

MY RIDE ACROSS CUBA.

BY LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ANDREW S. ROWAN.

THE STORY OF A SECRET MISSION TO THE CUBAN LEADERS.

EDITOR'S NOTE:—When war was declared against Spain in April last, the War Department decided to send an agent to General García, to ascertain what coöperation might be expected from the insurgents, in case we should invade Cuba. The man chosen for this mission was Lieutenant Andrew S. Rowan, a Virginian, a graduate of West Point in the class of 1881, at this time employed in the Military Information Bureau of the War Department. In the following article he himself tells the story of his journey. The narrative is the simple, straightforward one of a man who is unconscious that he has done anything remarkable, and one to whom daring and hardship are matters of course when they are necessary to the discharge of a duty. The reader, however, cannot forget that from the moment he left Jamaica on April 23d until he arrived in Key West on May 11th, he was exposed to all the dangers which a state of war brings the despatch-bearer who ventures into the enemy's territory. Sleeping on stone ballast in the bottom of an open boat, climbing on foot through thickets, riding fifty miles and more a day over abandoned roads or through unbroken forests, stopping only when preparation for continuing the trip required it, exposed to wind and sun and waves for two days in a boat so small that the occupants were forced to sit upright in it, forced on land and sea to keep continually on the alert for a watchful enemy—these are the experiences which Lieutenant Rowan dismisses as mere incidents. After receiving Lieutenant Rowan's report, Major-General Miles wrote to the Secretary of War: "I also recommend that First Lieutenant Andrew S. Rowan, 19th U. S. Infantry, be made a lieutenant-colonel of one of the regiments of immunes. Lieutenant Rowan made a journey across Cuba, was with the insurgent army under Lieutenant-General García, and brought most important and valuable information to the government. This was a most perilous undertaking, and in my judgment Lieutenant Rowan performed an act of heroism and cool daring that has rarely been excelled in the annals of warfare."

UPON the outbreak of hostilities with Spain, I was the instrument chosen by the War Department for learning more of the military possibilities of eastern Cuba. At noon on Saturday, April 23, 1898, I reached No. East Queen Street, Kingston, Jamaica, where I placed myself in the hands of unknown friends. Three hours later a four-

seated carriage, drawn by two small Jamaica horses, was driven rapidly up to the door. The moment I entered, the negro driver leaned forward, plying his whip, and we whirled furiously through the narrow streets and out the Spanish Town road. Four miles from the city we stopped with a jolt in the midst of a dense tropical forest. A second carriage, containing four men, came up in a cloud of dust, wheeled out, and passed us. My driver whipped his reeking horses and followed closely. In this way we raced up the beautiful tropical valley of the Cobra River and came at dusk to Bog Walk, near which we halted for a few moments for food and a change of horses, and then drove onward again at the same killing pace. During all of this time no one had spoken a word to me and I had presumed to ask no questions.

It must have been nearly ten o'clock that night when both carriages drew suddenly to a standstill. It was dark and hot and breathlessly silent. From the jungle came presently a shrill whistle. Men appeared in the middle of the road. There was a short whispered parley, and then we entered our carriages again and the journey was continued, now not quite so furiously. An hour later we halted at a little shack-like farmhouse, where supper awaited us. After a glass of rum all around, I was introduced to one Gervacio Sabio, a commandante of the Cuban navy, who was charged with my safe delivery into the hands of General Calixto García. Gervacio was much lighter in complexion

than almost any other Cuban I had seen—a tall, wiry, determined man, with a fierce, drooping mustache, that gave him the aspect of a Caribbean pirate.

Again on the road, the horses raced along at a steady pace until sometime after midnight, when we were halted by whistle signals in a field of sugar cane. Here we left

our carriages. A walk of a mile brought us to a grove of coca palms, bordering a pretty little bay. Fifty yards out on the water a small fishing-smack lay dim and silent. Although we made no sound, a light flashed out for a single instant on the boat. Gervacio, the pirate, grunted his satisfaction and answered the signal.

