

James Otis



The Boys of '98

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CHAPTER I.

THE BATTLE-SHIP MAINE.

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At or about eleven o'clock on the morning of January 25th the United States battle-ship *Maine* steamed through the narrow channel which gives entrance to the inner harbour of Havana, and came to anchor at Buoy No. 4, in obedience to orders from the captain of the port, in from five and one-half to six fathoms of water. She swung at her cables within five hundred yards of the arsenal, and about two hundred yards distant from the floating dock.

Very shortly afterward the rapid-firing guns on her bow roared out a salute as the Spanish colours were run up to the mizzenmast-head, and this thunderous announcement of friendliness was first answered by Morro Castle, followed a few moments later by the Spanish cruiser *Alphonso XII.* and a German school-ship.

The reverberations had hardly ceased before the [pg 2]captain of the port and an officer from the Spanish war-

vessel, each in his gaily decked launch, came alongside the battle-ship in accordance with the rules of naval etiquette.

Lieut. John J. Blandin, officer of the deck, received the visitors at the head of the gangway and escorted them to the captain's cabin. A few moments later came an officer from the German ship, and the courtesies of welcoming the Americans were at an end.

The *Maine* was an armoured, twin-screw battle-ship of the second class, 318 feet in length, 57 feet in breadth, with a draught of 21 feet, 6 inches; of 6,648 tons displacement, with engines of 9,293 indicated horse-power, giving her a speed of 17.75 knots. She was built in the Brooklyn navy yard, according to act of Congress, August 3, 1886. Work on her was commenced October 11, 1888; she was launched November 18, 1890, and put into commission September 17, 1895. She was built after the designs of chief constructor T. D. Wilson. The delay in going into commission is said to have been due to the difficulty in getting satisfactory armour. The side armour was twelve inches thick; the two steel barbetstes were each of the same thickness, and the walls of the turrets were eight inches thick.

In her main battery were four 10-inch and six 6-inch breech-loading rifles; in the secondary battery seven 6-pounder and eight 1-pounder rapid-fire guns and four Gatlings. Her crew was made up of [pg 3]370 men, and the following officers: Capt. C. D. Sigsbee, Lieut.-Commander R. Wainwright, Lieut. G. F. W. Holman, Lieut. J. Hood, Lieut. C.

W. Jungen, Lieut. G. P. Blow, Lieut. F. W. Jenkins, Lieut. J. J. Blandin, Surgeon S. G. Heneberger, Paymaster C. M. Ray, Chief Engineer C. P. Howell, Chaplain J. P. Chidwick, Passed Assistant Engineer F. C. Bowers, Lieutenant of Marines A. Catlin, Assistant Engineer J. R. Morris, Assistant Engineer Darwin R. Merritt, Naval Cadet J. H. Holden, Naval Cadet W. T. Cluverius, Naval Cadet R. Bronson, Naval Cadet P. Washington, Naval Cadet A. Crenshaw, Naval Cadet J. T. Boyd, Boatswain F. E. Larkin, Gunner J. Hill, Carpenter J. Helm, Paymaster's Clerk B. McCarthy.

Why had the *Maine* been sent to this port?

The official reason given by the Secretary of the Navy when he notified the Spanish minister, Señor Dupuy de Lome, was that the visit of the *Maine* was simply intended as a friendly call, according to the recognised custom of nations.

The United States minister at Madrid, General Woodford, also announced the same in substance to the Spanish Minister of State.

It having been repeatedly declared by the government at Madrid that a state of war did not exist in Cuba, and that the relations between the United States and Spain were of the most friendly character, nothing less could be done than accept the official construction put upon the visit.

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The Spanish public, however, were not disposed to view the matter in the same light, as may be seen by the

following extracts from newspapers:

“If the government of the United States sends one war-ship to Cuba, a thing it is no longer likely to do, Spain would act with energy and without vacillation.”—*El Heraldo*, January 16th.

“We see now the eagerness of the Yankees to seize Cuba.”—*The Imparcial*, January 23d.

