

“...AND ALL THE MEN KNEW THE COLORS OF THE SEA...”
HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
OF THE SS *COMMODORE*’S REMAINS, PONCE INLET, FLORIDA

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Kimberly Lane Eslinger

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“...AND ALL THE MEN KNEW THE COLORS OF THE SEA...”
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by
Kimberly Lane Eslinger

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF THESIS _____ Dr. Timothy Runyan

COMMITTEE MEMBER _____ Dr. Carl Swanson

COMMITTEE MEMBER _____ Professor Frank Cantelas

COMMITTEE MEMBER _____ Dr. Roger Smith

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
_____ Dr. Michael Palmer

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
_____ Dean Paul Tschetter

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on a single question: Are the wreck site remains held under joint title by the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association and Norman Serbousek those of the SS *Commodore*, sunk on January 1, 1897? The answer to this question lies in the documentation, survey, and historical study of a shipwreck lying twelve miles off Daytona Beach, Florida, in seventy feet of seawater. The remains at the site represent a significant late nineteenth century wooden-hulled steam vessel located in a dynamic marine environment off Ponce Inlet, Florida. The research presented here stems from the hypothesis that the vessel's identity can be determined by an examination of the historical and archaeological records.

Discovered in 1985 by Norman (Don) Serbousek, the vessel remains are primarily sitting on a sand and shell hash bottom. The engine, shaft, propeller, donkey boiler, small anchor, and windlass are the dominant site features. Buried under a thin layer of sediment are at least two cases of bullets, large pieces of boilerplate, and some hull structure. Serbousek and the Anchor Chasers Dive Club recovered over 180 artifacts in the 1980s and early 1990s. The collection contains rifles, bullets, coal, ceramics, and steam machinery. It is housed at Ponce Inlet Lighthouse, where it awaits conservation.

Research was facilitated by the existence of extensive archival materials, a relatively "untouched" archaeological wreck site, and the ability to examine previously recovered artifacts. Each of the sources above were examined to test Ponce Inlet

Lighthouse Association's (PILHA) and Serbousek's assertions that the wreckage is that of the SS *Commodore*.¹

Underwater investigations of the site were made using standard archaeological practices. The site was mapped to scale, and a video documentary record made of the site. All previously recovered artifacts were examined, identified, drawn, photographed, tagged, and assessed for future conservation. Documents from a variety of sources were studied and used in testing the site's identity. The incorporation of data from all three sources, the site, the artifacts, and the documents lead the author to conclude that the wreck lying twelve miles from Daytona Beach, Florida, represents the remains of SS *Commodore*.

¹ The Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association changed its name and its abbreviation from the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Preservation Association (PILHPA) to the present Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association (PILHA) in the mid-nineties.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colors of the sea.

(Stephen Crane "The Open Boat" reprint 2000:70)

Thus begins Stephen Crane's short story "The Open Boat," and so ends SS *Commodore's* career. In January 1897, the filibusterer or illegal gunrunner SS *Commodore* sank just miles from the safety of Mosquito Inlet (renamed Ponce de Leon Inlet), near Daytona Beach on Florida's Atlantic coast (see Figure 1). Crane's short story immortalized the event and became one of American literature's most celebrated short stories. One hundred five years passed before the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association (PILHA) studied the site, they believed to be the resting place of *Commodore* and several of her crew.

Daytona Beach and Ponce Inlet's local sport diving and fishing communities have known the alleged SS *Commodore's* wreck site for more than four decades. The site's identity has puzzled locals and eventually resulted in a professional archaeological and historical site investigation. Fortunately, for the site and researchers, few divers and fishermen previously understood the wreck's historical or archaeological value.

SS *Commodore* was running arms, munitions, and medicine to Cuban insurgents when a fierce nor'easter sent the ship to the bottom in 1897. Yellow journalism led many to conclude the ship was a victim of sabotage. The search for the harbor-tug turned filibusterer began in the 1980s when Elizabeth Friedman, a Jacksonville literature teacher



Figure 1: The three major filibustering ports in Florida can be seen here: Jacksonville, Tampa, and Key West. The close proximity of Cuba to Key West, Florida, a mere ninety-miles has had tremendous impact on both Cuba and Florida.

approached Norman (Don) Serbousek, a Daytona diver, about seeking the ship that inspired Crane's "The Open Boat." Friedman wanted to locate the *Commodore* and try to solve the mystery of the ship's whereabouts. The weapons and munitions allegedly loaded before *Commodore*'s sinking appeared to match the material cultural remains found by Serbousek and others. Serbousek felt certain he had found the *Commodore*'s wreckage.

The site's arrest by Serbousek, a local avocational underwater archaeologist, and the nonprofit Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association in 1999 prevented salvage and sport diving on a large scale. Serbousek and PILHA jointly control the site (see Appendix C). Monitoring the wreck site's stability is the Volusia County Reef Team's responsibility whose members have actively dived, observed, and protected the site's location for many years. The efforts of Serbousek, PILHA, and the Reef Team have focused on a single question: Are these the remains of the S.S. *Commodore*?

