

Colonel Louis J. Van Schaick, U.S. Army

Lieutenant Louis J. Van Schaick received his Medal of Honor citation for the Philippine Insurrection in 1901: "While in pursuit of a band of insurgents, was the first of his detachment to emerge from a canyon and, seeing a column of insurgents and fearing they might turn and dispatch his men as they emerged one by one from the canyon, galloped forward and closed with the insurgents, thereby throwing them into confusion until the arrival of others of the detachment."

Louis J. Van Schaick was born in Cobleskill, NY, on 1 July 1875, the son of John and Francis Eliza (Shaver) Van Schaick. He entered the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1896, kicked out for deficiencies in math, returned but never graduated. However he was commissioned as a 2nd Lt. in April 1899. Lt. Van Schaick came to the Philippines with the American Army the same year.

On 23 September 23 1901 in Batangus Province, Lt. Van Schaick was on horseback leading 16 men through a deep and narrow cut, scouting out a large band of insurrectos, who had sacked a nearby barrio. The Americans were ambushed in the rear of their column by around 150 insurrectos. Lt. Van Schaick hurried to the rear of his column where, while still on his horse, he killed three enemy soldiers with his revolver. He was then knocked off of his horse, jumped to his feet and engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the butt of his revolver. He was severely wounded, almost having his left hand severed at the wrist. He was shortly after rescued by his men and the bolomen put to flight. For this action Lt. Van Schaick was awarded the Medal of Honor, which was not presented until 1913. Capt. Van Schaick remained in the Philippines, serving in the Philippine Scouts from 1904 to 1907. During this time, 1905 to 1907, he was the military governor of Cavite. From 1908 to 1912 he served as the military governor of Mindoro.

While in the Philippines Lt. Van Schaick was also awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal for saving a life at sea. The medal is the oldest non-military decoration in the U.S., established in 1874 and originally awarded by the Treasury Department. Lt. Van Schaick was awarded it for saving the lives of two drowning soldiers trying to cross a Philippine stream. At the time Capt. Van Schaick was the only member of the U.S. Military to hold both the MoH and the Life Saving Medal. Van Schaick was also one of a very few men ever awarded the American Cross of Honor (CoH). The CoH could only be awarded to those who were awarded the Lifesaving Medal.

In 1913 Capt. Van Schaick returned to the States, having more time and experience in the Philippines at that time than any other officer in the U.S. Army. After recovering from his Philippines service at the Presidio in San Francisco, he was stationed with the 26th Infantry where he went with them to the Mexican border with General Pershing to fight Pancho Villa. Capt. Van Schaick was next posted to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City as the military attaché. Until 1913 Capt. Van Schaick had never worn or owned a dress uniform, he wore khakis for his entire career up to that point.

From 1919 to 1921, he served as the inspector general of American Forces in Germany. He returned to the Philippines as advisor to the Governor General of the Philippines from 1930 to 1935, retiring as a Colonel in 1934. He and his wife decided to stay in the Philippines and live in Baguio where Louis became an executive with a mining company.

When World War II began and the Japanese arrived, both were placed into a civilian internment camp in Baguio with 501 other detainees. Louis was transferred to Manila; Nellie was given the option of remaining in Baguio but accompanied her husband to Bilibid prison.

Louis was not well while in prison, Nellie stayed with him to care and feed him. When the U.S. Army liberated the prison all hell had broken loose and the place was on fire. The Japanese guards had left but snipers continued to aim at the former prisoners and it was within artillery range. Louis was placed in an ambulance and not wanting to leave his side, Nellie jumped in the passenger seat next to the driver. They were taken to an Army clearing station hospital that came under Japanese artillery fire as well. During their time at the hospital 25 former internees were killed or maimed by the firing. On 11 February, the Van Schaick's were moved to another hospital out of artillery range. Louis was loaded into an ambulance, and Nellie again jumped in next to the driver, refusing to let her husband out of her sight. She cared for him until the day he died. COL Louis Van Schaick died on 14 February 1945 in the 54th Evac Hospital in Manila. Originally interred in the Santo Tomas internment camp cemetery, his remains were transferred to the American Military Cemetery in Plot D Row 3 Grave 162.

Van Schaick married Nellie Kellogg, who came to the Philippines as a 20-year old college graduate to join her father who was the U.S. Army chief medical officer under General MacArthur. While teaching at a high school in Cavite, Nellie met a young Lt. Van Schaick. At the time of their marriage, Louis Van Schaick held the rank of First Lieutenant in the 4th Infantry, he was also a Captain in the Philippine Scouts, Governor of Cavite, and head of the Cavite Provincial administration.

Nellie returned to the States after the war ended. She returned to the Philippines for a brief stay, but because the Huk rebellion was going on and due to complications with tuberculosis that she contracted while a prisoner, she again returned to the U.S., this time for good. Before her death in 1974, Nellie talked about setting up a scholarship for Filipino doctors (the Nellie Kellogg Van Schaick Foundation based in Tucson, Arizona). The scholarship was established in 1984 and is still active; it has sent thousands of Filipino's through medical school. The stipulation being that they must serve at least one year in a rural area.

Military Awards: Medal of Honor, Gold Lifesaving Medal, American Cross of Honor, and Prisoner of War Medal.

Masonic History: Brother Van Schaick was a Mason and National Sojourner.