The same paper, on the 27th, declared:

“If Havana people, exasperated at American impudence in sending the *Maine*, do some rash, disagreeable thing, the civilised world will know too well who is responsible. The American government must know that the road it has taken leads to war between both nations.”

On January 25th Madrid newspapers made general comment upon the official explanation of the *Maine's* visit to Havana, and agreed in expressing the opinion that her visit is “inopportune and calculated to encourage the insurgents.” It was announced that, “following Washington’s example,” the Spanish government will “instruct Spanish war-ships to visit a few American ports.”

The *Imparcial* expresses fear that the despatch of the *Maine* to Havana will provoke a conflict, and adds:

“Europe cannot doubt America’s attitude towards Spain. But the Spanish people, if necessary, will do their duty with honour.”

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The *Epocha* asks if the despatch of the *Maine* to Havana is “intended as a sop to the Jingo,” and adds:

“We cannot suppose the American government so naïve or badly informed as to imagine that the presence of American war-vessels at Havana will be a cause of satisfaction to Spain or an indication of friendship.”

The people of the United States generally believed that the battle-ship had been sent to Cuba because of the disturbances existing in the city of Havana, which seemingly threatened the safety of Americans there.

On the morning of January 12th what is termed the “anti-liberal outbreak” occurred in the city of Havana.

Officers of the regular and volunteer forces headed the ultra-Spanish element in an attack upon the leading liberal newspaper offices, because, as alleged, of Captain-General Blanco’s refusal to authorise the suppression of the liberal press. It was evidently a riotous protest against Spain’s policy of granting autonomy to the Cubans.

The mob, gathered in such numbers as to be for the time being most formidable, indulged in open threats against Americans, and it was believed by the public generally that American interests, and the safety of citizens of the United States in Havana, demanded the protection of a war-vessel.

The people of Havana received the big fighting ship [pg 6]impassively. Soldiers, sailors, and civilians gathered at the

water-front as spectators, but no word, either of threat or friendly greeting, was heard.

In the city the American residents experienced a certain sense of relief because now a safe refuge was provided in case of more serious rioting.

That the officers and crew of the *Maine* were apprehensive regarding their situation there can be little doubt. During the first week after the arrival of the battle-ship several of the sailors wrote to friends or relatives expressing fears as to what might be the result of the visit, and on the tenth of February one of the lieutenants is reported as having stated:

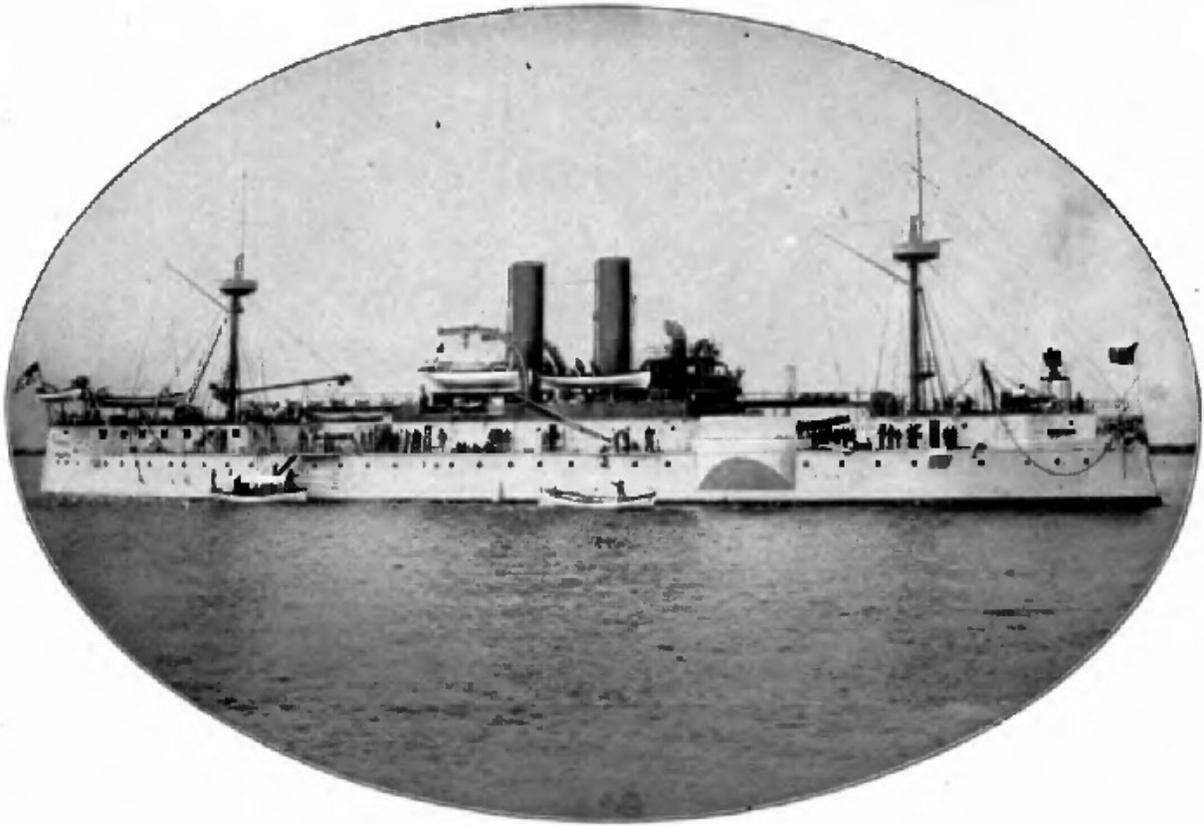
“If we don’t get away from here soon there will be trouble.”

The customary ceremonial visits on shore were made by the commander of the ship and his staff, and, so far as concerned the officials of the city, the Americans were seemingly welcome visitors.

The more radical of the citizens were not so apparently content with seeing the *Maine* in their harbour. Within a week after the arrival of the ship incendiary circulars were distributed in the streets, on the railway cars, and in many other public places, calling upon all Spaniards to avenge the “insult” of the battle-ship’s visit.

A translation of one such circular serves as a specimen of all:

“Spaniards: Long live Spain and honour.



U.S.S. MAINE.

[pg 7]

“What are ye doing that ye allow yourselves to be insulted in this way?

“Do you not see what they have done to us in withdrawing our brave and beloved Weyler, who at this very time would have finished with this unworthy rebellious rabble, who are trampling on our flag and our honour?

“Autonomy is imposed on us so as to thrust us to one side and to give posts of honour and authority to those who initiated this rebellion, these ill-born autonomists, ungrateful sons of our beloved country.

“And, finally, these Yankee hogs who meddle in our affairs humiliate us to the last degree, and for still greater taunt order to us one of the ships of war of their rotten squadron, after insulting us in their newspapers and driving us from our homes.

“Spaniards, the moment of action has arrived. Sleep not. Let us show these vile traitors that we have not yet lost shame and that we know how to protect ourselves with energy befitting a nation worthy and strong as our Spain is and always will be.

“Death to Americans. Death to autonomy.

“Long live Spain!

“Long live Weyler!”

At eight o'clock on the evening of February 15th all the magazines aboard the battle-ship were closed, and the keys delivered to her commander according to the rules of the service.

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An hour and a half later Lieut. John J. Blandin was on watch as officer of the deck; Captain Sigsbee sat in his cabin writing letters; on the starboard side of the ship, made fast to the boom, was the steam cutter, with her crew on board waiting to make the regular ten o'clock trip to the shore to bring off such of the officers or crew as were on leave of absence.

The night was unusually dark; great banks of thick clouds hung over the city and harbour; the ripple of the waves against the hulls of the vessels at anchor, and the subdued hum of voices, alone broke the silence. The lights here and there, together with the dark tracery of spar and cordage against the sky, was all that betokened the presence of war-ship or peaceful merchantman.

