

Sgt. John Quick – The Cuban “Wig-Wag”

BLUF: John Henry Quick was a United States Marine with 30 years of service. During the Spanish-American War, Quick received the Medal of Honor for his actions at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 1898. During World War I, Quick received the Distinguished Service Cross and the Navy Cross for his actions in France.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS DISPLAYED: Justice, Judgment, **Dependability, Initiative, Decisiveness, Tact, Integrity, Endurance, Bearing, Unselfishness, Courage, Knowledge, Loyalty, & Enthusiasm.**

SETTING THE STAGE: John Quick was born in Charlestown, West Virginia, on 20 June 1870. Living in a small farm community Quick attended a one-room school, achieving an education typical to his surroundings. Beginning at the age of sixteen, Quick worked for the community fire department. This activity required him to maintain his physical fitness and develop a strong sense of teamwork. Quick enlisted in the Marine Corps on 10 August 1892 at the age of twenty-two in the recruiting office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He completed his Marine Corps training at the Brooklyn Naval Yard on 24 October 1892. Quick was transferred to the Naval Yard in Washington, D.C., later transferring to the Marine Corps Barrack at "8th & I". By all accounts, Quick was a stellar Marine who was known for his discipline and bearing. He achieved the ranks of corporal in 1895 and sergeant in 1896. His first enlistment ended on 9 August 1897, but Quick was not finished with the Marine Corps. He enjoyed the Marine life immensely, so Quick re-enlisted as a private for another five years. The Marine Corps understood his worth, and he was reappointed immediately to his previous rank of sergeant. During the next six months, Quick was assigned to the armored cruiser *USS New York*. As tensions between the United States and Spain escalated, Quick was transferred to Company C, 1st Marine Battalion, in April 1898.

THE STORY: The United States declared war on Spain on 25 April 1898. Three days before the declaration, John Quick embarked on the auxiliary cruiser *USS Panther* headed for Key West Naval Station. Key West was the gathering point for the fleet in case tensions with Spain led to war. Cuba would be the focal point of the conflict, and the American military was only 90 miles away. On 29 April, the American squadron was dispatched to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for blockade duty. On 7 June, the battalion was ordered to seize and defend Guantanamo Bay. They made an unopposed landing on 10 June and established Camp McCalla as their forward operating base.

During the morning of 14 June 1898, Companies "C" and "D" under the command of Lt. Col Robert W. Huntington's Marine Battalion and approximately fifty Cuban revolutionary fighters navigated the surrounding hills to seize Cuzco Well, which was the main water supply for the Spanish garrison at Guantanamo Bay. The platform gunboat *USS Dolphin* moved east along the shore, ready to provide naval gunfire support. The Spanish discovered the movement of the American force, alerting their main force near the well. The Marines and Cubans occupied the hill, which overlooked the enemy's position but exposed heavy long-range Spanish artillery. Capt. George F. Elliott, the combat commander of Marine Company C, signaled the *Dolphin* to shell the Spanish position. The message, however, was misinterpreted because the sender was not clearly visible. Shells from the *USS Dolphin* began dropping on the Marine detachment led by 2ndLt. Louis Magill and Sgt. Quick, who was attempting to outflank the Spanish defensive position. Sgt. Quick solved the problem of directing the fire of the *USS Dolphin*. Quick, who heroically placed himself in plain sight of the vessel, though in danger of fire from the *USS Dolphin* and the Spanish. Standing on the hill's crest with an improvised semaphore flag on a stick, Quick signaled the ship using the "wig-wag" signaling method. His actions caused the ship to redirect their fire onto the Spanish in the concealed valley protecting the well.

When Sgt. Quick quickly finished the message, with the ship's fire directed correctly, picked up his M1895 Lee Navy rifle, and resumed his place on the firing line. Under the relenting fire, the Spaniards had begun to retreat by 1400 hours. For his brave and heroic conduct during this battle, Quick received the Medal of Honor.

AFTERMATH: John Quick remained in the Marine Corps for 30 years. As a Marine, he fought in five major engagements, including the First World War. In addition to the Medal of Honor, Quick received the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Cross, and the Silver Star award during his career. Quick passed away in 1922 in St. Louis, MO.

QUESTIONS

1. What leadership traits did John Quick display during the actions at Cuzco Well?
2. How did the actions of John Quick show his Marine Corps training throughout his career?
3. What lessons can one take from John Quick's story?

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