Initially, Serbousek spent several years and a large sum of money attempting to identify the site. The United States Middle District of Florida Court awarded title of the wreck to PILHA and Serbousek based on arguments proclaiming the site's remains represent the lost *Commodore*. The archaeological and historical evidence did not confirm that the site lying twelve miles from Daytona Beach, Florida, was the lost steamship. This thesis documents the efforts to identify the vessel remains through historical and archaeological means.

PILHA sought a partner to resolve the mystery of the vessel's identity. Serbousek's work, while notable, did not meet professional, or archaeological standards.

PILHA wanted an archaeological investigation conducted to generate a detailed site plan buttressed by documentary evidence. To achieve a portion of their goal, PILHA forged a partnership with the not-for-profit Cambrian Foundation establishing that PILHA provide logistical support for the field operations and Cambrian supply a dive team and a supervising archaeologist (See Figure 2).² The first archaeological field season at the site was conducted in 2002 with PILHA and Cambrian support under the author's direction.

Three field seasons, several site visits, artifact analysis and recording, and historical research have yielded new clues to the site's identity. The first field season held under PILHA auspices in 2002 yielded a site plan, two weeks of intensive mapping, and some minimal artifact conservation processes. In December 2002, PILHA received a site report and management plan based on the previous field season's recovered data (*Draft Site Report and Management Recommendations for the site believed to be the SS Commodore*, Kimberly Eslinger 2002). Continued work at the site by PILHA in 2003 included site reconnaissance dives, mapping, artifact mediation, artifact recording, and the creation of conservation recommendations. The 2004 investigations utilized mapping, monitoring, and artifact condition assessments.

The limited number of divers aware of the site protected it from widespread looting prior to 2003. After 2003, site looting increased. This prompted a need to positively identify the wreck site before further damage and artifact loss could occur. PILHA's conservation obligations imposed by the Middle District Court as part of the

² The Cambrian Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the oceanic realm and educating the public about their impact on our marine resources. The Foundation has been instrumental over the years in assisting NOAA archaeologists at the USS *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary, and has worked extensively in the Yucatan helping hydrologists map groundwater resources.



Figure 2: The Cambrian Foundation and PILHA dive teams gearing up for the second week's dives. Members were tasked with mapping unfinished grids and video-mosaicing the site. From left to right: first mate Red, Terrence Tysall (Cambrian Foundation Director), Kate Schmidle (Project Director), Captain JB, Bill Ward (research diver), Rick Allen (videographer). (Image courtesy PILHA 2002)

title agreement have also resulted in a greater need to identify the wreckage in order to raise funds for the work. The following chapters will seek to answer the question of whether or not the wreckage is that of the lost SS *Commodore* by examining the historical and archaeological evidence.

Chapter II focuses upon the historical context of SS *Commodore*. This was an age of American expansion, the Cuban fight for independence, and the Spanish-American War. This chapter provides historical context for the lost vessel and her cargo.

Chapter III focuses on the evolution of specialized vessel construction and steam propulsion. *Commodore*'s wooden hull was fitted with steam machinery at a time when steamships were constructed of steel. *Commodore* was built as a New York Harbor Tug in the 1880s. She ended her career as a filibusterer for the Jacksonville *junta*. This chapter provides a perspective on how technology impacted the ship's usage, cargo, and loss.

Chapter IV focuses on *Commodore*'s early career, eyewitness accounts of the vessel's loss, yellow journalism, and the expeditions to Cuba. The information presented in Chapter IV was used to assist in site identification discussed in Chapter VI.

Chapter V addresses the site of *Commodore*'s remains. The chapter focuses on a brief history of the previous salvage investigations, the site's orientation and location, site formation processes, and the surveys prior to 2002.

The *Commodore* archaeological site is the subject of Chapter VI. This includes a discussion of the archaeological survey, video mosaic, photo documentation, and fieldwork at the site. The material culture records from the site are discussed in this

chapter. The site's remains, artifact assemblage, and orientation are compared to ship schematics and eyewitness accounts of the sinking. The artifacts previously recovered from the site are compared to the cargo known to have been aboard the vessel and bound for Cuba.

Chapter VII focuses on the site's identity, its history as a closed site, and the threats to the site. The identification of the shipwreck believed to be SS *Commodore* sheds light on a mystery over a century old. The conservation of materials from the site by the Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association's Museum will permit continued research, interpretation, and educational exhibits. The loss of SS *Commodore* on the night of January 1, 1897, impacted not only the crew and officers of *Commodore*, but also the lives of the keepers at Ponce Inlet Lighthouse, the Jacksonville *junta*, and the Cuban insurgents awaiting their supplies. The story of *Commodore* brings to life the story of Ponce Inlet Lighthouse and its role in keeping mariners safe. It links archaeology, history, and American literature. The events that led to *Commodore*'s role in the Cuban Revolution also led to her loss in the waters of Florida's east coast.