Suddenly, and when the silence was most profound, the watch on board the steamer *City of Washington*, and some sailors ashore, saw what appeared to be a sheet of fire flash up in the water directly beneath the *Maine*, and even as the blinding glare was in their eyes came a mighty, confused rumble as of grinding and rending, followed an instant later by a roar as if a volcano had sprung into activity beneath the waves of the harbour.

Then was flung high in the air what might be likened to a shaft of fire filled with fragments of iron, wood, and human flesh, rising higher and higher until its force was spent, when it fell outwardly as falls a column of water broken by the wind.

The earth literally trembled; the air suddenly became [pg 9]heavy with stifling smoke. Electric lights on shore were extinguished; the tinkling of breaking glass could be heard everywhere in that portion of the city nearest the harbour.

When the shower of fragments and of fire ceased to fall a dense blackness enshrouded the harbour, from the midst of which could be heard cries of agony, appeals for help, and

the shouts of those who, even while struggling to save their own lives, would cheer their comrades.

After this, and no man could have said how many seconds passed while the confusing, bewildering blackness lay heavy over that scene of death and destruction, long tongues of flame burst up from the torn and splintered decks of the doomed battle-ship, a signal of distress, as well as a beacon for those who would succour the dying.

Captain Sigsbee, recovering in the briefest space of time from the bewilderment of the shock, ran out of the cabin toward the deck, groping his way as best he might in the darkness through the long passage until he came upon the marine orderly, William Anthony, who was at his post of duty near the captain's quarters.

It was a moment full of horror all the more intense because unknown, but the soldier, mindful even then of his duty, saluting, said in the tone of one who makes an ordinary report:

"Sir, I have to inform you that the ship has been blown up, and is sinking."

[pg 10]

"Follow me," the captain replied, acknowledging his subordinate's salute, and the two pressed forward through the blackness and suffocating vapour.

Lieutenant Blandin, officer of the deck, was sitting on the starboard side of the quarter-deck when the terrible

upheaval began, and was knocked down by a piece of cement hurled from the lowermost portion of the ship's frame, perhaps; but, leaping quickly to his feet, he ran to the poop that he might be at his proper station when the supreme moment came.

Lieut. Friend W. Jenkins was in the junior officers' mess-room when the first of a battle-ship's death-throes was felt, and as soon as possible made his way toward the deck, encouraging some of the bewildered marines to make a brave fight for life; but he never joined his comrades.

Assistant Engineer Darwin R. Merritt and Naval Cadet Boyd together ran toward the hatch, but only to find the ladder gone. Boyd climbed through, and then did his best to aid Merritt; but his efforts were vain, and the engineer went down with his ship.

It seemed as if only the merest fraction of time elapsed before the uninjured survivors were gathered on the poop-deck. Forward of them, where a moment previous had been the main-deck, was a huge mass looming up in the darkness like some threatening promontory.

On the starboard quarter hung the gig, and opposite her, on the port side, was the barge.

[pg 11]

During the first two or three seconds only muffled, gurgling, choking exclamations were heard indistinctly; and then, when the terrible vibrations of the air ceased, cries for help went up from every quarter.

Lieutenant Blandin says, in describing those few but terrible moments:

“Captain Sigsbee ordered that the gig and the launch be lowered, and the officers and men, who by this time had assembled, got the boats out and rescued a number in the water.

“Captain Sigsbee ordered Lieut.-Commander Wainwright forward to see the extent of the damage, and if anything could be done to rescue those forward, or to extinguish the flames which followed close upon the explosion and burned fiercely as long as there were any combustibles above water to feed them.

“Lieut.-Commander Wainwright on his return reported the total and awful character of the calamity, and Captain Sigsbee gave the last sad order, ‘Abandon ship,’ to men overwhelmed with grief indeed, but calm and apparently unexcited.”

The quiet, yet at the same time sharp, words of command from the captain aroused his officers from the stupefaction of horror which had begun to creep over them, and this handful of men, who even then were standing face to face with death, set about aiding their less fortunate companions.

