

Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal

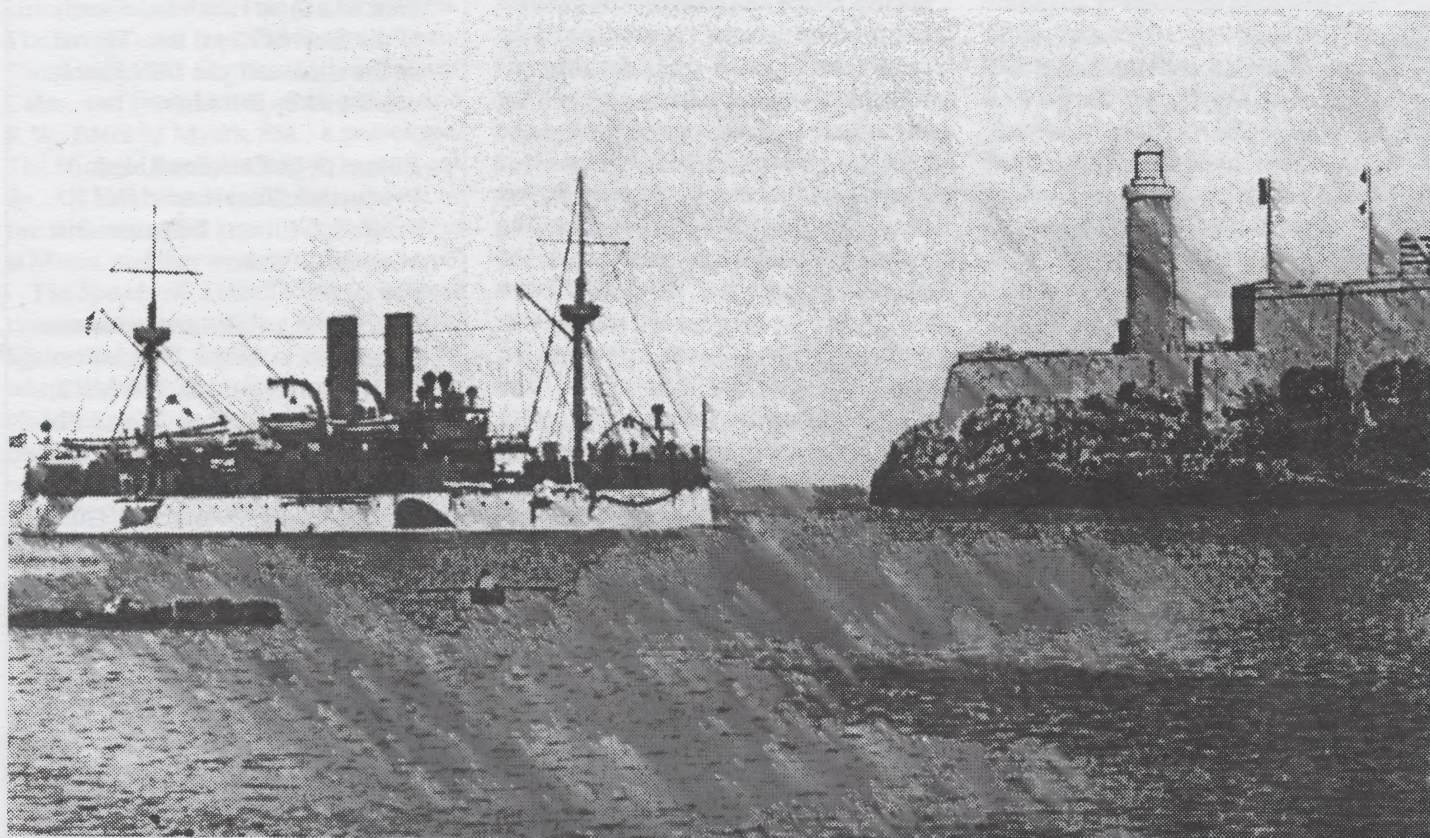
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USS SHARK

 OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Battleship Maine A Key West Legacy



The USS Maine entering Havana Harbor on January 26, 1898. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

By Joseph G. Pais
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The following article (used by permission of the author) is an excerpt of chapters 4 and 5 of the book "The Battleship Maine A Key West Legacy."

The U.S.S. Maine Sent to Key West

In November of 1897, the Queen Regent announced that she had ordered an Autonomist Government be set up for the people of Cuba. This step toward representative

government for and by the Cuban people was met with overwhelming approval of Americans living in Cuba. They were certain that the revolution would quickly die out. General Maximo Gomez saw the matter differently. He refused to recognize the Regent's decree and said he would continue the fight for total independence for the island. The American President and the American press hailed the Queen's announcement. In Cuba, the decree of autonomist government coupled with the

replacement of General Weyler frightened the Spanish elite and the members of the Civil Volunteers who believed in the strict and brutal policies of the Governor-General. Civil unrest was growing in Havana and anti-American feeling was running high.

In the meantime, the *Maine* was ordered to proceed to Key West where her Captain was ordered to set up a special emergency code with General Fitzhugh Lee, the

(Continued on page 10)

Society News

Lectures and Field Trips

By John Viele

January 19: Who Sank the Maine?

To a full-house of members and guests, Rear Admiral Nick Gee USN (Ret.) presented the background and known facts surrounding the explosion and sinking of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898. This catastrophe resulted in the loss of the lives of 266 officers and men and led to a declaration of war against Spain. A naval court of inquiry met in the Custom House at Key West. After presenting the same evidence given to the court, Admiral Gee asked members of the audience to voice their conclusions as to the cause of the explosion, and then took a vote on the various theories put forth. The majority of the votes were almost evenly divided between spontaneous internal combustion and an external explosive device set at the direction of U.S. war mongers, but it was agreed that the real cause will probably never be known.

February 4: Honoring John Bartlum's Great Granddaughter

Members of the Society gathered at the Key West Historic Sculpture Garden next to the bust of Key West's renowned clipper-ship builder, John Bartlum, to honor the shipbuilder's great granddaughter, Mrs. Genevieve Wilson, for her efforts toward obtaining funds from Bartlum descendants to help pay for the sculpture. Commissioner Wilhelmina Harvey presented Mrs. Wilson with an Honorary Conch Certificate; President of the Friends of Mallory Square, Ed Swift, thanked her for her fund raising efforts; and President of the Key West Maritime Historical Society, Ed Little, appointed her a commodore in the Historical Society Navy. Also attending was Mrs. Louisa Sirls, Mrs. Wilson's daughter and great-great granddaughter of John Bartlum.

February 23: Around the World Without an Engine

Another capacity crowd gathered to hear boating writer and Society member Mary Drake present a slide program of her five-year voyage around the world in a replica

of Joshua Slocum's yawl. One hundred years ago, in June 1898, Joshua Slocum sailed into Newport, Rhode Island to become the first person to sail around the world alone. Mary and her former husband, George Maynard, built the replica, named *Scud*, in their back yard using timber cut in the surrounding woods. Like the original *Spray*, their yawl had no engine or electronics. During the voyage, they visited forty-one ports in twenty countries and educated their children (aged eight, ten, and eleven when they departed) through correspondence courses.

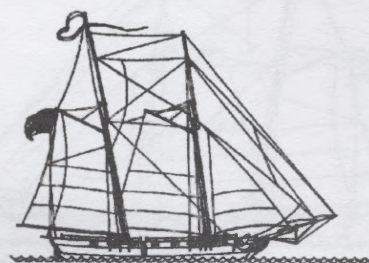
Society Helps "Remember the Maine"

Many of the Society's members and directors deserve much credit for their efforts in planning and helping to put on the many events that took place during the battleship *Maine* commemoration. Rear Admiral Nick Gee worked very hard for two years to put the whole commemoration together, serving as co-chairman of the Centennial Commission. Emily Boyd Lowe planned and directed the "Musical Journey Through the Life and Times of the Spanish-American War." She selected some of the music from the collection of the late Joseph Albertson, a former director of the Society. Her husband, Don Lowe, sang in the college chorus and served as stage manager. The concert was performed before nearly 3,000 people at Fort Zachary Taylor with Nelson Read, Art Drinkwater, Bob Rowe, Charlie Kamper, Bob Elliott, and John Viele blending their voices in barber-shop harmony. Rear Admiral Bob Elliott also spearheaded the drive to get the U.S. Postal Service to issue a special "Remember the Maine" commemorative stamp. Phil Carney served as a member of the commission and furnished the results of his research into the sinking. Tom Hambright, another member of the commission, also provided historical research, ably assisted by Lynda Hambright. It may be that there are other Society members of whom we are not aware who contributed to the commemorative events. Please forgive us if your name was not included.

New Members

Robert G. Nebergall, Charleston, SC.

Joyce Newman, Big Pine Key.



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Editor: D. O. Christian Rieger

Production: Tom Hambright

Staff: Bob Elliott, Ed Little, Bill Muir, John Viele

Letters and articles are welcome. Please write to: Editor, Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, KWMHS, P.O. Box 695, Key West, FL 33041 The KWMHS headquarters are located at 631 Greene Street. Appointments recommended. (305) 292-7903.

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Captain Collier's Schooner Speedwell Capsized

Nine Lives Lost Out of a Party of Thirteen.

The following articles appeared in the Fort Myers Press of Thursday, March 10, 1898.

Key West, March 3. — The schooner *Speedwell*, Captain W.M. Collier, from Marco, Fla. for Key West, was struck by a squall to-day while off Marquesas, eighteen miles from here, and capsized. Nine persons were drowned out of thirteen, all told, on board.

Among the victims were the three children of Captain Collier, George, Tom, and Wilbur, aged respectively, 4, 6, and 8 years, and the entire Nichols family, Bradley Nichols and his wife, their son, and the latter's wife, and the two grandchildren. The family were from Bridgeport, Conn. Those saved are: Captain Collier, Samuel Cates, and Jesse Green, deck hands, and R. W. Bates of Myers, Fla., a passenger. The Nichols family is said to be well-to-do. All had been staying for a month or two at a small hotel kept by Captain Collier at Marco, and they were on their way home.