**CHAPTER II:
“THE COLOR OF THE SKY:”
THE CUBAN AND AMERICAN 1890’s CONTEXT**

The sinking of SS *Commodore* in 1897 is closely linked both to the United States’ struggle to expand after the frontier’s closing in 1891, and the economic uncertainty of the 1890s. The 1823 Monroe Doctrine pronounced the United States’ authority and power in the western hemisphere. The Doctrine justified the assistance of Cuban revolutionaries by the United States at the century’s close. Technology and big business demanded new markets for finished goods at the same time the United States suffered a series of depressions. A burgeoning population and labor movements combined to create a closed and racist American society at a time when revolutions in the western hemisphere made expansion possible. To understand the importance of *Commodore*’s role in the Cuban Revolution, one must consider the factors that shaped the era’s political and technological context.

Technological advances in steam machinery, steel construction, and maritime technologies allowed nineteenth century American settlers to expand westward at an unprecedented rate. The exploration of the Louisiana Purchase by Lewis and Clark, the settlement of westward territories, the Mexican War, the California Gold Rush, Native American resettlement policies, and the purchase of Alaska in 1867 furthered American expansion. The American people and government moved into lands previously unexplored and unpopulated by white settlers. Immigration between 1870 and 1900 almost doubled the population of the United States at a time when the frontier was

closing, and economic collapse seemed inevitable (*The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, Charles Calhoun 1996:xi). The California Gold Rush inspired technological advances in shipping both by water and by rail. Completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, combined with canal construction through the Great Lakes and Northeast, linked the East and West coasts as never before (*The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Volume II, The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913*, Walter LaFeber 1993:5). Goods and people could travel from one sea to the other with the assistance of improved transportation technologies. By 1860, the United States operated or owned over fifty percent of the railroad track in the world (“Industrialization and the Rise of Big Business,” in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, Glenn Porter 1996:4).

Better distribution of goods paired with new industrial technology created a second industrial revolution following the American Civil War. Historian Walter LaFeber described the impact of the Civil War on American Industry this way:

As a result of the vast wartime market and new laws that gave incredible gifts of land and money to railroad builders and steel manufacturers, North Americans emerged in 1865 with a nascent industrial complex which in a mere thirty-five years would make them the world’s leading industrial power and, shortly thereafter, make their country the globe’s financial center. (*Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, Walter LaFeber 1983:31).

Companies such as Westinghouse, General Electric, Singer Sewing Machines, Sears, Roebuck & Company, and Standard Oil created technological change while driving the economy (Porter 1996:14). Despite the economic potential of the new industrial complex in the United States, larger markets were needed to keep the factories running. Thus, the

same technologies that made North American expansion possible created a financial and industrial need for the United States to become a world power.

President James Monroe's 1823 congressional address set the tone for nineteenth century American expansion. Monroe's speech, now known as the Monroe Doctrine, clearly stated the United States' position as the sole western hemisphere power. The Doctrine, issued in response to continuing European expansion in the western hemisphere, stated the United States would not interfere with European colonies or revolutions provided European countries did not continue expansion into the hemisphere. According to Monroe, any attempt by European powers to expand or forcefully put down rebellions in the Caribbean, Central and South Americas would be seen as hostile acts towards the United States. Although issued in 1823, the Monroe Doctrine was the foundation for the United States' reaction to the Cuban bid for independence from Spain in 1895. The Monroe Doctrine was cited by Presidents Grover Cleveland, Benjamin Harrison, and William McKinley in support of munitions trafficking to Cuba by Americans in the 1890s:

With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the Governments who have declared their independence and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States. In the war between those new Governments and Spain we declared our neutrality at the time of their recognition, and to this we have adhered, and shall continue to adhere, provided no change shall occur which, in the judgment of the competent authorities of this Government, shall make a corresponding change on the part of the United States indispensable to their security (*Our Nation's*

Archive: The History of the United States in Documents, Monroe 1999:223).

The American pledge of neutrality during a war in the western hemisphere between a colonial power and a colony *unless* the United States felt at risk is one of the keys to understanding the Spanish-American War. The Monroe Doctrine protected American gun running to Cuban rebels because the United States was not actively participating in the rebellion, nor were the Cubans an acknowledged government. This policy allowed SS *Commodore* to steam from Jacksonville, Florida, for Cuba carrying weapons, munitions, medications, and Cuban freedom fighters in 1896 and 1897.

The Monroe Doctrine only provided a foundation for American protection of self-interest during the Gilded Age – it did not provide the impetus for American imperialistic actions during the nineteenth century. Several factors influenced the expansionist practices followed by the American government in the final decades of the century. A need for new markets, new frontiers, and a way to fuel the economy reflected the needs of American big business during the Gilded Age.