As soon as they could be manned, boats put off from the vessels in the harbour, and the work of rescue was [pg 12]continued until all the torn and mangled bodies in which life yet remained had been taken from the water.

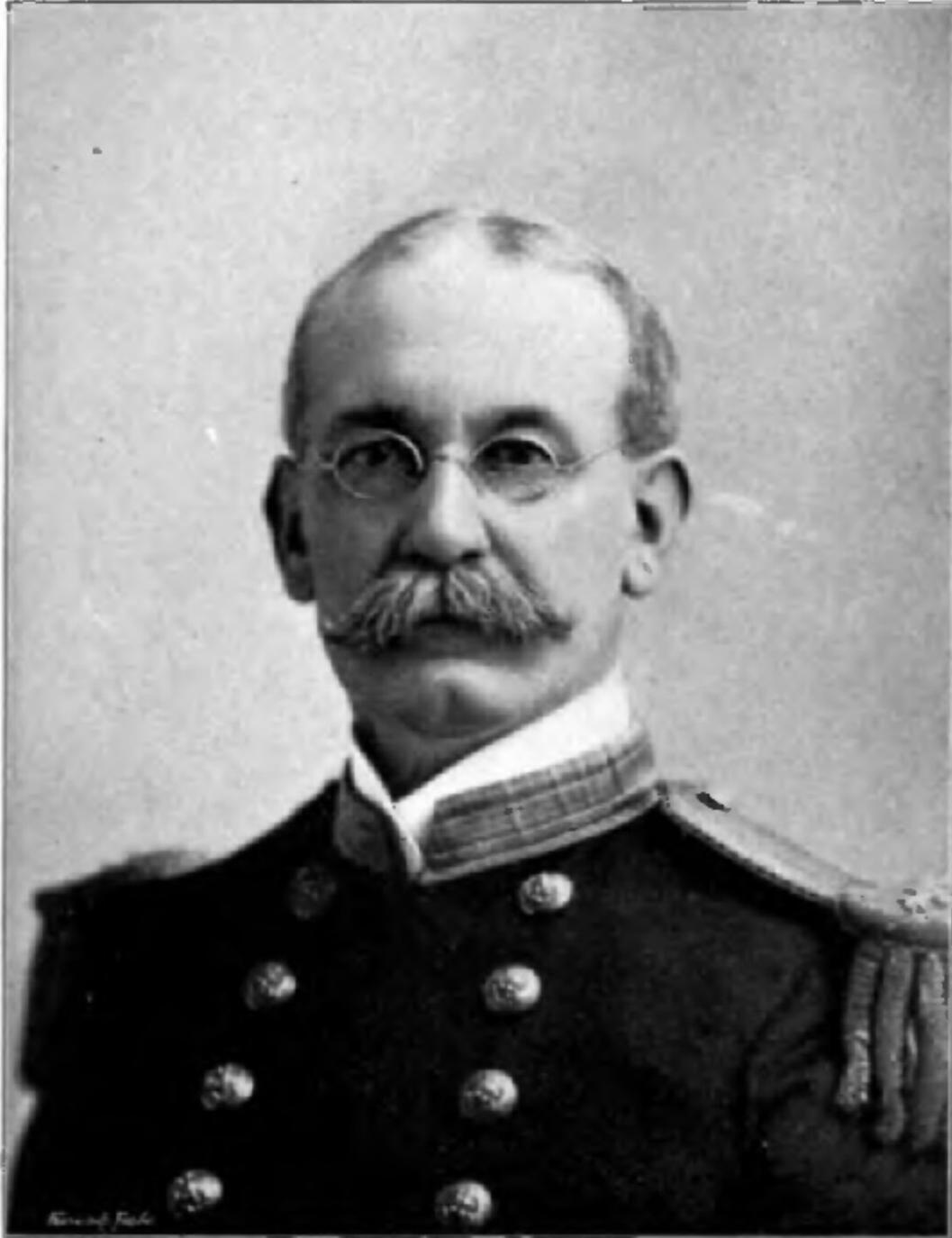
Capt. H. H. Woods, of the British steamer *Thurston*, was among the first in this labour of mercy, and concerning it he says:

“My vessel was within half a mile of the *Maine*, and my small boat was the first to gain the wreck. It is beyond my power to describe the explosion. It was awful. It paralysed the intellect for a few moments. The cries that came over the water awakened us to a realisation that some great tragedy had occurred.

