Waller. "We looked forward to meeting our old friends. We expected a warm welcome home." Indeed the Marines received a welcome from the armored cruiser USS *New York* (ARC-2), flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, whose sailors and Marines lined the ship's rail. "Cheer after cheer went up for us. ... I went to my Commander-in-Chief [Army Major General Adna R. Chaffee] and was met with a charge of murder."

The major and 1stLt Day were ar-

raigned at Manila on 17 March by the U.S. Army, who claimed jurisdiction for operations on Samar. The two men were to face courts-martial for the murder of 11 Filipinos.

It was an election year in the States, and apparently American foreign policy no longer came down to tracking and killing those who killed American soldiers. The Stateside newspapers were calling Waller "the butcher of Samar." One of the campaign issues was the "atrocities and harsh means used by American troops to suppress the Philippine Insurrection."

Historians agree that MG Chaffee was under pressure from the War Department to punish what was considered a violation of the laws of land warfare.

However, the court of seven Army and six Marine officers acquitted Waller and Day with a vote of 11 to 2. Waller on the last day of an 18-day trial stated: "As a representative officer responsible for the safety and welfare of my men ... I ordered 11 men shot. I honestly thought I was right then. I believe now that I was right." BG Smith, who wanted to make Samar a "howling wilderness," was later tried, convicted and retired by President Roosevelt.

The incident at Samar, although a testament to human endurance, was also a testament to poor planning. Waller's impetuous behavior was responsible for both. His career, which up to that point had been considered "brilliant," was forever damaged. Although he went on to serve with distinction in Panama, Cuba and Haiti and retired in 1920 as a major general, Waller had besmirched his reputation and the reputation of his battalion.

And although simians and Marines may occasionally fall from trees, the Corps for years honored the deeds and hardship endured during the ordeal on that uncharted island in the Philippines with the command: "Stand, gentlemen! He served on Samar."

*The excellent articles on Samar by Gerry D. Provenza and Col Joseph Alexander, USMC (Ret) that appeared in the November 1991 Leatherneck were used as references for this story. Also used as references were: \* "Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps" by Allan R. Millett; "The U.S. Marine Corps Story" by J. Robert Moskin; \* "Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps from 1775-1962" by Col Robert Debs Heinl Jr., USMC; and "A History of the United States Marine Corps" by Clyde H. Metcalf.*

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