The *Speedwell*, a small schooner of about twenty tons, was making small headway against the wind, Captain Collier was at the wheel, and the Nichols family and the Collier children were in the cabin fast asleep. Suddenly a squall came up and the boat was turned over. Collier, the deck hands, and Mr. Bates were swept into the sea, but clung to the rigging and were saved.

After being in the rigging for twenty-four hours, the sea subsided. Then they got the dingy loose, baled her out with a hat, broke a thwart in two pieces, and, with these for oars, rowed toward Marquesas. After going three miles, they were picked up exhausted by a fishing sloop and brought here.

Samuel Cates, one of the survivors, was seen at his home to-night. He said: Captain Collier has been sailing twenty years in these waters. He is not to blame. Before we knew it we were lifted off our feet and thrown into the water. The people below were penned in like rats. The wife of young Nichols rose to a skylight. I was clinging to the rigging. She waved her hand at me, and that's the last I saw of her. When we got off, two hours later, they were all dead.

"We did not see a thing of the Children or hear a cry. We had to bale with the hat all the time we were in the dingy, and often came near being swamped."

Soon after being brought into port Captain

Collier and Jesse Green went out on the yacht *Buccaneer*, accompanied by a diver, to try to recover the bodies.

From Key West Herald.

The New York Journal's dispatch boat *Buccaneer*, under the direction of Correspondent Karl Decker, which at 4 p.m. Thursday left for the scene of the wrecked schooner *Speedwell*, which was capsized about three miles off South West Key (one of the Marquesas Keys,) returned to Key West at 4:00 p.m. yesterday bringing eight of the nine dead bodies of those who lost their lives about 7:30 Thursday morning.

The bodies brought up by the *Buccaneer* were: Mr. Bradley Nichols, aged about 60 or 65 years (said to be a wealthy citizen of Bridgeport, Conn.); Mrs. Nichols, Sr., aged about 50 or 55 years; Mrs. Nichols, Jr., aged about 26 or 27 years, and two children, a boy of about 8 or 9 years, and a girl about 3 ½ or 4 years, children of Mrs. Nichols, Jr., and grand children of the elder Mr. and Mrs. Nichols; also the three sons of Capt. Collier, William, aged 8 years; Thomas, 6 years and George, 4 years.

The body of Mr. Nichols, Jr., drifted out of the ill fated schooner soon after she capsized, therefore it could not be recovered.

The *Buccaneer* arrived in the neighborhood of the sad disaster about 7 p.m. Thursday and dropped anchor for all night. Early yesterday morning, about 7 o'clock, they were led to the wrecked vessel by the coal schooner *Pocahontas* which had found the vessel the evening before and had dismasted her, and was returning to the wreck to see if she could not be saved. The Captain and crew were Negroes, and did not know the ghastly contents of the cabin.

After the *Buccaneer* had found the wreck preparations were at once made to secure the dead bodies.

Mr. Andy Black, assisted by another one of the crew of the *Buccaneer* and Captain Collier, manned a small boat, and with assistance of a boat hook and a sponge hook, they succeed in fishing out the above eight bodies.

The wrecked vessel had dropped her anchor, and had not drifted far from the scene of the sad catastrophe.

As soon as the lost body, had been taken from the wreck the *Buccaneer* left for Key West. But Capt. Collier did not return with the dead bodies of his children. He sent them up to Undertaker Baker, with instruc-

tions to put them on ice and keep them until he returned to the city he having chartered the *Pocahontas*, for the sum of \$150, to save his boat and bring her to Key West.

When the *Buccaneer* arrived in Key West the eight bodies were turned over to Undertaker Baker, who had, in the mean time, received a telegram from Mr. A.J. Nichols, son of the aged deceased to embalm the bodies and ship them to Bridgeport, and they were at once removed to his dead room.

Soon after the bodies had been carried to the dead room Coroner J.J. Warren, Sheriff Frank Knight, Dr. Maloney and the coroner's jury assembled in the room to hold an inquest. The jury is composed of the best material that could be procured, as follows: Peter A. Williams, foreman; Jno. W. Sawyer, W.A. Gwynn, Wm. B. Curry, Richard Curry, Wm. McKillip. Mr. Claud P. Williams was sworn in as clerk, and proceeded to take an inventory of the different articles of value found in the pockets and on the persons of the corpses among which were: Mr. Bradley Nichols had \$10.25 in cash in his pocket book, and a letter and other unimportant articles, Mrs. Nichols, Sr., had only \$1.54 in her purse, Mrs. Nichols Jr., had no purse, but a handsome set of diamond ear rings were found pinned to her corset. The children had nothing of value. About the only article found that would tend to identify the unfortunates was a letter, addressed to Mr. Bradley Nichols.

At 9 p.m., the jury adjourned until 10 o'clock this morning, to meet at Baker's furniture store, when the evidence of those who were on the ill-fated schooner and other was taken.

One of the witness in this sad catastrophe is Mr. Richard W. Bates, a tourist of Boston, Mass., who was coming to Key West en route to his Northern home.

About 10 o'clock this morning the coroner's jury met per adjournment and after examining all the witnesses the jury brought in a verdict of accidental drowning.

A WEALTHY MAN

Bridgeport, Conn., March 3.—Bradley Nichols was one of the most important real estate men in this city; also very wealthy. His son as also very wealthy. His son was associated with him in business. The wife of young Nichols was the daughter of United States Prosecuting Attorney Giddins of this city.

A Sailor's Diary

William Gisterer was a merchant seaman who signed on the steamer Seneca in June 1898. The Seneca was one of forty-eight civilian ships chartered by the U. S. Army to carry the troops from Tampa to Cuba. The ships with an escort of warships sailed on June 14, 1898. The fleet sailed south around the Tortugas, along the north coast of Cuba, then around the eastern and along the south coast of Cuba. On June twenty-second the Army was landed at Daiquiri near Santiago de Cuba. The Army won the battle of San Juan Hill in July 1. The Spanish squadron sailed from the port and was destroyed by the American fleet on July 3. The Spanish surrendered Santiago de Cuba on July 17. The Seneca was one of the ships that carried the sick and wounded north. Seaman William Gisterer was present for most of the action and even with the "fog of war" gives an accurate account of the war.

After the war William Gisterer mailed his log to John W. Pinder with the request that he protect the document but could show to anyone. Former States Representative Joe Allen acquired this copy which he made available to the Society.

Log kept by William Gisterer on board the steamship *Seneca* at anchor Tampa Bay June 10, 1898.

June 10th

I shipped today on board the *Seneca*. We have on board 940 troops. Supposed to leave for Cuba at a moment. The weather is almost unbearable, so hot.

June 11th

Still at the same place, no move has been made yet. Gunboat *Helena* is here, also Torpedo Boat *Hornet*.

June 12th

The troops are losing patience, it is killing to lay out here in the hot sun. The *Resolut* came in today.

June 13th

7:30 a.m. No news yet in regard to moving.

4:30 p.m. We are now starting down the bay. Everybody jubilant.

8:30 p.m. At anchor off Mullet Key.

June 14th

8:30 a.m. Off again. Are now heading outside through the Northwest passage.

6:30 p.m. All are now moving slowly heading South half West. Going at about 6 knots an hour, one of the ships disabled.

June 15th

8:30 a.m. Still heading on same course good weather.

6:30 p.m. Lights are seen on our starboard bow. We have all stopped. Great excitement. Our fleet numbers about 35 ships, not including convoys of warships.

June 16th

8:30 a.m. Lights last night were American warships. 4 more torpedoes, 2 cruisers and 1 battleship, said to be the *Massachusetts*, have joined us. Passed Tortugas Light about midnight, Left Key West on our port about 4 o'clock this morning. Heading East South East.

8:30 p.m. We are heading East by South since 5 p.m. all is well and in good spirits.

June 17th

8:30 a.m. We have been going at full speed all night. Land visible on our starboard presumably outlying islands near Cuba. Heading Southeast by East.

5:30 p.m. Passed one tall lighthouse to starboard about 11 a.m. Later on passed some high land on the same quarter. Heading East South East. Big sea on, but not much sickness, all the soldiers anxious to land.

June 18th

8:30 a.m. Some land was seen last night, with campfires on it, may be the insurgent army. We have stopped, and seem to be waiting for the slower vessels to catch up. The *Seneca* is one of the fastest ships in the fleet. Firing was heard inshore now. Soldiers very anxious to land. They complain of their rations.

12:30 p.m. We have started again at full speed heading South. All the troops are packing up ready to land at any moment.

5:30 p.m. Just got through supper. We passed a high range of mountains to starboard, but it is very hazy. Gunboat *Helena* went inshore at noon and returned this evening. Will likely round Cape Maisi tonight, all are expecting to land tomorrow. Some think we are bound for Puerto Rico. Heading about East South East. I will turn in now. So far everything has gone well. The *Massachusetts* and *Helena* are leading the way.

Sunday, June 19th

8:30 a.m. We are still heading in a Southeasterly direction. It begins to look as if we are going to Puerto Rico. Perhaps Santiago has fallen. A Spanish Gunboat was reported seen this morning *Helena* gave chase and returned just now. Big sea on.

9:30 a.m. Lighted land ahead also Light-

house presumably Santo Domingo. Are now changing our course heading about South by West guess we are bound for Santiago after all.

4 p.m. Land is again on our starboard, heading about South Southwest.

5:30 p.m. We are slowly following the coast, heading West. Sea is getting calm. We will see what tomorrow will bring. Everyone thinks we will land then. I hope so.

June 20th

8:30 a.m. Land right ahead. Heading North. Can't be far from destination. Big swells coming in from the South.

12:30 p.m. All have stopped. Land about 15 miles off, high mountains. We seem to be awaiting orders. From here we can make out the ships of Sampson's fleet inshore. Very hot and almost calm.

5:30 p.m. Witnessed the bombardment of Santiago since 2 o'clock, but were too far off to see the effects. The entrance to the harbor is plainly visible with glasses. Morro Castle to the right on top of the hill, The smoke of the guns would seem to indicate that hot work was being done while it lasted. Now we are heading offshore. Transport No. 27 has landed her troops. Our ship is No. 5. I have no idea how far we are going and can only let time decide it.

7:30 p.m. Torpedo Boat *Hornet* just came by with orders for the fleet to keep together. Great things looked for tomorrow. Possibly a Naval battle.