In a hoarse whisper Gervacio impressed upon me the great necessity of caution. When we had escaped the Jamaican authorities the Cuban coast lay a hundred miles to the north. It was patrolled night and day by the Spanish *lanchas* or coast-guard boats. If we were signaled by one of these sentinel ships we were to hoist the French flag and lie flat in the bottom of our boat.

If the Spaniards were still suspicious and insisted on running alongside, we were to rise at a signal and give them a volley. Perhaps we might drive them off; if not, we knew our fate. My companions were filibusters and I was a spy. And thus, with Gervacio swearing solemnly that he and his men would stand by the "Americano," I climbed on the moist shoulders of a Cuban sailor and was borne out through the surf.

A gentle breeze caught our sails, and the



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ANDREW S. ROWAN.

From a photograph taken especially for McClure's Magazine by
Francis B. Johnston.

little craft cut her way smoothly outward through the phosphorescent sea with the stars of an unfamiliar sky shining above us. About three o'clock in the morning, I crawled under the seat among the ballast bowlders and went to sleep. When I awakened, the sun was shining hotly over the gunwale. The Cubans showed their white teeth with a "Buenos dias, Meester Rowan," and we began another day of converting time into distance.

About four o'clock in the afternoon the clouds which had walled in the north broke away, and the towering peaks of eastern Cuba stood forth in the sunshine. Fearing that we were nearing the coast too rapidly, Gervacio ordered the mainsail furled, and we began to teeter along under a patch of a jib. It seemed hardly a dozen miles across the glaring water to the shore, but it was not until nearly midnight that the sailors began to take soundings. Gervacio had figured out the time-table of the *lanchas* very closely, and yet we crept in as stealthily as a red Indian, Gervacio's gaunt form looming high at the stern and his keen eye sweeping the horizon for the sight of a sail. A coral reef here parallels the shore, but with the pirate at the helm and full sail set we swept in upon a long roller from the open sea, leaped it gracefully, and dropped into the quiet water beyond.

Within our reef-protected bay we felt quite secure from any Spanish *lancha*. Indeed, so confident was our commander that he drew up within fifty yards of the shore and dropped anchor for the night. This arrangement was scarcely to my liking. I deemed it dangerous, but I risked no expression of

opinion; and I slept as soundly as any of the others.

With the coming of daylight I found that we were in a moon-shaped inlet between two small headlands in the district of Portillo. Above, the sun was rising gloriously behind El Turquino—the highest peak in all Cuba—and below, near the shore, rose a riotous wall of tangled grape, mangrove, and cactus,

defended from the sea by a sandy rampart against which the water broke in long, lapping swells. In all probability I never shall look on a scene of more entrancing beauty.

A ragged Cuban appeared presently on shore, and faces could be seen peering from the jungle. Signals passed back and forth. We pressed forward until the keel of our boat snubbed in the sand, and then I rode ashore on my sailor's shoulders. A half naked Cuban lad, with two terrible scars in his breast, the marks of Spanish Mauser bullets, led the way into the thicket. Here I saw some interesting salinas, crude arrangements for obtaining salt by the evaporation of sea water. Cut off from supplies from the outside world,

the Cuban army has been provided with salt in this poor way for years.

Such a spot as this offered no pleasant landing nor camping ground for an invading army. The coast is fringed with a marsh-like coral reef of variable width, averaging probably three miles. This is pitted with small holes and marked with sharp hummocks, making traveling slow and difficult. Upon the porous coral grows an almost impenetrable tangle of small hard-wood trees, infinite in variety and rooted in an inch or two of vegetable mold. Through this jungle



COLONEL CARLOS HERNANDEZ, CHIEF OF STAFF TO GENERAL COLLAZO, AND ONE OF THE PARTY THAT ACCOMPANIED LIEUTENANT ROWAN THROUGH THE LATTER HALF OF HIS JOURNEY.

From a photograph taken especially for McClure's Magazine by Frances B. Johnston.

we fought our way, stopping, when we could no longer bear the heat and fatigue, to refresh ourselves with the delicious water drawn from green coconuts. At last we passed the coral thicket and came out into a superb forest that needed but the touch of the farm implement to transform it into a blooming garden. Still with our faces to the north, we cautiously crossed the road from Santiago de Cuba, and plunged into the thorn and cactus thicket beyond, where even a Spanish guerrilla would not dare to follow.