When University of Wisconsin professor Frederick Jackson Turner, addressed fellow historians at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 he focused on "The Significance of the American Frontier (LaFeber 1993:43)." Turner used the 1890 U.S. Census Bureau's announcement that the frontier was closed to propose a new foreign policy (*Empire by Default: The Spanish-American War and the Dawn of the American Century*, Ivan Musicant 1998:4). The Turner thesis stated the frontier had driven the United States economy for over a century, and he posited that a new frontier was needed to fuel domestic economic growth (Musicant 1998:4). Turner's comments found a fellow voice

in Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan who not only agreed with Turner, but took the concept one step further by proposing the world's oceans as the next American frontier (Musicant 1998:9). Mahan's revolutionary monograph *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783* viewed the world's oceans as an opportunity for the United States. He suggested that the "most obvious light in which the sea presents itself from the political and social point of view is that of a great highway...over which men may pass in all directions....These lines of travel are called trade routes.... (*The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*, Alfred Thayer Mahan 1987:25)." Mahan's view of the world's oceans as an opportunity for commerce dovetailed nicely with the need for larger markets, an isthmian canal, naval coaling stations, and control of the western hemisphere.

If the Monroe Doctrine prevented European interference in the western hemisphere while creating American dominance, why did the United States not take a larger role in the hemisphere before 1898? The American foreign policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean clearly changed throughout the nineteenth century as the United States came through the Civil War and into Reconstruction. One important aspect of American interest did not change, however, an interest in gaining Cuba as an American holding.

From the start of the early Republic, the United States coveted Spanish holdings in the New World and believed that in time those holdings would join the United States. According to LaFeber, "from the beginning, North American leaders believed their new republic was fated to be dominant in Spanish-held Mexico, Central America, and, indeed, the regions beyond" (LaFeber 1983:19). As early as 1823, John Quincy Adams believed

Cuba should be gained for the United States (Herring 1968:396). By 1852, American interest in the Ever Faithful Isle had become so pronounced that Great Britain and France requested the United States disavow any desire for Cuba. Claiming the right to mediate disputes and colonial ownership in the western hemisphere, President Franklin Pierce instead invoked the Monroe Doctrine and then offered Madrid \$130 million for Cuba in 1853. When Spain refused, the American ambassadors in Great Britain, Spain, and France issued the Ostend Manifesto declaring the United States' willingness to have Cuba as a possession through purchase or other means (Herring 1968:396). Although Washington decried the Ostend Manifesto, southern interests saw Cuba as a new southern slave state. An option President Pierce's administration did not want to encourage (Herring 1968:396). Incidentally, until 1865, the Cuban independence movement sought admittance to the United States. Cuban proponents of freedom believed they could protect the institution of slavery on the island if admitted as a slave-holding state. A hope clearly dashed at the close of the American Civil War (LaFeber 1993:63-4). The Civil War and Reconstruction altered the predominantly isolationist American foreign policy:

Americans, often viewed as ardently anti-revolutionary, acted as catalysts for revolution as they searched for economic and missionary opportunities around the world; then as they willingly sacrificed order for the sake of opportunity, they supported a new presidency that emerged with this imperialism. (LaFeber 1993:xiii)

United States foreign policy began to focus on Latin America and China by the late 1860s. In 1869, Secretary of State William Henry Seward negotiated and signed a treaty with Colombia giving the United States complete control of a twenty-mile wide canal through the Panamanian province (LaFeber 1993:16). The Colombia-United States

treaty directly conflicted with the restrictive Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850, which gave joint control of an isthmian canal through Nicaragua to the United States and Great Britain. Despite the Senate's refusal to ratify the 1869 treaty, American expansion in the Caribbean would continue well into the twentieth century (LaFeber 1993:16). Seward turned American foreign policy towards developing American footholds in Caribbean islands to provide protection for a future isthmian canal (*The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, Walter LaFeber 1963:28). American ownership of Caribbean islands and an isthmian canal would open the door to Hawaii and Asian markets, Seward's true goal (LaFeber 1963:29). An isthmian canal would enable American merchants to travel a shorter distance to newly opened Asian markets using California and Hawaii as convenient coaling stations (LaFeber 1963:29). While Americans began to look beyond U.S. shores for new markets, both the U.S. merchant marine and navy were collapsing (LaFeber 1963:19). Of 1,942 vessels in the United States Navy in 1880, only 48 could fire a shot if called upon (LaFeber 1963:58). Clearly, American interests in foreign markets had more to do with selling goods than carrying them in American hulls.