June 21st

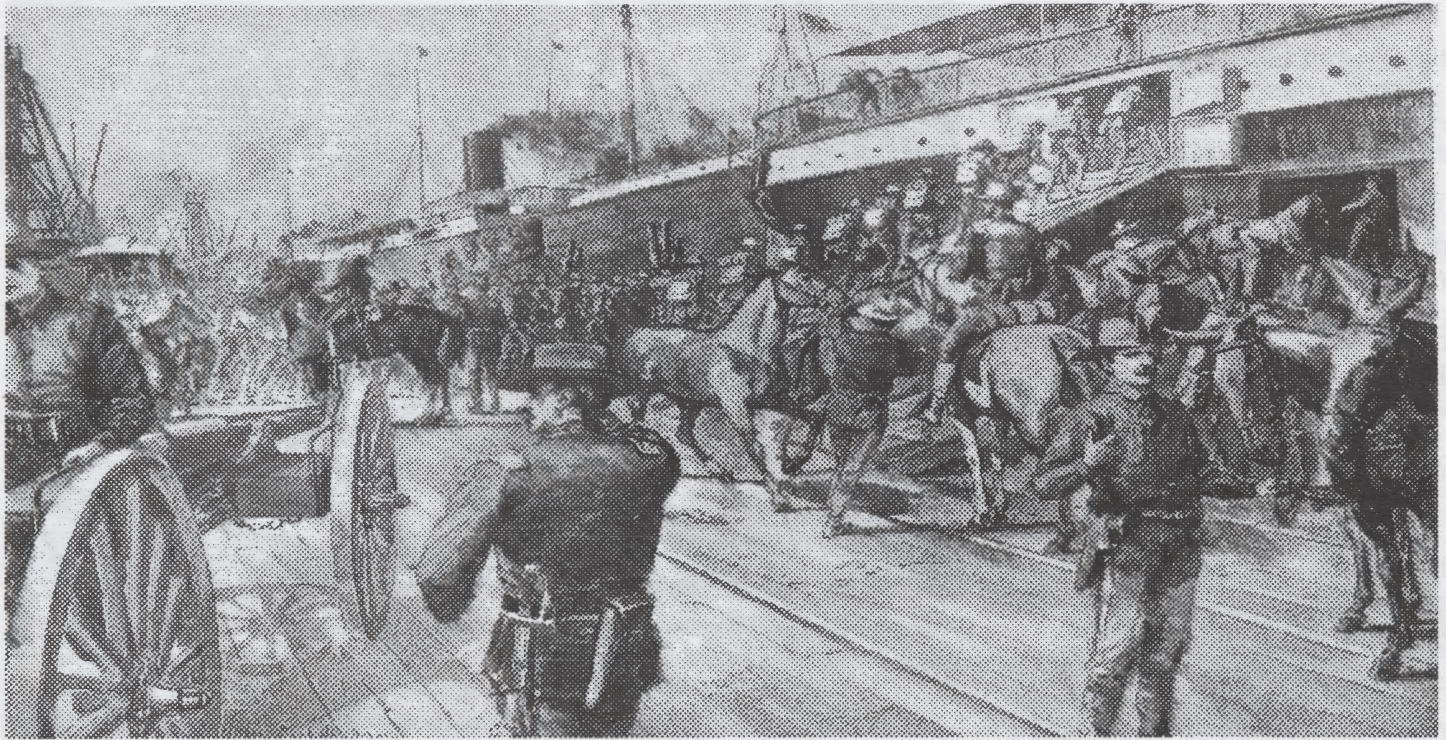
8:30 a.m. For an hour we have been going offshore, due South. After having stopped all night. Nobody seems to know where we are going. Everybody disgusted. It begins to look like a regular bluff so far as landing is concerned. We will just wait and see.

12:30 p.m. Laying to again. Have returned and are at about the same place we were yesterday. Ship is rolling fearful, hardly able to write.

5:30 p.m. Still off Santiago, cruising around. There are indications that a landing will be effected tomorrow. We are slowly steaming inshore. Every soldier is getting thoroughly disgusted and no one is trying to conceal their feelings.

8:30 p.m. Heading offshore again. How long is this humbug going to last?

June 22nd



The U.S. Army and civilian ships at Tampa in June 1898. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

5:30 a.m. It seems now certain that we will land the troops today. As I am writing this we are going at full speed inshore. All the troops are having breakfast, which is an hour earlier than usual.

9 a.m. The whole fleet has started inshore. We are leading the left column. Heading to a point east of Santiago harbor.

9:30 a.m. Are now within 2 miles of land. There seems to be a small settlement here. A big iron dock is to the right of the place with railroad cars on it. A large building has just now been set afire and is burning, sending up black volumes of smoke.

10 a.m. The cruiser *New Orleans* assisted by 2 gunboats are bombarding the place. All hands are standing by to lower boats and to land troops. The bombardment is terrific.

10:30 a.m. Troops are now landing. The 2nd Massachusetts volunteers and 8th U.S. Infantry which were on the *Seneca* have already landed. There was no resistance by the Spaniards not a shot being fired from the shore. They must have deserted the place.

5:30 p.m. There is a blockhouse on top of a hill to the right of the harbor. The American flag has just been raised over it. All the whistles of the fleet are saluting it and the noise is deafening.

8:30 p.m. I will now turn in. There is plenty of work looked for tomorrow.

June 23rd

8:30 a.m. Nothing occurred last night. We are quietly laying here.

12:30 p.m. It is blowing a gale from the southeast. The derricks are being got ready for unloading the cargo, which is made up of provisions, ammunition, also 12 field pieces for the artillery.

5:30 p.m. I have been painting wood work all the afternoon. Wonder why the cargo is not unloaded. Most of the troops have gone towards the city which is said to be some 22 miles from here. Perhaps they intend to take it and land the cargo there.

June 24th

8:30 a.m. Still laying here, no news of importance.

12:30 p.m. One of our boats went ashore this morning, and brought back news that Hobson and his 7 companions had been murdered. Nobody believes it. Also that a skirmish took place soon after landing in which 8 were killed and 13 wounded on our side.

5:30 p.m. Siboney, a small settlement between here and Santiago was bombarded this afternoon. The *New York* took part in the engagement.

6 p.m. Just now got orders to follow the flagship, which is the *Vigilancia*. Heading West, wonder what it means.

6:30 p.m. We passed Morro Castle just now, about 3 miles off shore. It looks as if we were going to unload our cargo west of the city,

8:30 p.m. At anchor, waiting for tomorrow.

June 25th

6:30 a.m. It is understood that we are to take aboard some 5,000 Cuban troops under Garcia's command, to be carried further east to join the American forces.

10:30 a.m. Just getting breakfast. Very busy bringing those troops aboard the ships, there are three more besides the *Seneca*.

4:30 p.m. Dinner, two of the transports are now loaded. As it is 11/2 miles to the landing. It takes quite a lot of work and time. I feel very tired.

8:30 p.m. All the troops are now aboard, and what a lot they are. Most of them bare-footed very scanty attire, but all are supplied with a gun and machete. They appear very hungry and devour the Army hardtack with great relish. Tomorrow we will land them.

June 26 Sunday

7:30 a.m. We have begun landing the Cubans. Some of the Man-of-Wars boats are helping. This place was taken yesterday it is called Siboney. There were 90 Spaniards buried here, 18 Americans. The graves can plainly be seen from the deck.

12:30 p.m. All are off. Going up the coast to first landing places called Daiquiri.

5:30 p.m. Been very busy all the afternoon loading cannons and ammunition into

(Continued on page 6)

(Diary from page 5)

a lighter which is alongside.

8:30 p.m. At last they are off. I hear that everything is to be moved towards Santiago tonight. Fighting looked for tomorrow.

June 27th

8:30 a.m. Those pretending to know it all claim that Santiago is to be taken on Wednesday. Will unload cargo all day.

12:30 p.m. Still discharging cargo. Steamer *Harvard* formerly the *Paris* also Hospital Ship *State of Texas* arrived here this morning.

8:30 p.m. We quit discharging cargo after dinner, but are not finished.

June 28th

7:30 a.m. All the guards who were left aboard to take care of baggage have received orders to go ashore. I don't think we will remain here much longer.

5:30 p.m. All have left the ship. There is a rumor that we will leave tomorrow, but we have got a lot of provisions and baggage for the Army aboard, I fail to see why we should leave before unloading. Santiago not yet taken.

June 29th

8:30 a.m. This morning we are to proceed further down the coast to finish discharging cargo. No news.

5:30 p.m. All hands on deck to weigh anchor. I do not know where we are bound.

7:30 p.m. Going at full speed about South Southwest. It looks as if we are bound for Jamaica.

June 30th

6:30 a.m. Have been going all night and are now within three miles of Port Antonio, Jamaica.

12:30 p.m. Still at anchor in Port Antonio This is a beautiful place. Fruit and rum are being brought aboard in generous quantities. *Three Friends* came in here this morning also *Dauntless*.

5:30 p.m. I hear that we came here for the purpose of getting 100 men to work as stevedores on the transports. Have been taking aboard some provisions, also ice.

July 1st

8:30 Underway again, heaved anchor at 6:30 this morning heading North at full speed. The English Government refused to permit any men to ship as stevedores.

12:30 p.m. Land ahead, will probably be at destination some time this afternoon.

8:30 p.m. There is a report that a skirmish took place today at Seville, near the city. No particulars. We are anchored at Daiquiri. Plenty of rum is being carried ashore. The *Seneca* is a floating saloon.



Wounded soldiers being transferred from the *Seneca*. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

July 2nd

8:30 a.m. They are bombarding at Santiago. The white smoke is plainly seen after each discharge of the guns.

1:30 p.m. Morro Castle at the entrance of Santiago harbor is now said to be in ruins.

5:30 p.m. Just received news that a battle took place today on a hill close to the city. The Americans lost heavy but succeeded in capturing Fort El Caney. They are even now bringing wounded men on board the hospital ships *Olivette*, *Troyouis* and *State of Texas*. We are again anchored at Siboney, having moved down here this p.m.

8:30 p.m. Two big fires, presumably signals were seen just now on top of the mountain west of Santiago. It is reported that the Spanish flag still floats defiantly over the ruins of Morro Castle.

