

RUSHING SAN JUAN.

ROOSEVELT'S ACCOUNTS OF THE ROUGH RIDERS IN THE CHARGE.

Who Ordered and Who Led the Charge - The Historian of the Rough Riders Has Put Forth Three Stories of the Event.

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ROOSEVELT'S account of the rough riders is the one to stand in history. Its author is an educated man, an able writer and the best one in all the command to become its historian. However, a critical pen, looking for truth to exploit and having outside as well as inside statements to draw upon, cannot take Roosevelt as the sole and the infallible authority upon the battle career of his regiment.

From the accounts popularly accepted of the charge up San Juan hill one gleams that the rough riders, led by their colonel, initiated and carried home the charge, clinching the victory by heroic defense of the crest. This is not the view of the officers and soldiers outside of the rough riders. The regiment did well—for a volunteer regiment unusually well—but deserves no more praise than the others. After describing the march down the road to the San Juan river Roosevelt tells in two official reports and in his magazine narrative how the charge originated and the part the rough riders took in it. In his magazine story he says: "I sent messenger after messenger to try to find General Sumner or General Wood and get permission to advance, and was just about making up my mind that in the absence of orders I had better 'march toward the guns,' when Lieutenant Colonel Dorst came riding up through the storm of bullets with the welcome command 'to move forward and support the regulars in the assault in the hills in front.'"

Roosevelt says that the instant he received the order his "crowded hour began." He formed the regiment in column of Troops, deployed in skirmishing order, and took his place with the rear. Somehow—the reason given is not clear—he forged his way to the front of his own regiment. The Ninth cavalry was in front, the First regulars in the left of the rough riders. In his narrative the colonel says, "And these went up 'Kettle' hill with my regiment." "Kettle" hill is the name given to the outlying spur of the ridge which was first captured. Roosevelt's first report is not so clear as his second, and this last states distinctly: "We charged the blockhouse and intrenchments on the hill to our

right against a heavy fire. It was taken in good style, the men of my regiment thus being the first to capture any fortified position and to break through the Spanish lines."

This statement is in the report dated July 30, and from similar verbal ones probably originated the extravagant claims made for the rough riders. Getting into position, Roosevelt says he waved his hat and gave the order to charge the hill in front—that is, "Kettle" hill. This is his literal statement of what followed:

"Out of my sight, over on the right, Captains McBlain and Taylor of the Ninth made up their minds independently to charge first about this time, and almost at the same moment Colonels Carroll and Hamilton, who were off, I believe, to my left, where we could neither see them nor hear their men, gave the order to advance. But of all this I knew nothing at the time. The whole line, tired of waiting and eager to close with the enemy, was straining to go forward, and it seems that different parts slipped the leash at almost the same moment. The First cavalry came up just behind and partly mixed with my regiment and the Ninth." Having previously stated in this narrative that the Ninth and First went up "Kettle" hill with the rough riders, it is clear that Roosevelt claimed too much in his official report in saying, "My regiment thus being the first to capture any fortified position."

The real difficulty is to find among all the statements just what the rough riders did as a regiment. There was gallant work and heavy loss. Roosevelt carries the narrative to a critical point, then rambles off into statements of what the Ninth or Tenth or First or Third regiments did. One may glean from his account that the Tenth cavalry actually led the charge on "Kettle" hill, but farther on the verbose colonel says that the guides of some of his Troops were first planted on the hill. In the same sentence he says, "On the extreme right of the hill, at the opposite end from where we struck it, Captains Taylor and McBlain and their men of the Ninth were first up." Now the right of the hill was where the house, misnamed a blockhouse by Roosevelt, stood. It was not a blockhouse. There were some trenches, but the Spaniards made no defense. The loss sustained by the charging columns was due to fire from the main ridge. "Kettle" hill was not in the Spanish line of defense, but was an outwork, and its capture did not constitute a break in the enemy's line, as claimed by Roosevelt.