Six miles from the coast we reached the foothills of the Sierras—verdure-clad hills that, I was told, were teeming with the families of the Cuban soldiers, who had been driven from their homes by the *reconcentrado* edict. Here, in inaccessible heights, I saw patches of sweet potatoes and other vegetables, which in this land of magic sunshine sprout today and to-morrow are ready for eating.

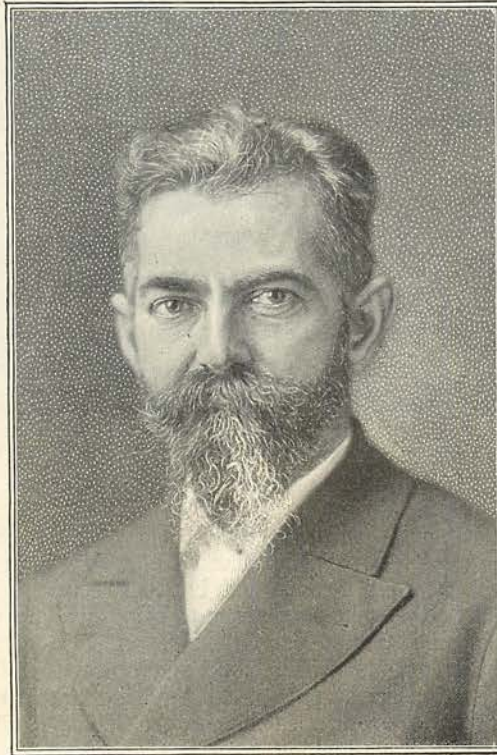
We had a practical lesson of the Cuban method of feeding an army. At convenient points along the path stood little thatched sheds, each with a smoldering camp-fire just in front. An aged Cuban man, or a woman with little naked children, stood guard. As the ragged soldiers pass along, the hungry ones rake sweet potatoes from the ashes, shuck off the skins, and eat them while they march. There is never a failure in the supply, never a time when the desperately poor wives and old fathers and little children in the hills cannot raise and roast enough potatoes to feed these ragged fighters for a desperate cause.

On the morning of April 27th, we were in

the district of Pilon and had begun to climb the mountains. Here I got some of the best views of my trip, and I formed a good idea of what the country would offer to an invading army. All around me rose great rounded peaks, covered to the top with jungles of verdure. Flocks of saucy parrots disputed garrulously our right of thoroughfare. Trailing vines hung above us and around us in festoons, intermingled

with strange trees, making a thicket through which rabbit scarce could find a passage. And yet my Cuban guides knew every turn of the blind trail, and I ceased to wonder at their success in eluding and vanquishing the Spanish soldiery.

The next day our horses slid down the slippery sides of a score of ravines. The ascents were not so easy, and I felt sorry for the sore backs of the poor beasts. Nearly all of the horses that I saw in Cuba were saddle-galled, but they bore it with as little complaint as the Cuban soldier bears his hunger. The beds of streams I found as a rule strewn with boulders, although Cuba is freer from



GENERAL ENRIQUE COLLAZO, THE CUBAN GENERAL WHO ACCOMPANIED LIEUTENANT ROWAN ON HIS RETURN FROM CUBA.

From a photograph taken especially for McClure's Magazine by Frances B. Johnston.

stones than any other mountainous section of the world that I have visited. The long dry season had lasted for months, yet the streams still held water in pools. A few months later, with the advent of the rainy season, they would become roaring torrents, impassable even to small parties of men.

We were now beyond the Sierras, and about sunset we halted before a thatched shed called *Jíbaro*. Here we partook of a meal which introduced several dishes new to me, and all poorly suited to my appetite. The remains of a beef newly killed, its dismembered parts hanging from the joists and drip-



LIEUTENANT ROWAN AND HIS PARTY APPROACHING THE CUBAN COAST.