July 3rd Sunday

8:30 a.m. We weighed anchor last night and are now drifting between Siboney and Santiago. A great explosion was seen this morning about 2 o'clock in the direction of the City.

9 a.m. It is very hot and calm. Cruiser *New York* has just now passed us heading for Siboney.

9:30 a.m. Spanish Men-of-War are coming out of the harbor, big excitement. They have opened fire on the blockading fleet. From a battery opposite Morro shots are rapidly coming. All hands are up on the rigging. I am writing this on the main truck. The *New York* has turned around but I am afraid she will be too late. Four of the big black Spaniards are now outside. Two

smaller ones are following. The noise is deafening. It is getting to smoky to see what's going on. But we can see that both fleets are going West.

11 a.m. We are following the reports of the guns. It is beginning to clear off.

12 p.m. We are going at full speed West, as a strange Man-of-War is coming from the East. It is simply great.

12:30 p.m. Passing two ships which are on the rocks afire. I hope they are Spaniards. Don't know yet, too much smoke.

1 p.m. Dinner, too excited to eat. We are now nearing a ship is afire, but still afloat don't know yet who she is.

2 p.m. It proved to be the *Viscaya* we are now within a mile of her watching her destruction. The *Iowa* is close by taking off her crew in small boats. One of her magazines has just then exploded. Her hull and smokestacks, also foremast are yet intact. The rest of the fleet is chasing another one. They are nearly out of sight.

3 p.m. Two more explosions on board the *Viscaya* knocked down her foremast and one smokestack. We are leaving her to her fate. Heading back towards Santiago. Those two on the beach burning are the *Maria Teresa* and *Almirante Oquendo*. The strange Man-of-War proved to be an Austrian bound for Havana. She is a fine big cruiser about the size of the *New York*.

8:30 p.m. Well, this was an unexpected Sunday entertainment. Have heard no particulars yet.

July 4th

12:30 Off Siboney, it is blowing a gale from the East. Have heard no news yet of yesterday's battle.

8 p.m. Still here. Cruiser *Brooklyn* left, going in a Easterly direction. No news.

July 5th

12:30 Anchored at Daiquiri. Boat has gone ashore to get news.

5:30 p.m. It is reported today that the Spanish cruiser *Cristobal Colon* got away, but was captured by the *Brooklyn* and *New York* with all on board. Santiago has asked for a 48 hours truce. They will likely surrender now.

July 6th

12:30 noon We are washing paintwork. Still at anchor. No news.

5:30 p.m. A mutiny on board the *Harvard* is the latest. Several reported killed.

July 7th

8:30 a.m. News reached us that Santiago would be taken this morning.

5:30 p.m. Under way. Going back to Siboney.

July 8th

8:30 a.m. 300 wounded soldiers are being carried on board *City of Washington* besides 300 on the regular hospital ship. Santiago seems to be hard to take.

5:30 p.m. No news this afternoon.

July 9th

12:30 Getting under way. Heading East.

2 p.m. Passed Daiquiri, still going. What does it mean.

5:30 p.m. Anchored in Guantanamo Bay. The *Iowa*, *Oregon*, *Texas*, *Massachusetts*, *New York* and *Harvard* are here coaling up. Also two four-masted schooners.

7:30 p.m. Going out again, heading back towards Santiago.

July 10th Sunday

8.30 a.m. At anchor in Siboney. I hear we are to unload as soon as possible and return to Tampa. This is welcome news. There are five cases of Yellow Fever ashore.

5:30 p.m. They are now busy unloading our ship. I don't think we will stay here much longer. Santiago was again bombarded this evening. A good many wounded soldiers were carried aboard the hospital ships today.

July 11th

7:30 a.m. The stevedores are still busy unloading. It will take some time yet.

12:30 p.m. Santiago is being attacked by land. The Spanish made an unsuccessful attempt to break through the American lines. More wounded soldiers coming. Still unloading.

5:30 p.m. Seven wounded soldiers were brought aboard here this evening. Three of them had to be carried in stretchers. There are more to come tomorrow. Then

we will leave. Raining all the afternoon. Cruiser *Columbia* arrived today. Some say we are to carry a lot of wounded men to Fort Monroe, Va. I hope not, for we have very poor accommodations for sick men.

July 12th

12:30 p.m. It seems a fact that Yellow Fever has broken on out ashore. All the houses in which cases originated are now being burned. So far seven houses are in ashes. Still raining.

8:30 p.m. More wounded were brought aboard, in all we have about 50. No news from the front.

July 13th

5:30 a.m. More wounded are to be brought aboard today. Then we will go. I am glad to get away.

5:30 p.m. We have now 98 sick or wounded soldiers aboard some were brought from the hospital ship *Relief*. They will certainly suffer.

July 14th

9:30 a.m. At last we are getting under way. Captain Decker made a formal protest ashore this morning against carrying such men as we have. He was told to go on. Bound for Fort Monroe, Va.

5:30 p.m. It is blowing a gale, very rough. Will probably round Cape Maisie some time tonight.

July 15th

12:30 p.m. The weather has moderated. Wind fair. Have set sails. Passed some islands to starboard.

7:30 p.m. Going at a good rate about North by East. Sick are suffering terrible, not a bit of ice on board to relieve those who have fever.

July 16th

7:30 a.m. Passed two steamers just now, good weather. No news.

6:30 p.m. Passed a schooner this afternoon. I shall be surprised if some of those poor fellows don't die down below, before we reach north.

July 17th Sunday

Spent a very quiet Sunday. Good weather. Some expect to reach Hampton Roads tomorrow, I hope so.

July 18th

12 Noon. Land ahead, changing course lighthouse to port, said to be Cape Charles Light.

2 p.m. Anchored at Newport News, under Quarantine. From here we will likely go to New York.

8.30 p.m. It is a settled fact that we are to go to New York in the morning, as the hospital here is too full to take off our sick.

Have been taking on some provisions and ice.

July 19th

12:30 p.m. Now getting under way bound for New York, a stiff breeze is blowing from the East.

5:30 p.m. Passed several steamers and schooners. The air feels very cool, it is also clouding up for rain.

July 20th.

5:30 a.m. Land on our port, coast of New Jersey.

8:30 a.m. Have passed several summer resorts with big hotels on it, Asbury Park, Long Branch, Atlantic City, and are now rapidly nearing Sandy Hook.

12.30 p.m. Are nearing quarantine. Every steamboat passing us, saluted in recognition.

5:30 p.m. Anchored at quarantine. Don't know how long we will be detained. The soldiers having fever are being carried ashore in the hospital boat.

July 21st

7:30 a.m. This morning we are getting everything in shape for getting fumigated.

7.30 p.m. Been very busy all day. All the clothes on board were carried to the quarantine boat and disinfected. The upper and main decks were scrubbed with a strong solution. Below a sulphur smoke made things lively for rats and roaches.

July 22nd

7:30 a.m. Still at quarantine. The saloon is now being scrubbed. Three of us are scraping off the mass on the bottom from the waterline up.

5:30 p.m. Just now were notified that quarantine is off. Will go to the dock in the morning.

July 23rd

7.30 a.m. Left quarantine at 5 this morning and are now anchored near the Statue of Liberty. Captain has gone ashore for orders.

12 Noon. Still here. What can this delay mean. It is very provoking to see the streets of New York and yet can't land.

2.30 p.m. Captain just now came in a tugboat. We are heaving anchor to go to the dock.

3 p.m. The *Seneca* is made fast at pier 16 East River near Brooklyn bridge. All the crew will be paid off at 4 p.m. and then we are at liberty to go ashore. Thus ends the trip which began at Tampa on June 13th.

Wm. Gisterer

N.Y. City

July 23rd

The Reverend Gilbert Higgs and The Spanish American War

By Winifred Fryzel
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Various historians of the nation are preparing for the hundredth anniversary of the Spanish American War. Particularly in Key West there will be activities at the Maine-Winslow Plot honoring the fallen men of the battleship *Maine*, four sailors from the torpedo boat, *Winslow* their officer, Ensign Bagley, as well as all who participated in that war.

The battleship *Maine* had been ordered to Cuban waters in January on a friendly visit to protect American lives and property from Spanish loyalists. When the *Maine* was blown up on February 15, 1898 with a loss more than 258 lives, many Americans concluded that the Spanish had sunk the ship. War was declared in April and over in August. According to John Jay, the Spanish American War was "a splendid little war."

During this short war, Key West was an important naval, supply and medical base. All the clergy of the island were busy ministering to the sick and wounded. St. Paul's rector, The Reverend Gilbert Higgs, was no exception.

Some of the bodies recovered from the explosion of the *Maine* were sent to Key West where Higgs conducted some of the funeral rites.

A record in the Episcopal Convocation Journal of 1899 gives an idea of the duties of St. Paul's rector:

Buried the remains of some of the seamen killed on the *Maine*.

Buried the remains of all the seamen killed on the *Winslow*.

(John Varveres, Oiler; John Dueefe, Fireman; George Burton Meek, Fireman; Elijah Tunnel, Ship's Cook) Note: Spelling of names differ.

Held pre-burial service over the remains of Ensign Worth Bagley.

Buried the remains of one seaman killed on the Battleship *Iowa*. (Henry Twistman)

Buried the remains of two soldiers killed by the explosion of a gun at Fort Taylor, Key West. (Benjamin F. Kimmel and Elva F. Harfaen)

Administered Holy Communion to Seaman Sherman Walker of Torpedo Boat, *Cushing*.

Read prayers on deck of Torpedo Boat, *Winslow* with Com. Bernadou.

Visited Miss Clara Barton on steamer *City of Texas*, and had a conversation with

her with reference to aiding the poor and needy Cubans here.

Visited Hospitals, Convent Hospital, Marine Post, College Hospital and *Coronado*. Sixty-eight visits.

This war was a journalist's dream. Batteries of reporters and illustrators were sent to cover the war. There exist detailed accounts and the activities in Key West were no exception.

It was the duty of The Rev. Gilbert Higgs to bury the four sailors killed on the *Winslow*. The funeral was held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Key West, May 12, 1898.