The capture of "Kettle" hill was gallantly done, and it was timely, for it proved a vantage ground for attack on the real Spanish positions beyond it. But the rough riders seem to have had no specially brilliant part in it. The regiment's place was on the right of the second line. Roosevelt and the two companies with him went up the left or southern knee of the hill; hence marched obliquely across the field. It was said in camp that Roosevelt lost his

bearings, and, mistaking San Juan fort for the red house on "Kettle" hill, practically abandoned his regiment. For this reason he deals in generalities in his report, and really accounts for but four of his eight troops, two only of these being with him "personally."

The most important events of the day for the cavalry followed the capture of "Kettle" hill. Roosevelt's first report says: "When the men got their wind, we charged again and carried the second line of intrenchments with a rush. Swinging to the left, we then drove the Spaniards over the brow of the chain of hills fronting on Santiago." Bearing in mind that this is the official report of the rough riders by their commanding officer, it must be taken as meaning that the rough riders "carried the second line" and "drove the Spaniards over the brow." In his second report Colonel Roosevelt says that after Fort San Juan was taken a large force was assembled on "Kettle" hill, not only of his own regiment, but of the Ninth and portions of other regiments. This is well known. He then states: "We then charged forward under a heavy fire across the valley against the Spanish intrenchments on the hill in rear of San Juan hill. This we also took, capturing several prisoners." He received orders to halt and hold the crest. At the time he had fragments of the Sixth cavalry and an occasional infantryman under him, 300 or 400 men all told. The rough riders numbered 543 and lost 87 in all, making about 475 on duty. But there were other troopers than the Sixth and rough riders with Roosevelt at the time.

Either Roosevelt is confused as to the order of events or he and his rough riders had nothing to do with the capture of the second ridge, or San Juan hill. He places his rush forward after Parker's Gatlings opened on Fort San Juan. At that hour the cavalry advance was rushing along the swale toward the second ridge. Roosevelt says that when he saw the Spaniards abandon Fort San Juan he called upon his men to charge the hills in front, that is, north San Juan ridge. His details of what followed, coming from the colonel of the regiment reported to have done wonders that day, need no comment. Roosevelt jumped a fence and went on alone, thinking the men would follow, but at the end of 100 yards found he had but five rough riders with him. He told them to stay where they were while he went back and brought up the rest of the "brigade." (?) After a spirited colloquy the dilatory rough riders begged to be led forward, but Roosevelt wanted the "other regiments to come, too," so he ran back to General Sumner, com-



A ROUGH RIDER.

manding the division, and asked if he (Roosevelt) might make the charge. According to Roosevelt, Sumner told him to go ahead, and he (Sumner) would see that the men followed. Just what men he meant is uncertain. Sumner had already ordered the First cavalry and battalion of the Third to remain on "Kettle" hill. The Sixth was moving up the hill in touch with the infantry, and a battalion of the Third was climbing the slope in front of "Kettle" hill while Roosevelt was going through these motions evidently to get his own regiment into shape.

Roosevelt finally got to the crest of San Juan ridge. Meanwhile the Third cavalry had formed a line in the V shaped ridge or salient, subsequently called Rough Riders' hill, but which they did not capture. Roosevelt says he had a mixed force and about 50 of his own men. This corresponds to the statement of Captain Morton of the Third cavalry. Morton became senior on the front line by the wounding of Major Wessells and went along the crest from right to left to find out his strength. He located 40 to 45 rough riders at 3:30 p. m. A soldier of the regiment who had been on duty at headquarters went in search of the command that night and reached its colonel and all there was of the regiment about 10 o'clock. He said that what surprised him most was that there were "so few rough riders there." In his mind the rough riders should muster 500, barring the fallen.

Now the rough riders lost on July 1 and 2, 87 killed and wounded. They did their share of facing Mausers and earned a share in the glory. The regulars accord them this willingly. But the true story of the rough riders is yet to be written. Their colonel has made three attempts at it, but he apparently saw little of what the regiment was doing as a regiment on July 1. Yet he was colonel over 500 men as good and brave as ever stood behind a gun.

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