The decline of American naval power coincided with American expansion into Latin America during the 1880s. When Cuban revolutionaries first declared independence in 1868, Congress quickly reacted. By 1869, Congress urged President Ulysses S. Grant to take immediate action and either recognize the belligerents, or annex Cuba. Secretary of State Hamilton Fish fought the Congressional recommendation for Cuban annexation on racial grounds and eventually persuaded Grant to avoid annexation

(LaFeber 1993:64). Several key members of Congress sided with Fish in the annexation dispute citing the concern that once annexed, Cuban sugar production would compete too heavily with American sugar beet production (LaFeber 1993:65). The Cuban Ten Years War (1868-1878) left Cuban plantations ravaged and economically unviable. Americans quickly bought Cuban sugar plantations for a fraction of their real price (LaFeber 1993:65). Partly because of protective tariffs and partly because of American owned plantations, ninety-four percent of Cuban sugar was exported to the United States (“Phases of Empire: Late Nineteenth Century U.S. Foreign Relations,” in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, Joseph A. Fry 1996:279). American expansion into Cuba also provided opportunities in industrial and infrastructure venues. Americans built and controlled Cuba’s railways, gas lighting, elevators, and even telegraph communications. Notably, Cuba maintained direct telegraph links with both New Orleans and New York City, but not Madrid in the 1880s (Fry 1996:279).

Central America’s agrarian economy and unstable politics made the area a profitable arena for American business at the end of the nineteenth century. American merchants sought not “farming, mineral, or grazing lands, Americans sought foreign markets for agricultural staples or industrial goods,” and Central America was pivotal to this expansion (LaFeber 1963:1). American entrepreneur Minor Keith had already established United Fruit in Costa Rica by 1883. Keith had left the U.S. in 1871 to lay railway track through Costa Rica to the Atlantic Ocean. Twelve years later, Keith controlled seven percent of Cost Rica’s territory in the form of mines, banana plantations, ranches, and railroads. At pivotal moments of unrest, Keith exerted control over the

governments of Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala, usually to the benefit of American or United Fruit Company interests. United Fruit's control of Costa Rica continued well into the twentieth century, and gave American interests a tool to shape Central American politics (LaFeber 1993:71).

Individual American interest in Latin America, though a powerful influence in promoting American expansion, paled in comparison to 1880s foreign policy. The Frelinghuysen-Zavala Treaty of 1884 between the United States and Nicaragua attempted to once more give the United States an isthmian canal. The treaty, though never ratified, (another victim of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty), promised the United States exclusive canal rights through Nicaragua (LaFeber 1993:74). The need for a route to Asian markets and the Pacific continued to gain support during the 1880s and 1890s.

While American interests expanded in the western hemisphere, so too did political goals. The close of the 1880s witnessed the first Pan-American Conference. Held in 1889-1890, the Pan-American Conference brought delegates of Central and South America to the United States to discuss economic and political questions. U.S. delegates wanted to create a common customs house within the hemisphere allowing for a more favorable balance of trade and cutting the historic trade connection between Europe and Latin America. Unfortunately for the U.S. delegation, the other countries were unwilling to dispose of their favorable trade agreements with Western Europe. The conference was successful, however, in creating a way to settle disputes between American countries, and establishing the Commercial Bureau of American Republics (a precursor to the Pan-American Union). The Conference attendees recommended the creation of a railway that

would link North and South America (LaFeber 1993:75). The creation of a Pan-American organization gave the United States a new foothold in the western hemisphere and the opportunity to aggressively seek new markets while keeping Europeans out (LaFeber 1993:60). Newly recognized U.S. strength in the western hemisphere in 1890 triggered American investment in Central America, South America, Asia, and Europe. Americans purchased foreign stocks and bonds while building industrial and transportation systems to protect their investments (LaFeber 1963:9).

Reciprocity treaties promoted American trade in foreign markets while protecting the United States as the 1890s dawned. Congressman William McKinley's 1890 tariff gave President Harrison the ability to "reduce tariffs on foreign goods (especially raw materials) when other nations reduced their tariffs for U.S. products (especially industrial and staple agricultural goods)" (LaFeber 1993:77). The McKinley tariff focused on five key goods: sugar, molasses, coffee, tea, and hides (LaFeber 1993:77). Recognizing the new tariff and Pan-American agreements would require protecting American interest abroad, Congress authorized the construction of three modern battleships in 1890, and the subsidizing of American steamship companies that delivered mail in 1891 (LaFeber 1993:80; *Benjamin Harrison*, Charles Calhoun 2005:117). Seward had proposed in the 1870s that American power in Asian markets would rely on two things: force and the cooperation of the powers involved to guarantee power for all in Asia (LaFeber 1993:95). Following Seward's path, the construction of three modern battleships provided the United States the necessary force to enforce its treaties in Asia.