From a sketch by General Enrique Collazo.

ping blood on the earth floor, made me affect an air of unconcern I did not feel. While we were still at supper I heard a furious clattering of horses' hoofs and a shout from the Cuban outposts at the edge of the forest. We all went tumbling out together. A Cuban officer and his staff dashed up to the door and dismounted. I was at once presented to a young and vigorous looking man who proved to be Lieutenant-Colonel Castillo, of the staff of General Ríos. After a short consultation, Colonel Castillo left us as suddenly as he came, and the next day General Ríos appeared. My meetings with these officers were cordial, and they treated me with unvarying kindness. General Ríos is the "General of The Coasts" of this part of Cuba. He is a cross between a Cuban and an Indian, and consequently very dark; but his fine facial angle and thin lips at once indicate that his color is a mere incident. He is fifty-five years of age, erect of stature, his beard cut *a la* Napoleon III., and his movements quick, athletic, tiger-like. He must have proved a very unwelcome foe to old Spain. His district of The Coasts, as I had reason to know, was in perfect order. I had a long talk with him concerning conditions in Media Luna, Manzanillo, and at the

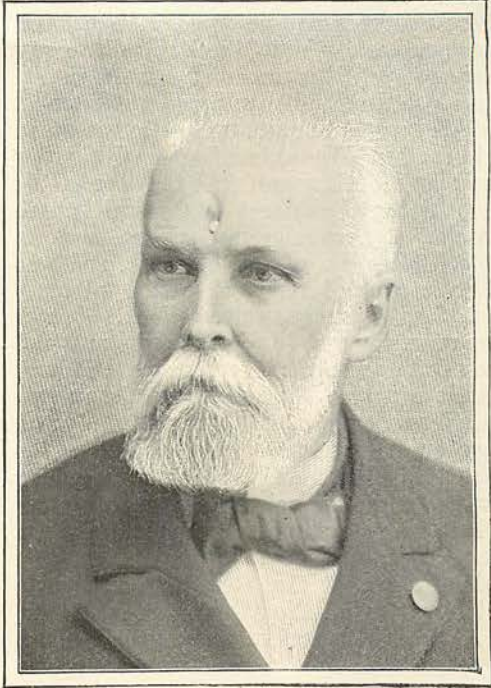
light-house at Cabo Cruz. He naïvely remarked that his information was two days old, but that he would despatch his agents at once to bring his data up to date, and that by the day after to-morrow I should have the plans and figures that I wanted.

In the field here, among the forest fastnesses, the Cubans publish certain tri-weekly papers, the organs of the insurgent party. The editor of one, a successor of Masó, the President of the Republic, was introduced to me by General Ríos.

Our mounts ready, General Ríos turned over to me an escort of several hundred cavalry, and we took up the road to El Chino, riding down the gentle slopes of the Cauto valley. Here for the first time I found a field for the cavalry and artillery, although the intersecting watercourses, with their fringe of jungle, would still leave to the infantry the brunt of battle. The ever faithful island of Cuba, the Pearl of the Antilles, and the fairest land that eyes have ever seen, is also the land *par excellence* for infantry. This let us not forget.

General Ríos left us at El Chino, where he received a large consignment of cattle from Camaguey (Puerto Príncipe). My guide from this point was Lieutenant Dionisio