According to the Jacksonville Times Union for May 13, 1898 gives the names of the men and a short comment on each:

John Varveres, oiler, was a native of Smyrna, Asia, but a naturalized citizen of the United States. He had been in the navy about three years and nine months.

John Denfec, fireman, first-class, was born in Kilkenny, Ireland, but was naturalized and had been in the naval service about five years.

George B. Meek, fireman, first-class was born in Clyde, Ohio, and his father John Meek, now resides in that city. Deceased had a total naval service of five and one-half years.

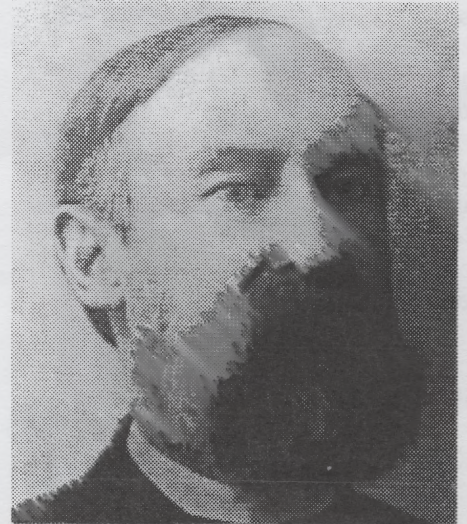
Elijah Tunnel, cook had been in the service only a few months, his first enlistment bearing date of March 21, 1898. He was born in Accomack County, Virginia, and his next of kin is his father, John Tunnel, now a resident of Wattsville, Accomack, Va. Tunnel was the only African American in the list of dead. (Spelling of the names differ)

The *Winslow* Funeral

The funeral of the seamen of the *Winslow* is detailed in Wright's Official History of the Spanish American War, General Marcus J. Wright, War Records Office, Washington, D. C. pages 228, 229.

The funeral of the four sailors who were shot to death in a Spanish trap in Cardenas Bay was held at Key West May 12, 1898. A detail consisting of a drummer, a bugler, and sixteen Marines from the *Panther* headed the funeral procession.

There was also an escort of over 200 men from the warships in the harbor, which marched in sections behind the marines and each hearse. Six pallbearers mostly gunners' mates were detailed from the *Puritan*, the *Cincinnati*, the *Helena* and the



Reverend Gilbert Higgs. Photo credit: Winifred Fryzel

Miantonomoh to the four heroes. Behind the hearses and escorts followed a long line of carriages containing officers from all the ships in the harbor and a large number of citizens.

Others followed on foot, a big crowd had gathered at the cemetery before the arrival of the procession. Four graves had been dug in the coral sand not far from those holding the bodies of men that died on the *Maine*. The guard of Bluejackets lined up on one side of the open graves on the arrival at the cemetery, with the escort of Marines and the men from the torpedo boats, who acted as mourners, opposite them.

The black coffins were lowered into the shallow graves, and the Rev. Dr. Gilbert Higgs, Episcopal rector of the parish, read the burial service over each one, the Sailors and Marines standing with bowed heads in the slanting shadows of the moss-grown trees. The gleaming marble slabs, crosses and monuments in the wind-swept cemetery, and the great silent gathering of the whites and blacks of the city who usually chattering and vivacious; all lent an impressiveness to this hurried burial of the first men slain in a battle in the war.

Nor was the deep feeling shown during the services the only evidence given by the citizens of Key West of patriotic pride in the Navy and their sympathy for the loss of the men who had been quartered there so long.

Bareheaded men, women and children lined the entire route of the procession, and every one of the hundreds of flags in the city was lowered to half-mast.

There were many floral tributes to the memory of the slain sailors. Nearly all Key

West stood by when, after the burial services, concluding with the Lord's Prayer, the marine guard fired three volleys into the air and the bugler stepped forward and sounded the last taps.

The Anti Funeral of Ensign Worth Bagley

The following account was also found in Wright's Official History.

Ensign Worth Bagley was the first officer killed in battle during the Spanish American War. He was accorded a heroes funeral.

"The funeral of Ensign Worth Bagley, who was killed on the torpedo boat *Winslow* in the action off Cardenas as described, was held at Key West May 13, 1898. A part of the full church services for the dead was read by the Rev. Dr. Gilbert Higgs in the St. Paul's Episcopal Church here. The Interment was in Raleigh, N. C.

The body was escorted to the church and thence to the boat by a guard of fifty marines and an equal number of bluejackets from the torpedo boats now in the harbor, including a color guard of force for the draped flag and eight body guards.

Ten junior officers acted as honorary pallbearers, and the crew of the *Winslow*, fourteen men, followed the hearse as mourners. The coffin was covered with a large flag, on which the dead man's sword rested among the flowers."

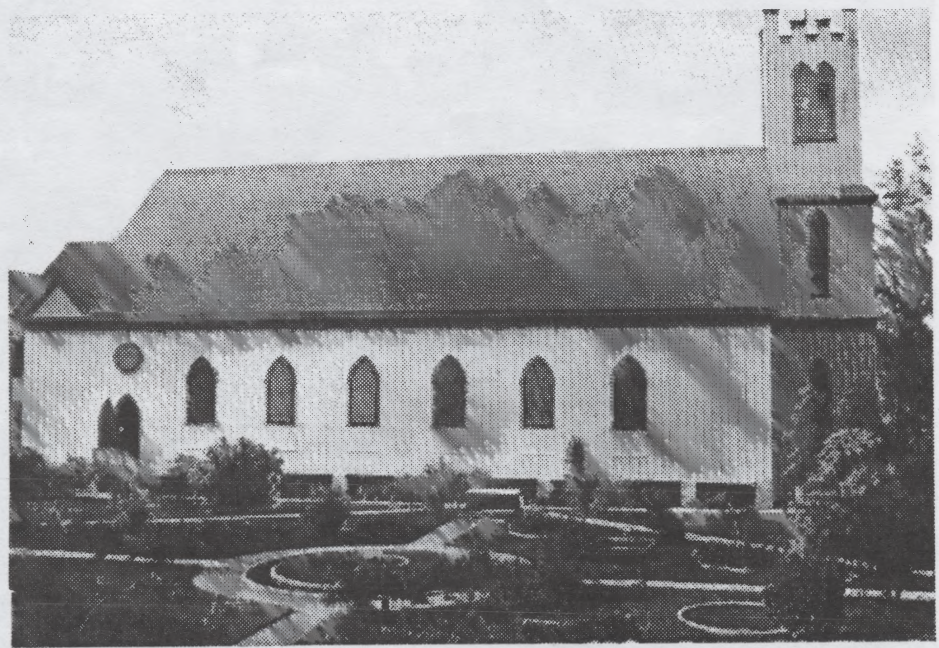
His mother received a letter from a Key West lady. She wrote:

"The precious remains of your son were taken to our church, St. Paul's yesterday afternoon. The casket was borne by eight sailors from his ship; It was draped with his flag, and kind hearts placed on it God's choicest gifts, sweet flowers. The church was filled with sympathizing friends who, after the service, followed the body to the steamer. The beautiful hymn at the service was: When our heads are bowed with woe,"

It has been dropped from the present hymnal, but found in a 1892 Episcopal hymnal. The first stanza of this is as follows.

When our heads are bowed with woe,
When our bitter tears o'er-flow,
When we mourn the lost, the dear,
Jesus, Son of Mary, hear.

The Washington Times reported: "The body was escorted to the church and thence to the boat by a guard of fifty marines, and an equal number of blue-jackets from the torpedo boats now in the harbor, including a color-guard for the draped flag. ... Ten Junior officers acted as honor-



St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1898. Photo credit: Winifred Fryzel.

ary pall bearers. The coffin was covered with a flag, on which the dead man's sword rested among flowers."

It is not recorded in the annals of St. Paul's, but it is probable that the "Big Bill" the largest of St. Paul's Chime of Bells tolled the passing of the first naval officer killed in the Spanish American War.

In the book, "First Fallen Hero" by Josephus Daniels a letter is found from Dr. Higgs dated May 14th to Rev. Dr. M. M. Marshall, rector of Christ Church

Yesterday I read the ante burial service over the remains of the late Ensign Worth Bagley, Raleigh, N.C. He was the first officer killed in battle in our war with Spain. I write to you thinking it might be a comfort to his parents and family to hear through you that his remains were sent to them from God's house and to know that not only a large representation of the Navy and Army, but many of our citizens were present in church and afterwards in a procession, the casket covered with flowers and emblems, the body was borne to the steamer leaving that evening for Tampa. For many things I love North Carolina, its people, and feel it an honor to the State that she can claim the first martyr in the nation's call to arms, and it is a great satisfaction to me to have been here to minister the last rites before the Interment.'

Clara Barton and The Rev. Higgs

Clara Barton's mission was twofold: to provide for dislocated Cuban civilians and to provide medical supplies for the U. S.

military. Upon arriving at Key West she was quartered on the Red Cross ship, *State of Texas* during her short stay in Key West. The Rev. Higgs met and talked with Barton about aiding the poor and needy Cubans in Key West. However, she did not mention this visit in her autobiography. It is not known what a action Higgs took on this matter.

The war was over in August and the city eventually settled down and returned to normal. Key West hasn't entirely forgotten the war for the Maine Monument and the Maine-Winslow Plot is a reminder. The songs about Cuba are a part of Key West history as well as the nation. The most familiar is:

The *Maine* went to Cuba. She went there in the night.

The Spanish blew her up with a barrel of dynamite

There'll be a hot time In the old town tonight.

My favorite Is See You in C-U-B-A by Irvin Berlin.

Cuba is now having severe difficulties. Americans have not traveled freely for many years to this beautiful but troubled land. The nearest large city to Key West Is Havana. This writer has been there in happier times and was hijacked during Castro's early years. The difference was shocking.

The day will come when we can return—and when it does

I'LL SEE YOU IN C-U-B-A.



The crew of the USS Maine. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

(Maine from page 1)

United States Consul to Cuba living in Havana. The *Maine* arrived in Key West harbor on 15 December 1897. Captain Sigsbee had arranged for the code "two dollars" to be the signal which would put his battleship on alert to sail to Cuba. Sigsbee's orders were to protect the American citizens of Cuba and to remove them from harms' way if they were threatened or in danger.