The start of the 1890s proved Seward correct and validated the congressional naval appropriation. Captain Mahan convincingly argued competition for world markets would result in instability in the balance of power, instability that would result in war. He concluded that the only way to protect American foreign markets and interests was to build a strong navy (LaFeber 1993:117). The Valparaiso Incident of 1891 and the Hawaiian revolt in 1893 proved Seward and Mahan correct. The beating of American sailors from the USS *Baltimore* in Valparaiso, Chile, by police forces in 1891 almost sent the United States to war with Chile. When the Chilean government failed to apologize appropriately (in the eyes of President Harrison), the president asked Congress to give him power to force an apology. Although a minor incident by modern standards, President Harrison's threat of war with Chile proved the power the United States felt it held in the western hemisphere. Without a modern navy, however, the United States would more than likely have lost the war (Calhoun 2005:127). In Hawaii, the situation was quite different, because American firepower could not be challenged by native Hawaiians. White Hawaiian planters controlled more than two-thirds of the islands and their sugar production (LaFeber 1993:91). When the 1890 McKinley treaty removed favored status for Hawaiian sugar, it forced an economic recession for white planters. The economic downturn created a struggle between the white planters and Queen Liliuokalani. The political battle ended in 1893 when American sailors and white planters forced annexation on Hawaii proving the navy a powerful diplomatic tool (LaFeber 1993:94).

The 1893 Panic and resultant depression created a need for American big business to further expand the American economic empire. American business clamored for more favorable trade agreements and better protection from foreign products (LaFeber 1963:192). The protectionist economic thread once more altered American foreign policy when Cuba declared independence in 1895. To protect American interests the Wilson-Gorman tariff “removed Cuba’s favored position in the American sugar market” thereby offsetting the economic uncertainty of the Cuban sugar market during a revolution (LaFeber 1963:286).

American foreign policy after 1895 focused on three things: Cuba Libre, the Japanese and Russian threat to American interests in the Orient, and the rapprochement of British and American foreign policy (LaFeber 1963:285). The new status of American and British relations is most clearly evidenced in the appeasement of American demands regarding British policies in Brazil, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. The capitulation by London to the demands of Washington made the United States the sole power in the western hemisphere (LaFeber 1993:126). Adding to the United State’s newfound power in the hemisphere was the request by the Cuban insurgents for official recognition. President Cleveland refused to recognize the belligerents lest official recognition free Spain of its responsibility of protecting American property in Cuba (LaFeber 1963:287). Cleveland wanted Spain to give Cuba autonomy, which would provide the United States with fresh markets and no political responsibilities (LaFeber 1993:131).

American opinion over the 1895 Revolution was sharply divided. A clear rift between war hawks (generally Democrats and Populists) and expansionists (primarily Republicans) appeared in the upper levels of American government as the war with Spain drew closer. Westerners, Populists, and Democrats generally supported Cuban independence because they believed it would force the government to reissue silver coinage thereby re-floating the economy (LaFeber 1993:141). The Republicans meanwhile wanted Hawaii annexed, a Nicaraguan canal, a naval base in the Danish West Indies, an empire, and Spain's withdrawal from Cuba and the western hemisphere (LaFeber 1993:127). From 1895-1897, Republicans in Congress led the Cuba Libre cry and supported the Cuban *juntas* in the United States (LaFeber 1963:333).

Not to be left out, labor unions and big business voiced their opinion of the Cuban Revolution and the possibility of American involvement. The American Federation of Labor under the control of Samuel Gompers pledged its support for a free Cuba. This stance was not overly surprising since many of the AFL's members were Cuban cigar rollers living in New York, Florida, and Louisiana (LaFeber 1993:131). Interests in the Northeast worried war would undermine the economy further and undercut profits (LaFeber 1993:141). Big business, on the other hand, believed war with Spain over Cuba could open new markets and accelerate economic recovery while protecting market shares (LaFeber 1963:291).

Secretary of State Richard Olney supported American involvement in the Cuban Revolution in 1895. He advocated war for four reasons: the United States should always support independence, the Cuban war was cruel and inhumane, to protect trade agreements, and to protect American property in Cuba (LaFeber 1963:292). Olney stated that if the rebels held “a substantial portion of the community” the United States should “put ourselves in a position to intelligently consider and pass upon the questions of according to the insurgents belligerent rights, or of recognizing their independence (LaFeber 1963:289).”

Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, like Secretary of State Olney, saw the Cuban bid for independence as an opportunity. In a May 3, 1897, letter to Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, Roosevelt told Mahan “...there are big problems in the West Indies also. Unless we definitely turn Spain out of those islands (and if I had my way that would be done tomorrow), we will always be menaced by trouble there (*The Annals of America*, Volume 12 1968:151).” Six months later, on December 6, 1897, President William McKinley in his first address to Congress stated:

The story of Cuba has been one of unrest; growing discontent; an effort toward a larger enjoyment of liberty and self-control; of organized resistance to the mother country; of depression after distress and warfare and of ineffectual settlement to be followed by renewed revolt....The revolution which began in 1868 lasted for ten years, despite the strenuous efforts by the successive peninsular governments to suppress it. Then as now, the government of the United States testified its grave concern and offered its aid to put an end to bloodshed in Cuba....There is no desire on the part of our people to profit by the misfortunes of Spain. We have only the desire to see the Cubans prosperous and contented, enjoying that measure of self-control which is the inalienable right of man....” (McKinley 1968:161-2)

McKinley continued his address, informing Congress he had already informed Spain that the United States could only “be required to wait a reasonable time” for Spain to end the revolt (McKinley 1968:161-2). Spain’s response to McKinley’s demand was to remind the United States that it was bound by its declaration of neutrality, and that the United States needed to prevent filibusterers from leaving US waters (McKinley 1968:163).

