

Private Emit L. Miller

Wednesday, April 22, 1891, 32-year-old Miller of the U.S. Fourth Cavalry spent the evening with friends in Rose's saloon talking and perhaps playing cards. The conversation turned to the 1st Cavalry in which Miller had spent his first three enlistments. A local civilian named Andrew J. Hunt overheard the conversation and, though normally soft-spoken said, "All the soldiers of the 1st Cavalry were sons of bitches." Miller took offense and pushed him aside saying he was one of them and that he wanted no trouble. Hunt pulled a gun from his under his coat and shot Miller in the chest. Hunt was quickly arrested and Miller was rushed to the Ft. Walla Walla hospital.

The following night around 7 p.m. Major Egon A. Koerper, the base surgeon, informed Sheriff J. M. McFarland that Miller was barely alive. The sheriff placed Hunt in a wagon and took him to the base hospital where Miller immediately identified him as the shooter.

Vigilantism in the U.S. Army was an extremely rare, but not unheard of occurrence. The sheriff's driver heard a small party of soldiers, angry over the shooting of a fellow soldier, making plans to take the prisoner from the sheriff as they left the fort late on the night on the 23rd. The sheriff informed the base commander and the plot was thwarted.

On Friday the 24th, several soldiers were seen hanging around the court house. Sheriff McFarland requested that the base commander, Colonel Charles E Compton, restrict all the soldiers to the base. Colonel Compton replied he could do nothing and that he did not expect any trouble. Sheriff McFarland returned to the jail and added five or six armed deputies as extra guards. That night as many as 200 soldiers from the fort sealed off all the streets to the courthouse and assumed control of the courthouse and all of the officers in the building. The soldiers dragged the prisoner outside and he remained silent except to mutter, "I guess my time has come." When one of the soldiers shoved the gambler into the courtyard a gunshot was heard and Hunt collapsed to the ground. Dozens of soldiers then ran up and fired their guns either into his body or into the air. The incident lasted only a few minutes and then the soldiers vanished into the night as silently as they had appeared. Some of the shots were so close together that the coroner could not tell the exact number of bullet wounds. There was no less than 16 wounds and eight or nine were in the head.

Surgeon Koerper last spoke with Miller around 10:00 on Monday the 27th and shortly thereafter he breathed his last. The next day he was buried with full military honors in the Ft. Walla Walla Cemetery. The procession was led by the 4th Cavalry band followed by an escort of eight privates from his troop, the chaplain and the surgeon. Behind the hearse were the pallbearers from Troop D and another member leading Miller's horse with all his equipment and his boots reversed in the stirrups. The rest of his troop

followed and behind them the other three Ft. Walla Walla companies. Last was a large contingent of townspeople who came to pay their respect.

Hunt was buried in the cemetery now known as Mountain View with other gamblers paying his burial costs and providing a headstone.

Seven soldiers were indicted and went to civilian trial. All were acquitted. Then they, and one other soldier, were immediately rearrested by military authorities and taken to Fort Sherman, Idaho for court-martial. Three of them were found guilty of military infractions and given dishonorable discharges. Then Colonel Compton had to be court-martialed for failing to prevent the incident. He was found guilty and sentenced to suspension of rank and command on half pay for two years and sent to Chicago to sit out the embarrassment. A year later his three decades of honorable service and two brevets for distinguisher actions in combat caused the new secretary of war to commute the sentence and return him to command of the 4th Cavalry. He went on to serve in the Spanish-American War and earned promotion to brigadier general shortly before retiring.



Source: Wild West Magazine, February 2010 edition, *Shot Like a Dog: Soldier Justice at Fort Walla Walla*, By Douglas C. McChristian