

The Last Horse-Mounted Charge of the U.S. Cavalry 75th Anniversary

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The Last Cavalry charge in the U.S. Army's history

<http://georgy-konstantinovich-zhukov.tumblr.com/post/29141815278/horse-charge>

The Oxford English dictionary defines the word “cavalry” as follows: “(in the past) soldiers who fought on horseback.” It explains the word’s origin as mid-16th century: from French cavallerie, from Italian cavalleria, from cavallo, from Latin caballus (horse). Wikipedia further explains: “From earliest times cavalry had the advantage of improved mobility, and a man fighting from horseback also had the advantages of greater height, speed, and inertial mass over an opponent on foot. Another element of horse mounted warfare is the psychological impact a mounted soldier can inflict on an opponent.”

Perhaps it was a bit anachronistic that in the 1930’s, following the harsh lessons of World War I that the future battlefield would be dominated by barbed wire, machine guns, artillery, armored vehicles and aircraft, the U.S. Army would still retain horse cavalry and train its officers in the advantages of height, speed, inertial mass, and psychological impact inherent in a mounted cavalry charge. But these lessons continued to be taught and, on 16 January 1942, they were deployed for the last time by a U.S. horse-mounted cavalry unit in a charge

conducted by a platoon of combined Troops E and F of the 26th U.S. Cavalry Regiment (Philippine Scouts), led by First Lieutenant Edwin Ramsey.

Edwin Price Ramsey, born in Illinois on 9 May 1917, was raised in Kansas by his widowed mother and graduated from the Oklahoma Military Academy in May 1938. He was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the Cavalry Reserve and entered active duty in February 1941 with the 11th U.S. Cavalry. In June 1941, he volunteered for service in the Philippines with the 26th U.S. Cavalry (Philippine Scouts). An avid rider and polo player, he was attracted to the 26th Cavalry by its active polo competition.



Lt. Ramsey on his horse Bryn Awryn

The 26th Cavalry (PS) was formed on the Philippine Island of Luzon in 1922 from elements of a U.S. Army field artillery regiment and a U.S. Army infantry regiment, whose service in the Philippines traced back to the end of the Spanish American War. The 26th Cavalry was headquartered at Fort Stotsenburg, about an hour north of the capital city of Manila. At the start of World War II, the regiment had about 55 officers (U.S. and Filipino) and 785 (Filipino) enlisted troopers. It was organized with six horse troops, a HQ troop, a machine gun troop, a platoon of White scout cars, and trucks for transporting support services, including a veterinarian. The regiment was thoroughly trained and highly proficient in its service as horse cavalry. It was regarded as an elite unit. Ramsey described it as “probably as fine, if not the finest, regiment the U.S. Army had.”



26th Cavalry (PS) M3A1 "White" Scout Cars
Life Magazine Photo

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese army on 12 December 1941 invaded the Philippine island of Luzon and began a determined drive south towards Manila. They encountered U.S. and Philippine forces who engaged in dogged resistance, delaying the Japanese advance. By mid-January 1942, the Japanese forces had focused on breaking the defending line by driving through the area around Mount Natib. In the path of this drive was the small village of Moron, which initially was defended by the Philippine Army. However, they had withdrawn from Moron on January 14, and General Wainwright ordered combined Troops E and F of the 26th Cavalry to fill the gap.

Lt. Ramsey, due to his familiarity with the area from prior patrols, was ordered to lead the first platoon, composed of 28 mounted troopers, into Moron. As they approached Moron without resistance, he ordered four troopers to ride point into the village. They entered the village at the same time as the advance guard of a large Japanese infantry unit and drew the fire of the startled Japanese soldiers. Galloping back with one trooper wounded, they alerted Ramsey. Riding forward, Ramsey saw dozens of Japanese infantrymen firing from the village center and further back hundreds more crossing the Batalan River towards Moron. He deployed his platoon

as three squads in line of skirmishers, and they drew pistols. Recalling his cavalry training, he realized that the height, speed, mass and impact of a charge would be the only hope to break up the body of Japanese infantry. He shouted for his troopers to charge. Nearly lying flat on their horses' necks, they galloped into the mass of Japanese soldiers, shouting and firing as they went. They crossed the 100 yards from the village center to the river in moments, causing the startled Japanese infantry to break and flee in confusion and disarray. Seizing the advantage, Ramsey order the troopers to rein up, dismount and engage the disorganized enemy with rifle fire. The second platoon, led by Lt. Eliseo Mallari, and the third platoon, led by Sgt. Manuel Mascangcay, of the combined Troops rode to the sound of the guns and reinforced Ramsey's platoon. Later, the cavalry was relieved by infantry, and the action initiated by Ramsey had brought the Japanese advance at Moron to a complete halt. Lt. Ramsey's quick and resourceful action was witnessed by several superior officers, and ultimately Ramsey was awarded a Silver Star for successfully leading the last U.S. cavalry horse-mounted charge.



Capt. John Wheeler, Commander of Combined Troops E/F
Life Magazine Photo

Of course, the victory at Moron, like the rest of the heroic defense of Luzon, was temporary. The determined resistance of the U.S. and Philippine armies seriously slowed the Japanese

advance and made it costly, but ultimately, months later, all of Luzon fell. This final outcome does not diminish the last charge or the 26th Cavalry's history of exemplary service.

There is a tendency to romanticize horse cavalry, to speak of the dashing cavalier on a horse. However, the many written histories of the service of the U.S. Cavalry make it clear that actual cavalry service was not dashing or romantic. War is a harsh, brutal and ultimately ugly business, and this is not relieved by the beauty, majesty and power of the horse. The true significance of the last charge is not the romance of the horse charge. The American and Filipino soldiers who participated in the last charge displayed the best attributes of cavalymen. They exercised rapid judgment, seized the opportunity and with selfless courage charged into the fray. Because of this legacy, the U.S. Army today proudly retains the terms and images of the horse cavalry to remind them of the power of spirit, initiative, determination and courage in defense of our nation.

(Ed. For further information of the 26th Cavalry's intense fighting of the Japanese, recommend The Doomed Horse Soldiers of Bataan – The Incredible Stand of the 26th Cavalry by Raymond C. Woolfe, Jr. and The Twilight Riders – The Last Charge of the 26th Cavalry by Peter F. Stevens. Both books are very descriptive and referenced.)