“I made all haste to the wreck. There were very few men in the water. All told, I do not believe there were thirty. We picked up some of them and passed them on to other vessels, and then continued our work of rescue.

“The sight was appalling. Dismembered legs and trunks of bodies were floating about, together with pieces of clothing, boxes of meats, and all sorts of wreckage. Now and then the agonised cry of some poor suffering fellow could be heard above the tumult.

“One grand figure stood out in all the terrible scene. That was Captain Sigsbee. Every American has reason to be proud of that officer. He seemed to have realised in an instant all that happened. Not for a moment did he show evidence of excitement. He alone was cool. Discipline? Why, man, the discipline was there as strong as ever, despite the fact that all around was death and disaster.”



CAPTAIN SIGSBEE.

[pg 13]

The commander of the *Maine* was the last to leave the wreck, and then all that was left of the mighty ship was

beginning to settle in the slime and putrefaction which covers the bottom of Havana harbour.

Calmly, with the same observance of etiquette as if they had been assisting at some social function, the officers took their respective places in the boats, and, amid a silence born of deepest grief, rowed a short distance from the rent and riven mass so lately their post of duty.

A gentleman from Chicago, a guest at the Grand Hotel, was seated in front of the building when the explosion occurred.

“It was followed by another and a much louder one,” he said. “We thought the whole city had been blown to pieces. Some said the insurgents were entering Havana. Others cried out that Morro Castle was blown up.

“On the Prado is a large cab-stand. One minute after the explosion was heard the cabmen cracked their whips and went rattling over the cobblestones like crazy men. The fire department turned out, and bodies of cavalry and infantry rushed through the streets. There was no sleep in Havana that night.”

Soon after the disaster Admiral Manterola and General Solano put off to the wreck, and offered their services to Captain Sigsbee.

There were many wonderful escapes from death. [pg 14]One of the ward-room cooks was thrown outboard into the water.

A Japanese sailor was blown into the air, and, falling in the sea, was picked up alive.

One seaman was sleeping in a yawl hanging at the davits. The boat was crushed like an egg-shell; but the sailor fell overboard and was picked up unhurt.

Three men were doing punishment watch on the port quarter-deck, and thus probably escaped death.

One sailor swam about until help came, although both his legs were broken. Another had the bones of his ankle crushed, and yet managed to keep afloat.

Two hours or more passed before the unsubmerged, wooden portion of the wreck had been consumed by the flames, and at 11.30 P.M. the smoke-stacks of the ill-fated ship fell.

On board the steamer *City of Washington*, two boats were literally riddled by fragments of the *Maine* which fell after the explosion, and among them was an iron truss which, crashing through the pantry, demolished the tableware.

When morning came the wreck was the central figure of an otherwise bright picture, sad as it was terrible. The huge mass of flame-charred débris forward looked as if it had been thrown up from a subterranean storehouse of fused cement, steel, wood, and iron.

Further aft, one military mast protruded at a slight angle from the perpendicular, while the poop afforded a resting-place for the workmen or divers.

[pg 15]

Of the predominant white which distinguishes our war-vessels in time of peace, not a vestige remained. In its place was the blackness of desolating death, marking the spot where two hundred and sixty-six brave men had gone over into the Beyond.

The total loss to the government as a result of the disaster was officially pronounced to be \$4,689,261.31. This embraced the cost of hull, machinery, equipment, armour, gun protection and armament, both in main and secondary batteries. It included the cost of ammunition, shells, current supplies, coal, and, in short, the entire outfit.