McKinley claimed the United States had prevented the voyage of even a single armed vessel for Cuba (McKinley 1968:163). This is an interesting statement from McKinley when one considers that between 1895 and 1898 seventy-one filibustering trips left for Cuba from the United States. Of those trips, twenty-seven were successful. Twenty-three voyages were made from Jacksonville, Florida, and of the successful twenty-seven trips, twelve of the voyages were made by *Commodore*, *Dauntless*, or *Three Friends*. Of the unsuccessful forty-four filibustering trips, the United States caught thirty-three, the Spanish blocked five, the British captured two, and storms stopped four (*Jacksonville: Riverport-Seaport*, George E. Buker 1992:116). It appears the United States, Spain, Great Britain, and even Mother Nature were doing their best to stop filibustering. Clearly, however, the port of Jacksonville, Florida, was not helping matters by being so successful at slipping vessels into and out of port.

Recognizing perhaps that Congress disagreed with his position on Cuba, McKinley addressed Congress’s spring 1896 vote that recommended to the president that Cuban insurgents be recognized as belligerents (McKinley 1968:164). Although a seemingly minor distinction, McKinley reminded Congress that the difference between insurgent and belligerent for international relations is vast. An insurgent cannot be

recognized or supported by a separate government, but a belligerent can be recognized, thereby removing the United States' neutrality and obligations to Spain. The Congressional recommendation made it clear whom they believed the United States should support. McKinley argued that recognizing the Cubans as belligerents would gain them nothing, but would bind the United States in policy and support to the Cubans. If the United States diplomatically recognized the Cuban insurgents, it would give Spain reason to close Cuban ports to American vessels (McKinley 1968:164). Despite McKinley's clear decision to avoid involving the United States in the Cuban revolt, he did not fail to answer those concerned with holdings in Cuba or those who believed his stance too soft:

Sure of the right, keeping free from all offense ourselves, actuated only by upright and patriotic considerations, moved neither by passion nor selfishness, the government will continue its watchful care over the rights and property of American citizens and will abate none of its efforts to bring about by peaceful agencies a peace which shall be honorable and enduring....If it shall hereafter appear to be a duty imposed by our obligations to ourselves, to civilization and humanity, to intervene with force, it shall be without fault on our part and only because the necessity for such action will be so clear as to command the support and approval of the civilized world. (McKinley 1968:164)

Despite continued American interest in joining Cuba and the United States, McKinley refused diplomatically recognizing the Cuban revolutionaries for several reasons. McKinley wanted to avoid either annexation or American responsibility for Cuba. The President's disinterest in the Cuban revolution was a disinterest in a country populated by free slaves and Creoles, a racist sentiment shared by many Americans in the 1890s (Fry 1996:280). Despite McKinley's refusal to be drawn into a war that would negate Spain's responsibilities to American interests, he recognized the threat Cuban

insurrectionists posed to an American isthmian canal and the American-China trade. The Cuban revolution destabilized the Caribbean and the United States' ability to focus on opening up new markets in Latin America (Fry 1996:276). The departure of USS *Maine* for Havana Harbor in January 1898 was meant to send a clear message to Spain. First, the United States was watching Spanish actions. Second, the United States would protect its economic investments in Cuba (Brands 1994:1). The subsequent loss of USS *Maine* and the United States' declaration of war on April 25, 1898, began the Spanish-American War. Despite the sinking of USS *Maine*, the United States had four reasons for going to war against Spain in April 1898. First, the yellow press had pleaded for war since the insurrection began in 1895. Second, the United States claimed humanitarian intervention was necessary to protect the Cubans from the *reconcentrado* policies of the Spanish army. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the United States did not want Spain controlling the largest island in the Caribbean and a potential vulnerability for a new isthmian canal's defense. Finally, McKinley wanted satisfaction for the insult he received from the Spanish Ambassador to the United States (Herring 1968:398). Despite less than perfectly noble reasons for going to war, at the war's end in December 1898, the United States held the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Hawaii had been annexed, and Cuba gained independence, albeit as a protectorate of the United States.

American foreign policy towards Cuba after the Spanish-American war bore little resemblance to the noble goals the United States claimed to desire at the start of the war. In April 1898, the United States pledged in the Teller Amendment that the United States had no "intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said Island [Cuba]

except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the Island to its people (Herring 1968:398).” At the close of the war, however, President McKinley’s refusal to recognize the Cuban insurrectionists at the start of the Cuban Revolution carried over into the Spanish-American War peace talks. When the terms were settled, the colonies dispersed, reparations set, and the treaty signed, only American and Spanish interests had been served. The Cuban freedom fighters, who fought for independence from 1868-1898, were neither present at the peace talks nor given a voice in the final settlements. American racism at the close of the nineteenth century made Americans believe they knew what would be best for their Cuban protectorate (Fry 1996:280). Historian William Brands summed up the Spanish-American War’s importance in American history thus:

The significance of the Spanish-American War lay in the fact that it represented a willingness on the part of the American government and the American people to use American power for purposes not immediately related to American security and to do so at a great distance from home (*The United States in the World, Volume II*, H. William Brands 1994:1).