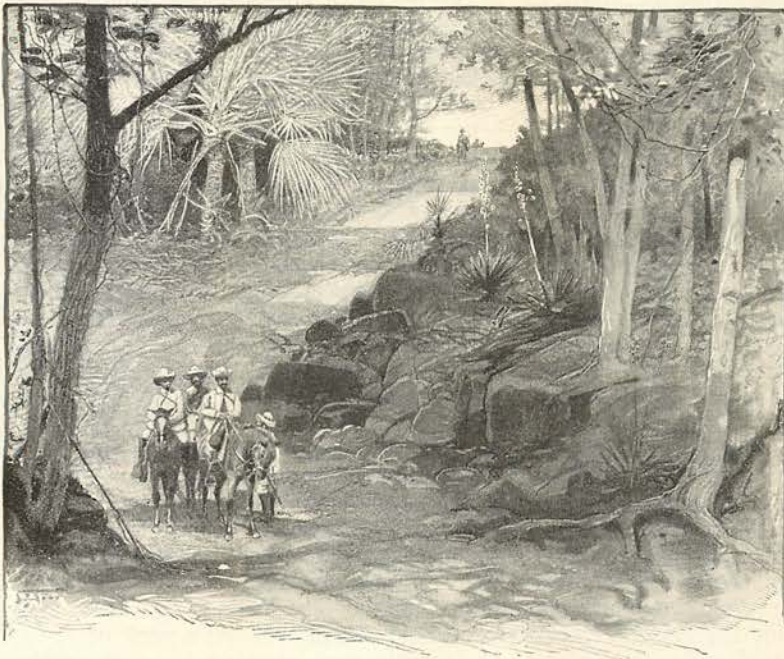
López, a coal black negro whose knowledge of the roads and country we were to traverse was perfect. We crossed the Sierra Maestro on the north side of the Convento Mulato, a small rounded elevation mostly free from timber, upon the top of which I saw an observation or lookout station of the insurgents. It was a high, rude tower, with a platform near the top, covered with palm leaves. In this high perch the insurgent sentinel sat watching. At some of these lookouts we were challenged, at others we were permitted to pass without question. Our new guide was a hard rider, but he knew the best camps. The second night we camped at Buey Arriba (marked on the map Limonar), about twenty miles south of Bayamo. This was the best and most beautiful camp I made in Cuba. Our escort put up some shelters, covered them with banana leaves, and stretched our hammocks beneath them. The next morning we started at sunrise, and for two hours our ride was through a most charming country. At Candelaria we passed the only house (and that a very small one, and burned, too) I had seen during a ride of a hundred miles. We rode through fields of grass so high that our horses were hidden, and without a sign of a habitation, and we met no evidence of human life till we



GENERAL CALIXTO GARCÍA, THE CUBAN LEADER WITH WHOM LIEUTENANT ROWAN WENT TO CONFER.

struck the royal road to Manzanillo near

Peralejo, the scene of Maceo's attack on Campo's command. Here we saw many squads of men, women, and children hurrying along. Bayamo had fallen. These people were going again to the city from which they had been expelled for over three years. They formed ragged but merry groups. This part of Cuba is a tropical garden gone to waste. Even what was once the great highway from Manzanillo to Bayamo is now in places overgrown with



TRAVERSING A MOUNTAIN ROAD.

From a sketch by General Enrique Collazo.

brush. A straggling telegraph pole here and there also tells its tale of destruction. On reaching the banks of the Bayamo, we saw some of the little forts of the Spaniards. They looked much like railroad water-tanks, and they would be quite useless to withstand artillery fire. The Cuban flag was flying over the village of Bayamo. At the door of the headquarters I was met by General Calixto García. I gave him my papers, made a short statement of my business, and was given a glass of rum and invited to breakfast, for it was now twelve o'clock. Breakfast over, we went to work, and by nightfall the return despatches were ready. General García asked me if I could leave that night, and I answered in the affirmative. In an hour our mounts were standing before the door. I bade farewell, and after a touching parting with Gervacio, whose many virtues I had tried to lay before General García, we rode on to the northward.

It was evident that General García was a "to-day" man. No "*mañana*" man was he. He is a large, well-built man of about sixty years of age—a gentleman in appearance and manner, a good soldier, and so far as his resources go, a great general. His department extends from the eastern trocha to Point Maisí. He has kept the Spaniards confined to a few of the larger towns, and when the smaller ones were occupied by them, he promptly laid siege and generally drove them out. In this way Victoria de la Tunas and Guisa and Guaymar have passed one after another into his hands.

Our new party was headed by General Enrique Collazo, and with him was his chief of staff, Colonel Carlos Hernandez. The General had been present during the afternoon's consultation, and General García had spoken of him in high terms as an honest, straightforward, and intelligent officer, a graduate of the Artillery School at Segovia in Spain. He has been prominent in politics in Cuba for three years. The more I knew of General Collazo the more I liked and admired the man.