On 24 December and Christmas Day of 1897, the *Maine* was anchored in Key West harbor. To the delight and surprise of the inhabitants, the battleship was decked out in colored lights from bow to stern. The display was reported as being one of the most unique and beautiful scenes ever to have been witnessed in the South. The sight of such a beautiful lighting display endeared the officers and men of the *Maine* to all the people of Key West.

All seemed peaceful as members of the crew's baseball team met the teams from various military vessels and the "boys" of Key West. The *Maine* baseball team would defeat the crew of the *Marblehead* on 9 January to secure the fleet baseball championship of the North Atlantic Squadron.

Three days later, riots broke out in Havana and the American Consul Fitzhugh Lee was concerned for the safety of his

staff and other Americans in Cuba. The rioters were mostly Spanish supporters of the former Governor-General Weyler who were also opposed to any autonomy for the Cuban people. Their ranks were bolstered by radical members of the Civil Volunteers. The target of the riots seemed to be newspapers and professionals who did not support the reconcentrados policy of General Weyler. Fitzhugh Lee cabled the "two dollar" signal to Captain Sigsbee of the *U.S.S. Maine* in Key West thus setting in motion a possible rescue effort by the battleship to Havana. The *Maine* baseball team was playing ball when the Black pitching star William Lambert heard the prearranged signal shot calling all officers and crew to the vessel. The game ended quickly as the *Maine* team rushed from the field to join their ship. Sigsbee awaited the second telegram from Lee which was to read "vessels may be deployed elsewhere". Upon receipt of this second message Sigsbee would have left immediately for Havana. The second telegram never arrived.

Fitzhugh Lee in Havana determined that although the riots had been very destructive, no American seemed to be in danger. Although it was rumored that the rioters would attack the American Consulate on 13 January, Lee believed that no war ves-

sels should be sent on that date. He believed that the arrival of the *Maine* would simply aggravate an already dangerous situation.

In the meantime, President McKinley and Secretary of the Navy John Long were discussing the possibility of a "friendly visit" of the *Maine* to Havana. They requested the opinion of the Spanish Minister to Washington, Dupuy de Lome, on 17 January. After checking with Madrid, Minister de Lome responded that sending the *Maine* to Havana at this particular time would be considered an "unfriendly act" by the Spanish Government. The President decided to study the various options. On 22 January, Secretary Long ordered Admiral Sicard of the North Atlantic Squadron to send the *Texas* and the *Maine* to New Orleans to attend the Mardi Gras festival on 17 February.

On Sunday, 23 January, 1898, the Atlantic Squadron, under the command of Admiral Sicard, arrived off the coast of Key West and the *Maine* left the Key West harbor to rendezvous with the fleet near Sand Key Lighthouse. At this point every battleship in the United States Navy, with the exception of the *Oregon* on the Pacific Coast, was gathered at Key West.

The powerful fleet sailed from Key West to the Dry Tortugas approximately sixty

miles distant on the morning of 24 January. As the mighty fleet moved placidly across the beautiful blue water toward the Tortugas, President McKinley was meeting with Secretary Long and Assistant Secretary of State Judge William Day to discuss sending a warship to Havana. Secretary Day felt that it was imperative to have a vessel in the harbor in order to protect American citizens who could be attacked by rioters at any moment. He also believed that the presence of a powerful warship would show the Spanish authorities that the United States Navy was a formidable foe and that troubling American citizens might prove very dangerous indeed. It was finally determined the *U.S.S. Maine* should be sent to Havana. Assistant Secretary Day informed Minister de Lome that the *Maine* would visit Havana in one or two days and the Spanish were welcome to send one of their warships on a visit to New York if they wished.

Fitzhugh Lee, in Havana, was shocked to receive a telegram from the State Department saying the *Maine* would arrive soon in Havana. Lee immediately cabled Washington asking that the visit be postponed by at least six days.

By 6:00 P.M. the North Atlantic Squadron was gathered at the Dry Tortugas. At 9:00 P.M. Captain Sigsbee on the *Maine* was informed that a fast moving vessel was approaching the fleet. The vessel was recognized as the messenger boat the *Dupont*. She made her way to the flagship *New York* with an important message from Secretary of the Navy to Admiral Sicard. The message read:

"Order the *Maine* to proceed to Havana, Cuba, and make a friendly call- Pay his respects to authorities there. Particular attention must be paid to usual interchange of civility ..."

Captain Sigsbee knew that the *Dupont* carried orders to steam to Havana even before the Admiral ordered him aboard the *New York* to receive the telegram. Before setting out for the *New York* he ordered that the engines aboard the *Maine* be prepared for the journey to Havana. At 11:00 P.M. the *U.S.S. Maine* pulled away from the assembled fleet and headed toward Havana to carry out the assignment given by the President of the United States. It would be the very last time that the *Maine* would sail the near shore waters of Key West.

The *Maine* in Havana Harbor

The *Maine* arrived off the coast of Cuba

early on Tuesday morning, 25 January. Captain Sigsbee ordered the battleship to approach Havana harbor slowly with colors flying because he wanted to enter the port while the city was busy and the harbor full of activity. On board the *Maine* everything was in readiness. Sigsbee had ordered general quarters for all crew. All gun crews were ready for action although they stayed out of sight. Ammunition had been taken from the magazines and guns were loaded should the Spanish show any hostility to the battleship upon arrival. At 10:00 A.M., with all hands smartly dressed on deck, the *Maine* entered Havana harbor.

Fifteen minutes earlier an American news correspondent had informed Fitzhugh Lee that the *Maine* was entering Havana harbor. Lee was shocked and sputtered, "Nonsense." The American Consul was highly agitated to find that the *Maine* had indeed come to Havana and was being shown to buoy No. 4.

Captain Sigsbee acted in strict accordance to his orders once the *Maine* was safely moored in 36 feet of water. Sigsbee sent Naval Cadet Culverius to accomplish all civilities necessary when a naval vessel visits a foreign port. Later in the day, Captain Sigsbee himself made a visit to Admiral Manterola the chief naval officer in Havana and dropped in to call on Consul Lee at his downtown office. At no time during the day did any event present itself to show that either the Spanish officials, military officers or the general citizenry were hostile to the *Maine* or her commanding officer.

On the 29th of January, the Marine Minister of Spain ordered the Spanish warship *Vizcaya* to leave Cadiz on a visit to New York City. This friendly visit by one of Spain's most important vessels was to be made in response to the visit of the *Maine* in Havana. The Spanish might not want an American warship in Havana, but, since it was there, they were determined to put on a bright face and send one of their own ships to New York.

With civilities out of the way Captain Sigsbee attended a bullfight with several members of his staff on 30 January. After having watched as six bulls were killed in the arena, Sigsbee and his staff departed for the return trip to the *Maine*. Even though the Americans had been stared at by large numbers of people while seated at the arena, Captain Sigsbee did not detect any outward hostility to himself or his



Captain Charles D. Sigsbee. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

staff. While on the way out of the arena however, Sigsbee was handed an anti-American circular which viciously attacked the visit of the American battleship and attempted to stir patriotic feelings against the *Maine* being in Havana. Although Sigsbee left the *Maine* and allowed his officers to do so as well, he refused leave to any crew members. The crew remained on the *Maine* that was constantly under steam in case she had to dash out of the harbor or needed the power to turn the turrets where big guns were ready to fire at all times.

On 9 February, 1898, all of America was talking about the Spanish Minister Dupuy de Lome who had insulted President McKinley in a letter to a friend that had been intercepted by Cuban spies. The *New York Journal*, one of the most influential newspapers of the day, called for the immediate recall of the Spanish Minister. Caught in this embarrassing situation, de Lome tendered his resignation on the same day.

While in Havana, the *Maine* suffered the loss of one of her crew, Ensign J.C. Breckinridge, who had fallen overboard from

(Continued on page 12)

(Maine from page 11)

the torpedo-boat *Cushing*, on his way to join the battleship in Havana. On 11 February, the body of young Breckinridge lay in state on the deck of the *Maine*. Shortly afterward, Breckinridge's body was returned to Key West and then back to his family.

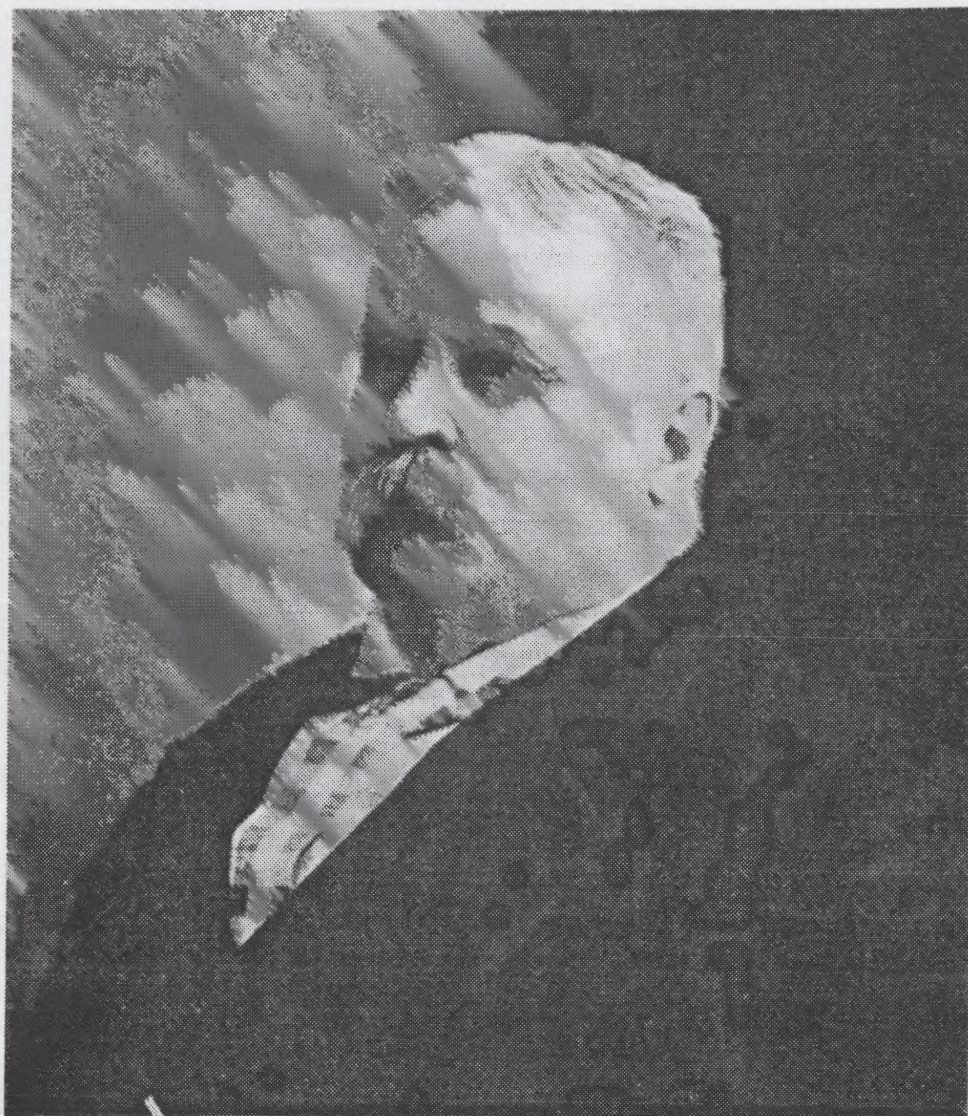
The *Maine* was a busy vessel while in Havana harbor. Captain Sigsbee entertained Americans in Havana and various Cuban leaders and their families. Anyone boarding the *Maine* was accompanied at all times and watched to insure that no bombs were planted in the vessel. On 13 February, Clara Barton lunched aboard the *Maine* with Captain Sigsbee. Barton was with the American Red Cross and had come to Havana to help deliver medicines and supplies for the Cuban population still suffering from the reconcentrados policy. By this date it was estimated that over four hundred thousand Cubans were destitute and homeless because of the relocation policy that General Weyler had begun. On board Clara Barton was delighted to find a "strong, ruddy and bright" crew of sailors.