The pet of the *Maine's* crew, a big cat, was found next morning, perched on a fragment of a truss which yet remained above the water, and near her, as if seeking companionship, was the captain's dog, Peggy.

Consul-General Lee cabled from Havana on the afternoon of the sixteenth:

“Profound sorrow is expressed by the government and municipal authorities, consuls of foreign nations, organised

bodies of all sorts, and citizens generally.

“Flags are at half-mast on the governor-general’s palace, on shipping in the harbour, and in the city.

“Business is suspended, and the theatres are closed.”

On the afternoon of the seventeenth the bodies which had been found up to that time were buried in [pg 16]Havana with military honours, two companies of Spanish sailors from the cruiser *Alphonso XII.* acting as escort.

A board of inquiry, composed of Capt. W. T. Sampson of the U.S.S. *Iowa* as presiding officer, Commander Adolph Marix as judge advocate, Capt. F. E. Chadwick, and Commander W. P. Potter, all of the *New York*, was convened, and on March 28th President McKinley sent a message to Congress, the conclusion of which was as follows:

“The appalling calamity fell upon the people of our country with crushing force, and for a brief time an intense excitement prevailed, which in a community less just and self-controlled than ours might have led to hasty acts of blind resentment.

“This spirit, however, soon gave way to calmer processes of reason, and to the resolve to investigate the facts and await material proof before forming a judgment as to the cause, the responsibility, and, if the facts warranted, the

remedy due. This course necessarily recommended itself from the outset to the executive, for only in the light of a dispassionately ascertained certainty will it determine the nature and measure of its full duty in the matter.

“The usual procedure was followed, as in all cases of casualty or disaster to national vessels of any maritime state.

“A naval court of inquiry was at once organised, composed of officers well qualified by rank and practical experience to discharge the onerous duty imposed upon them.

“Aided by a strong force of wreckers and divers, the court proceeded to make a thorough investigation on the spot, employing every available means for impartial and exact determination of the causes of the explosion. Its operations have been conducted with the utmost deliberation and judgment, and, while independently pursued, no source of information was neglected, and the fullest opportunity was allowed for a simultaneous investigation by the Spanish authorities.

“The finding of the court of inquiry was reached, after twenty-three days of continuous labour, on the twenty-first of March instant, and, having been approved on the twenty-second by the commander-in-chief of the United States naval force in the North Atlantic station, was transmitted to the executive.

“It is herewith laid before the Congress, together with the voluminous testimony taken before the court.

“The conclusions of the court are: That the loss of the *Maine* was not in any respect due to fault or negligence on the part of any of the officers or members of her crew.

“That the ship was destroyed by the explosion of a submarine mine, which caused the partial explosion of two or more of her forward magazines; and that no evidence has been obtainable fixing the responsibility for the destruction of the *Maine* upon any person or persons.

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“I have directed that the finding of the court of inquiry and the views of this government thereon be communicated to the government of her majesty, the queen regent, and I do not permit myself to doubt that the sense of justice of the Spanish nation will dictate a course of action suggested by honour and the friendly relations of the two governments.

“It will be the duty of the executive to advise the Congress of the result, and in the meantime deliberate consideration is invoked.”

It was the preface to a mustering of the boys of '61 who had worn the blue or the gray, this tragedy in the harbour of Havana, and, when the government gave permission, the boys of '98 came forward many and many a thousand strong to emulate the deeds of their fathers—the boys of '61—who, although the hand of Time had been laid heavily

upon them, panted to participate in the punishment of those who were responsible for the slaughter of American sailors within the shadow of Morro Castle.



[pg 19]

CHAPTER II.

THE PRELIMINARIES.

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War between two nations does not begin suddenly. The respective governments are exceedingly ceremonious before opening the "game of death," and it is not to be supposed that the United States commenced hostilities immediately after the disaster to the *Maine* in the harbour of Havana.

To tell the story of the war which ensued, without first giving in regular order the series of events which marked the preparations for hostilities, would be much like relating an adventure without explaining why the hero was brought into the situation.

