**The Rough Riders**

One of Teddy’s most notable pre-presidential achieve­ments came as [com­man­der of the Rough Rid­ers](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/roughriders.htm), arguably the most famous U.S. reg­i­ment to see action dur­ing the Spanish-American War of 1898. The Rid­ers’ leg­endary charge up Cuba’s San Juan Heights in Cuba (on foot, no less), led by a stal­wart Lieu­tenant Colonel Roo­sevelt on horse­back, was a piv­otal vic­tory for Amer­i­can troops.

All that stood between U.S. troops and the Span­ish held-city of San­ti­ago were two hills, San Juan and Ket­tle, which col­lec­tively formed the San Juan Heights. [On the morn­ing of July 1](http://burnpit.legion.org/2013/01/teddy-roosevelt-awarded-medal-honor-103-years-after-san-juan-hill), the Rough Rid­ers were ordered to attack the 760 Span­ish troops who defended the two hills. Approx­i­mately 8,000 U.S. sol­diers took part in the ini­tial charge, but hun­dreds of men were killed by the time U.S. forces reached the base of the heights. Lt. Col. Roo­sevelt led the Rough Rid­ers up Ket­tle Hill, [aided by Gatling guns](http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trsoldier.html) manned by his fel­low Amer­i­cans. They were joined by Cap­tain Pershing’s 10th Cav­alry, a black reg­i­ment who later became known as the ‘Buf­falo Sol­diers’. Under heavy Span­ish artillery fire, the Rough Rid­ers reached the crest of Ket­tle Hill and engaged in hand-to-hand fight­ing with the oppos­ing army; the Amer­i­cans secured their posi­tion on Ket­tle Hill when the Span­ish began to retreat.

The men were sun­burned and exhausted. But when Teddy saw Span­ish troops fir­ing upon the forces that had taken the adja­cent San Juan Hill, he requested per­mis­sion to assist them. Once Gen­eral Sum­ner gave his approval, Lt. Col. Roo­sevelt led 500 men in a charge down the steep ravine that sep­a­rated both hills. After wad­ing through waist-deep trenches, the Rid­ers suc­cess­fully ascended the hill, drove away the lin­ger­ing Span­ish forces, and ended the day in firm con­trol of the San Juan Heights.