On the other hand, the crew of the *Maine* had to face a stiff duty while in Havana. It was hot in the ship, even in February, and the men were obliged to stay on board without a chance for shore leave. In addition, Captain Sigsbee had ordered special duty for every man and the crew was expected to be ready for hostile action at any moment. Ordinary Seaman Elmer Meilstrup of West Bay, Michigan would describe duty in Havana harbor in a letter to his mother in this manner:

"The Spaniards have a couple of gunboats and a cruiser, and there are two German gunboats. The guns of the Morro are pointed at us as I write. The whole bottom of the harbor is covered with torpedoes, so that if they did not want to let us out, we would not be able to go very well."

On 13 February, the New York Herald printed an article that anticipated military plans of Spain and the United States when the inevitable war finally broke out. The Herald surmised that Spain would use Cuba as its primary base for the war and predicted Key West would be the critical base of operations of the United States. It was also certain that the Spanish fleet would attempt to bombard and destroy Key West.

On 15 February, 1898, the Spanish Minister of Marine, Admiral Bermejo sent a message to Admiral Cervera of the Cartagena Squadron describing his naval plan of action



American Consul in Havana, Cuba General Fitzhugh Lee. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

if war should break out with the United States:

"As to our war with the United States. I will tell you my ideas about it. A division of several large ships and destroyers would stay in Spain in the vicinity of Cadiz. The eight larger vessels of the Havana Navy Yard, would take up a position to cover the channels between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic and try to destroy Key West, where the United States has established its principal base of provisions, ammunition and coal."

To the credit of Admiral Cervera he warned his superiors in the navy and the Spanish Government that to wage a War against the United States would be a catastrophe for Spain. Although many individuals in the Spanish navy and other military forces agreed with Cervera's assessment of the situation, they were unable to convince the Spanish Government that giving in to the

demands of the United States would not be injurious to "the honor of Spain."

The Great Explosion of the Maine

The morning of 15 February, 1898, brought the same hot temperature and brilliant sky to the placid waters of Havana harbor where the *Maine* drifted slowly at anchor. The morning and afternoon would pass in the same manner that many days had passed for the crew of the battleship. As evening settled the men of the *Maine* gathered on deck as usual to catch a last breeze, smoke and talk among themselves. Many wondered, perhaps, when this boring duty would be changed so that they could once again visit a port where they would have "liberty ashore."

At 9: 10 P M. Marine Bugler Newton sounded "taps", signifying the end of the day and the hope of rest and peace for all military men. Listening to the sound of taps, Captain Sigsbee noted how solemnly beau-

tiful was the refrain on this quiet and calm night drifting in Havana harbor. Sigsbee went back to his correspondence to his wife, which he had neglected because of the demand of his duties in Cuba. All over the *Maine* the evening watch was vigilantly on guard for any unusual activity in the harbor or movement in the waters close to the battleship. The evening watch had been upgraded while in Havana and Sigsbee expected the evening crew to be particularly careful of the safety of the *Maine*.

At 9:40 P.M. an explosion lifted the forward section of the *Maine* followed immediately by a second, larger and more violent explosion near the center of the superstructure. The entire interior of the vessel went dark as men struggled throughout the wounded ship to find a way out of the sinking and burning hull. The explosions were located primarily in the forward section of the *Maine* where the crew was bunked and housed. There would be heavy casualties in this area as opposed to the aft section of the ship where the Captain and his officers were housed.

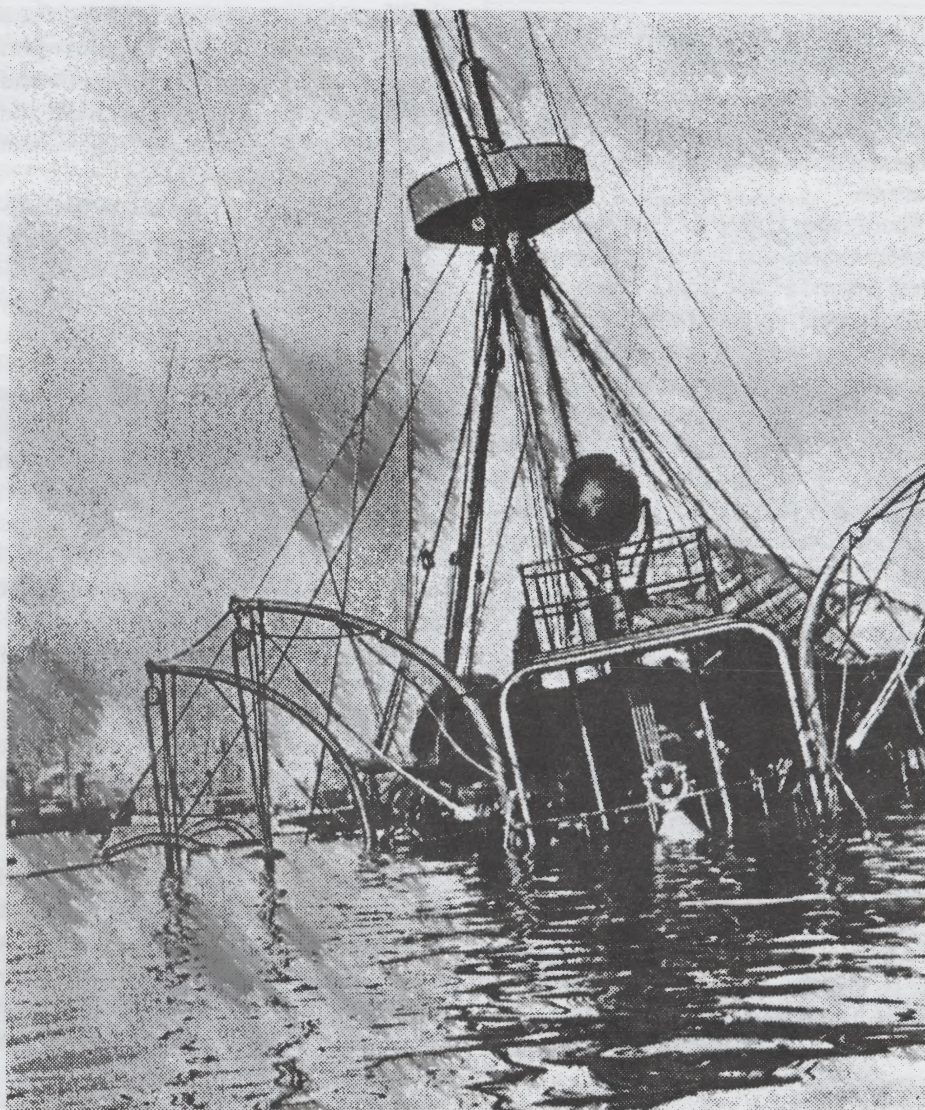
As Captain Sigsbee fled his cabin in the pitch dark, he collided head-on with his Marine aide Bill Anthony who was trying to work his way toward the Captain's cabin. They both moved slowly through darkened corridors to the outside and then to the poop-deck. Sigsbee's thoughts were those of an experienced naval officer trying to remain in control of his feelings and actions while taking in all circumstances around him:

"I knew the *Maine* had been blown up, and believed that she had been blown up from outside ... There was the sound of many voices from the shore, suggestive of cheers."

Clara Barton of the Red Cross, sitting at her desk on this hot and still night far across the harbor, was surprised when the glass in the hotel room started bursting everywhere and her door exploded into pieces. She instinctively rushed to the window and looked toward where the *Maine* was moored. She would describe that moment in these words:

"... a burst of thunder ... the air was filled with a blaze of light, and this in turn filled with black specks like huge specters flying in all directions. Then it faded away, the bells rang, the whistles blew..."

At 10:00 P.M. a cable was sent to the telegraph office at Key West, manned by Tom Warren that fateful evening, saying that the *Maine* had been blown up in Havana. The message was sent immediately



Wreck of the USS Maine the morning after the explosion. The photograph was taken from the City of Washington anchored near the Maine. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

to Captain Cleaves of the torpedo-boat *Cushing* moored at Key West harbor. Cleaves rushed the message to Lieutenant-Commander Cowles of the *Fern*. Commander Cowles did not believe the cable and decided to remain at the cable office to hear more information as it came over the line from Havana.