It is admitted that, as a rule, details, and especially those of a political nature, are dry reading; but once take into consideration the fact that they all aid in giving a clearer idea of how one nation begins hostilities with another, and much of the tediousness may be forgiven.

Just previous to the disaster to the *Maine*, during the last days of January or the first of February, Señor Enrique Dupuy de Lome, the Spanish minister at Washington, wrote a private letter to the editor of the [pg 20]Madrid *Herald*, Señor Canalejas, who was his intimate friend, in which he made some uncomplimentary remarks regarding the President of the United States, and intimated that Spain was not sincere in certain commercial negotiations which were then being carried on between the two countries.

By some means, not yet fully explained, certain Cubans got possession of this letter, and caused it to be published in the newspapers. Señor de Lome did not deny having written the objectionable matter; but claimed that, since it was a private communication, it should not affect him officially. The Secretary of State instructed General Woodford, our minister at Madrid, to demand that the Spanish government immediately recall Minister de Lome, and to state that, if he was not relieved from duty within twenty-four hours, the President would issue to him his passports, which is but another way of ordering a foreign minister out of the country.

February 9. Señor de Lome made all haste to resign, and the resignation was accepted by his government before—so it was claimed by the Spanish authorities—President McKinley's demand for the recall was received.

February 15. The de Lome incident was a political matter which caused considerable diplomatic correspondence; but

it was overshadowed when the battle-ship *Maine* was blown up in the harbour of Havana.



EX-MINISTER DE LOME.

As has already been said, the United States government at once ordered a court of inquiry to ascertain the cause of the disaster, and this, together with the search for the bodies of the drowned crew, was prosecuted with utmost vigour.

Very many of the people in the United States believed that Spanish officials were chargeable with the terrible crime, while those who were not disposed to make such exceedingly serious accusation insisted that the Spanish government was responsible for the safety of the vessel,—that she had been destroyed by outside agencies in a friendly harbour. In the newspapers, on the streets, in all public places, the American people spoke of the possibility of war, and the officials of the government set to work as if, so it would seem, they also were confident there would be an open rupture between the two nations.

February 28. In Congress, Representative Gibson of Tennessee introduced a bill appropriating twenty million dollars “for the maintenance of national honour and defence.” Representative Bromwell, of Ohio, introduced a similar resolution, appropriating a like amount of money “to place the naval strength of the country upon a proper footing for immediate hostilities with any foreign power.” On the same day orders were issued to the commandant at Fort Barrancas, Florida, directing him to send men to man the guns at Santa Rosa Island, opposite Pensacola.

February 28. Señor Louis Polo y Bernabe, appointed [pg 22]minister in the place of Señor de Lome, who resigned,

sailed from Gibraltar.

By the end of February the work of preparing the vessels at the different navy yards for sea was being pushed forward with the utmost rapidity, and munitions of war were distributed hurriedly among the forts and fortifications, as if the officials of the War Department believed that hostilities might be begun at any moment.

Nor was it only within the borders of this country that such preparations were making. A despatch from Shanghai to London reported that the United States squadron, which included the cruisers *Olympia*, *Boston*, *Raleigh*, *Concord*, and *Petrel*, were concentrating at Hongkong, with a view of active operations against Manila, in the Philippine Islands, in event of war.

At about the same time came news from Spain telling that the Spanish were making ready for hostilities. An exceptionally large number of artisans were at work preparing for sea battle-ships, cruisers, and torpedo-boat destroyers. The cruisers *Oquendo* and *Vizcaya*, with the torpedo-boat destroyers *Furor* and *Terror*, were already on their way to Cuba, where were stationed the *Alphonso XII.*, the *Infanta Isabel*, and the *Nueva Espana*, together with twelve gunboats of about three hundred tons each, and eighteen vessels of two hundred and fifty tons each.

The United States naval authorities decided that heavy batteries should be placed on all the revenue cutters built within the previous twelve months, and [pg 23]large