Colonel Hernandez was educated in the United States, and his service to Cuba has been unflinchingly loyal. His health has been ruined, and he bears the marks of Mauser bullets that passed through his right lung. He it was who planted the mines along the Cauto, and lay in ambush on the high banks back from the river for the Spanish *lanchas* bearing troops and supplies for the Bayamo district. His knowledge of the topography and his acquaintance with the geological

and botanical resources of the country, I found a never-ending source of instruction. We camped that night near the Cauto, where I observed, as I had all along, the disinterested patriotism of the Cuban soldier. It was nearly midnight when our supper was finished. The men behind the guns had yet to look out for themselves. If they carried rations no one could say how or where, but before they retired they had obtained something to eat. They had looked out for the officers and for the horses, and, lastly, for themselves. There was no complaint.

The next day at Cauto El Paso we forded the broad Cauto—a stream which in the rainy season becomes a raging, impassable torrent. Near nightfall we passed the remains of an old Spanish earthwork, turned into the brush, and camped under a shed called Las Arenas. The next day we reached Victoria de Las Tunas, the scene of García's great victory, where we examined the ruined works. I believe it to be the most completely destroyed town of modern times. Every building has been razed to the ground, and will never again furnish a foothold for Spanish troops. That night the sand flies deprived me of sleep, and, having no bedding, I suffered from the cold, as, indeed, I did every night I was on the island. Warm days and cold nights were the rule.

The next day was spent in preparing for the voyage to Nassau. Sails had to be improvised from hammock canopies and food collected from the neighboring forests. May the fifth found us on our way to the coast—our last day's ride. About sunset we cut our way through the grape thicket that walls in the sea and drew a little cockle-shell of a boat from under a mangrove bush. It had a capacity of only 104 cubic feet, much too small for our party. Dr. Bieta was accordingly sent back, leaving six of us, with a seat for each and a place between our legs for the supplies. There was small comfort in thinking of a long and dangerous voyage at sea in such a craft.

At eleven o'clock that night we pulled out cautiously under cover of darkness, leaving behind us the harbor of Manatí and entering a choppy sea. It was desperately hard rowing, and the big waves were continually washing over the gunwales, wetting our stores and keeping us busy bailing. All night long we worked steadily without a wink of sleep. At dawn the next morning the man at the helm called out, "un vapor"—a steamer. This was followed by "dos vapores, tres



PASSAGE OF THE CAUTO RIVER.

From a sketch by General Enrique Collazo.

vapores, caramba, doce vapores"—twelve steamers.

It was Admiral Sampson's fleet moving eastward toward Porto Rico.

This little diversion was all that we had to break the unhappy monotony of that broiling day and night. The next morning we reached the Great Bahama banks, and slipped out into the Tongue of the Ocean. Here we sighted a low coral island or two lying flat on the sea, and we passed a few little schooners, not without trepidation. In the afternoon a sponging steamer, with a crew of thirteen negroes, picked us up and carried us into Nassau, where we were promptly set upon by the most rapacious quarantine highwaymen that can be found anywhere. Mr. McLane, the American consul, finally rescued us, and on the second day we were off for Key West in the schooner "Fearless." As soon as we arrived, I left for Tampa, and thence for Washington, where I reported to Russell A. Alger, Secretary of War, and General Nelson A. Miles. After receiving a summary of my official report, the General asked me to give

him an account of my experiences. This I did briefly, pointing out my course on the map, and telling how I reached General García's camp, for it must be understood that its location was unknown when I set out for Cuba. General Miles listened patiently, and when I had concluded, the features of his handsome countenance relaxed. He congratulated me upon my safe return, and uttered some words of commendation which I cannot here repeat, but which, I am sure, I never can forget. Later the papers published an extract from a letter written by the General to Secretary Alger. The same day I received another letter, sent some time previously to Kingston, Jamaica, and returned from there to Washington. It was from my seven years old little girl. Here it is:

Dear papa:

I am wearing my hair braided. Look out that the Spaniards don't catch you.

Hurry and come home the cherries will be ripe by the time you get here.

With love and kisses

ELIZABETH ROWAN.