By 10:15 P.M. the *Maine* was underwater to her poop-deck. All boats that could be mustered from the *Maine* and other boats in the harbor were already picking up survivors of the explosion. Cries of pain and anguish filled the air. Lieutenant-Commander Wainwright spoke to Captain Sigsbee on the *Maine* poop-deck and convinced him that another explosion might kill every survivor including the officers. It was time to abandon the *Maine* to her glorious fate. Somehow Sigsbee's dog "Peggy" was beside him when he turned

to his officers and surviving crew standing about his gig that floated even with the deck of the *Maine* and ordered, "Get into the boat, gentlemen." Sigsbee would be the last person to leave the battleship that had by this time come to rest on the bottom of Havana harbor.

Within a few grueling minutes Captain Sigsbee's gig delivered him to the passenger steamer *City of Washington* that had been moored just a short distance from the *Maine*. Captain Stevens greeted Captain Sigsbee and offered him his cabin as headquarters and hospital. Sigsbee met with Spanish officials and American Consul Lee aboard the *City of Washington*. In fact, Captain Sigsbee asked Dr. Congosto Secretary-General of Cuba, to review the telegram he was about to send to the Navy

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(Maine from page 13)

Department in Washington. Dr. Congosto was amazed at the language in the telegram and thanked Captain Sigsbee for his consideration and calm at such a horrifying moment.

Shortly after 11:00 P.M. Lieutenant-Commander Cowles and his subordinates in Key West relayed a cable from Captain Sigsbee to the Navy Department with the unbelievable story of the destruction of America's proudest warship. The men in Key West gazed at the message in shock:

"SECNAV- WASHINGTON, D.C. *Maine* blown up in Havana harbor at nine forty tonight and destroyed. Many wounded and doubtless more killed or drowned. Wounded and others onboard Spanish man of war and Ward Line steamer Send Light House Tender from Key West - for crew and the few pieces of equipment above water None has clothing other than that upon him - Public opinion should be suspended until further report - All officers believed to be saved. Jenkins and Merritt not yet accounted for - Many Spanish officers including representatives of General Blanco now with me to express sympathy. SIGSBEE."

After sending his incredibly controlled cable, Captain Sigsbee received the muster figures he had called for having previously given Chaplain Chidwick authority to go ashore and comfort injured crew members being landed and taken in emergency vehicles to Havana hospitals. The figures presented at this first muster were astounding: only 84 crew members survived the explosion and many of that number were seriously injured.

At 1:00 A.M. the Sigsbee telegram arrived in Washington and was sent straight to Secretary of the Navy John Long at his residence in the Portland Hotel via his personal aide Captain Francis Dickins. Secretary Long would immediately have Captain Dickins take the telegram to the White House. Arriving at dawn, he caused President McKinley to be awakened. The President appeared in his nightgown to accept the cable. The President is reported to have uttered the following words after reading Sigsbee's message concerning the explosion of the *Maine*:

"The *Maine* blown up? The *Maine* blown up. Oh, there is a man a great man."

Of course, President McKinley was referring to Captain Sigsbee, and the fact that Sigsbee, under the most personal and professionally-trying circumstances, was able

to maintain control of his feelings, fears and emotions, and actually write in his report of the explosion that naval and government officials should "suspend" judgment and "opinion" until an objective assessment of the tragedy was completed.

Captain Sigsbee was forced by exhaustion to his cabin on the *City of Washington* at approximately 2:00 A.M. the morning of 16 February, 1898. He had difficulty falling asleep because the injured from the *Maine*, placed in rooms and areas surrounding his cabin, were moaning and screaming out at times. Sigsbee noted that at least one man was physically ill to his stomach and suffered horribly during the night. At dawn Sigsbee ordered the second muster of the officers and crew. There were still 250 men missing, 18 crew members were unharmed of the 85 survivors.

After requesting help from the Navy Department by cable, in which he confided in cipher that the *Maine* "was probably destroyed by a mine," Captain Sigsbee toured the wreck of the battleship. He described what he saw in the following terms:

"How great the destruction! She had settled in the mud, and her poopdeck, where we had stood at the last moment, was under water. There was no part of her hull visible except that torn and misshapen mass amidships and three pieces of iron jutting out of the water forward."

On the 16th, President McKinley ordered that a court of inquiry be appointed to explore the cause of the explosion that destroyed the *Maine*. The responsibility for such an appointment should have fallen on Admiral Sicard as commander of the North Atlantic Squadron. However, there is little doubt that the President and Secretary Long had a hand in the selection of the naval court after they rejected most of Admiral Sicard's suggestions. In the end, the court was made up of Captain William T. Sampson, President; Captain French E. Chadwick; Lieutenant-Commander William P. Potter, and Lieutenant-Commander Adolph Marix, Judge-Advocate.

Late in the day, Captain Sigsbee moved from the *City of Washington* to the Hotel Inglaterra where he would remain with staff for seven days. Consul Lee also had his suite of Hotel Inglaterra which was in downtown Havana.

A decision had to be made quickly concerning the remains of the dead crew members already recovered from the *Maine*. Because of the very hot weather and the

lack of undertakers who could properly preserve bodies Captain Sigsbee had to decide quickly where he could find decent burial space. The Catholic Archbishop of Havana said that he would donate Property at the Colon Cemetery for the burial of American remains. The City of Havana generously offered to pay for the services and for the display of bodies. With the advice of Consul Lee, and the go ahead from the Navy Department, nineteen crew members of the *Maine* were buried in Colon Cemetery after a massive and impressive funeral that had paraded across Havana. By the time Sigsbee returned to his hotel after the funeral he was told that forty more bodies had been recovered and were in need of burial.

Back in the port of Key West, flags were flying at half mast wherever the eye rested. Judge Jefferson B. Browne remembered how shocked the people of Key West were when the news of the destruction of the *Maine* was announced:

The explosion of the *Maine* shocked the people of Key West probably more than any other community, for here the officers and men had been stationed off and on for over a year, and had many friends.

The *Bache* arrived in Havana from Key West on 18 February. Aboard were the experienced divers Captain Sigsbee had requested. Sigsbee was anxious to know if the keys to the ammunition magazines were still in his cabin on the *Maine*. If the divers could not find the keys then there was a possibility of the *Maine* being destroyed by a traitor in her own crew. Although the divers did have an extremely difficult time diving and locating the armament room keys, they finally found them in Sigsbee's quarters. The divers also found ciphers and material that Sigsbee did not want to reveal to the Spanish authorities.

Late on the 18th, the *Vizcaya* arrived off the coast of New Jersey. The Spanish warship was forced to dock off Sandy Hook and later moved to Thompkinsville where she was placed under police protection. No military or civil authority wanted to take responsibility for the safety or security of the Spanish vessel. In New York City, emotions and tempers were hot due to the explosion of the *Maine*.

At Key West, the Station Log entry for 19 February, 1898, noted that the Light-house Steamer *Mangrove* had returned from Havana with ten wounded sailors from the *Maine*. She also brought a number of guns and other items from the wreck at Havana.

Sigsbee spent time at several Havana hospitals caring for the wounded from the *Maine* on 20 February. Later in the day Admiral Manterola visited Sigsbee at the Inglaterra Hotel. Manterola suggests the Spanish Inquiry into the sinking of the *Maine* was very concerned with the boilers in the forward section of the ship and their proximity to the ammunition bunkers. Sigsbee confidently informed the Spanish Admiral that the forward boilers of the *Maine* had not been lighted in three months and were not used for any reason while in Havana harbor.

The Log at Key West Station on 20 February shows that the Naval Court of Inquiry busily set up their investigation at Havana and Key West. A detail was sent to the bituminous and anthracite coal piles to investigate the condition of the coal - the same coal that had been loaded upon the *Maine* a month previously. The thorough examination of the coal pile would continue till late on 23 February.

At 10:00 A.M., on 21 February, in Havana, the Naval Court of Inquiry began their investigation with testimony from Captain Sigsbee. By this date 143 bodies had been taken from the *Maine*. While in Havana, the Court of Inquiry would spend most of their time aboard the Lighthouse Steamer *Mangrove* moored a short distance from the wreck of the *Maine*. The Court would also convene in the port of Key West on various military vessels and at the Key West Custom House. Although the Department of the Navy, the United States Congress, the President of the United States, and almost every American was anxious for the findings of the Court of Inquiry, Admiral Sampson carried out a lengthy and thorough investigation, convening in the harbor of Havana whenever he felt direct observation should be made by the divers who explored the wreck on a daily basis.

On 28 February, the Naval Court of Inquiry met to take testimony at the Key West Custom House. While at the Custom House the Court met on the second floor in the federal court chambers. While the Court was meeting in the new Custom House, the *Bache* arrived from Havana with the first crew member of the *Maine* who would be buried in the Key West Cemetery. From that date forward, all remains of American sailors and officers found would be brought to Key West.

On 1 March, 1898, the Naval Court of Inquiry convened again at the Key West Custom House taking testimony from some

twelve survivors of the explosion. While the Court was meeting in Key West, the Spanish warship *Vizcaya* arrived in Havana. The *Vizcaya* was greeted with wild celebrations by the people of Havana. The Spanish population of Havana believed that with the *Vizcaya* in Havana they would be free from any retaliation the Americans might plan as revenge for the explosion of the *Maine*.

All the survivors of the *Maine* explosion gathered at the Key West Custom House on 2 March, 1898. Once gathered at the federal court room Judge-Advocate Adolph Marix gave the instructions that if any man in the group had: any complaint to make or fault to find with any officer or man belonging to the *Maine* as to the care and guarding of that ship in the harbor of Havana let him step forward.

Of course, no man stepped forward. It was a certain sign that the survivors of the *Maine* believed that Captain Sigsbee and the entire crew had been careful for the security and safety of the battleship while they were in Havana. It was also an indication that the crew felt, like their Captain, the battleship *Maine* was destroyed by an outside explosion.

Joseph Pais is the assistant director of the Key West Art and Historical Society. He is also the Vice-Chairman of the U. S. Battleship Maine Centennial Commission. "The Battleship Maine A Key West Legacy" is available in bookstores and at the East Martello Museum gift shop.

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Fort Taylor from the Key West Lighthouse. To the left of the Fort is the USS Maine. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

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