



SGT. CHARLES W. RAY

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT

This Month in NCO History: Oct. 19, 1899 — Taking the Bridge near San Isidro

By Pablo Villa

As a scout, Sgt. Charles W. Ray often saw danger before most Soldiers in his unit did. On Oct. 19, 1899, Ray not only laid eyes on a perilous situation near San Isidro on the Philippine island of Luzon, he went headlong into it. While leading a reconnaissance mission with 12 Soldiers of I Company of the 22nd U.S. Infantry during the Philippine-American War, Ray and his group fought a large Filipino force in a battle for a key bridge that traversed the Pampanga River. His actions that day earned him and a fellow Soldier the nation's highest honor.

The Philippine-American War arose after the United States' acquisition of the Philippines from Spain after the Spanish-American War in 1898. The conflict, also known as the Philippine Insurrection, occurred from 1899 to 1902 and ended with American occupation of the Philippines and the dissolution of the First Philippine Republic.

In the fall of 1899, the 22nd U.S. Infantry was fighting its way toward San Isidro where earlier that year, Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo had been ousted as president of the Filipino republic. On Oct. 19, Ray led a 12-Soldier detachment toward the town ahead of the main force. He was to report any enemy activity.

As Ray's team wandered into an area a few miles from San Isidro, it encountered about 200 Filipino insurgents at the Rio Grande de la Pampanga, the second largest tributary on the island of Luzon and one the Americans needed to cross to reach their objective. When Ray observed Filipino soldiers removing planks from the narrow bridge in order to slow any American advance, he made the decision not to await orders and poured all efforts into capturing the bridge. After sending one of his scouts back to request reinforcements, one account of the day states, "Ray led his scouts in a mad dash for the bridge."

The opposing force fired on the small group of Americans, wounding three of them. Ray ordered those hit by bullets to stay back. One Soldier, Pvt. Charles Pierce, refused and proceeded with the scouts to the bridge where they began crossing it via its horizontal support beams. The scouts valiantly held the bridge for more than an hour before the main force arrived to drive away the insurgents. The bridge was saved from demolition and I Company was able to proceed safely to San Isidro.

For their actions, both Ray and Pierce were awarded the Medal of Honor. Ray received his medal by mail in

Democrat, N.C., where he was living in 1902. Ray experienced hardships throughout the rest of his time in the Philippines. He contracted malaria after his action near San Isidro. Upon rejoining his unit, he was captured by insurgents who beat and stabbed him, inflicting

wounds that would eventually result in the loss of his left arm. He retired from the Army in December 1900.

Ray and his wife, Myrtle, had eight children. Ray died at the age of 87 on March 23, 1959, in Grandfield, Okla. ■

— Compiled by Pablo Villa



<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/>

<https://www.facebook.com/NCOJournal>

<https://twitter.com/NCOJournal>

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the NCO Journal, the U.S. Army, or the Department of Defense.