Americans used the Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, racism, social Darwinism, and a second industrial revolution to expand American influence in Hawaii, the Philippines, and the Caribbean during the Gilded Age (LaFeber 1993:50). Big business needed new markets to conquer and raw materials to supply its factories. The Cuban Revolution of 1895-1898 provided an opportunity for the United States to become a world power while invoking the Monroe Doctrine; however Spain’s involvement in the New World was neither new, nor disputed in 1895. Despite Latin American revolutions at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Cuba remained the Faithful Isle. What factors

contributed to Cuba's late bid for independence? How did the Cuban revolutionaries gain the popular imagination of Americans at the close of the nineteenth century, and how did they use the press to promote their interests?

The Cuban Revolution

Spanish endeavors in the Western Hemisphere began with Columbus's voyages in the fifteenth century and continued well into the nineteenth century. The early nineteenth century witnessed repeated colonial revolutions in South and Central America (Brands 1994:4; *A History of Latin America*, Hubert Herring 1968:393-4). Many of these revolts centered around the emancipation of Spanish-held slaves who in turn assisted in overthrowing the colonial regimes. By the mid-nineteenth century, many former Spanish colonies were independent and formally recognized by the United States as sovereign states. Cuba, however, remained an important Spanish colony.

The Cuban situation was different from Spain's other New World colonies. Largest of the Caribbean islands, Cuba is 760 miles east to west, but less than 100 miles across at its widest point. Cuba's proximity to the United States, a mere ninety miles from Key West, influenced the Cuban socioeconomic dynamic (Herring 1968:393).

Cuba's stable economy and society resulted from its sugar trade. Sugar and tobacco were the staples of Cuba's economy; sugar accounted for nearly 75 percent of its total exports (Herring 1968:394). The importance of sugar and stability for the Creole elite made them loyal to Spain and "countenanced Spain's restrictive press policies; they sacrificed expressive freedom at the altar of sugar profits and social stability (*Children of*

Colonial Despotism: Press, Politics, and Culture in Cuba, 1790-1840, Larry R. Jensen 1988:ix).” Cuba’s stability and vibrant economy owed much to two key events in 1789, the opening of slave importation into Havana, which allowed Cubans to import 20,000 slaves in four years, and the Saint-Domingue slave revolt that destroyed sugar production on the island and pushed the price of Cuban sugar higher on the world market (Jensen 1988:7). Cuba’s position in Caribbean sugar production rose following the loss of Haitian sugar production in 1803. After Napoleon sold Louisiana to the United States, a revolt in Haiti destroyed most of the island’s plantations (Brands 1994:4). Cuban sugar production and profit in the early and mid nineteenth century depended upon a landed plantation class that remained loyal to Spain because it feared profit losses if its slaves were freed through revolution (Brands 1994:4). This plantation class would remain loyal to Spain throughout the Ten Years War (1868-1878), despite economic incentive to join the rebellion.

Cuba’s colonial government received its instructions from Madrid, but the minor slaveholders of the Creole ruling classes resented Spanish meddling in Cuban affairs. Theoretically, Cuba held state status in the Spanish nation, and even elected representation to Spain’s parliament, the Cortes (Musicant 1998: 38). Cuban representation in peninsular politics, however, could not balance the 1860s economic downturns that pushed the Creole elite to its limits. By 1868, the Creole Cuban government declared independence from Spain with the *El Grito de Yara*, thereby sparking ten years of armed conflict that resulted in stalemate (Herring 1968:396). The final peace agreement removed the last obstacle for Cuban plantation owners to support

an independent Cuba – Spain freed all Cuban-owned slaves (Brands 1994:6). The close of the Ten Years War left Cuba with greater autonomy, no slaves, and a promise to remain loyal to Spain.

The Cuban slave emancipation left the plantation class little reason to fear independence any longer. Without a slave population to plant and harvest sugar, the economic incentives that kept the Creole elite loyal to Spain prior to 1878 were removed, and the plantation class had no reason to oppose a sovereign Cuba. The war left 200,000 dead and the economy in shambles (Herring 1968:397). American money poured into Cuba after the war, and by the mid 1890s, American sugar producers had invested almost \$50 million in the Cuban economy. America's stake in Cuban sugar production is evident from then congressman McKinley's 1890 tariff, which eliminated Cuban sugar duties while raising Hawaiian sugar import tariffs. Despite the loss of slaves for the sugar plantations, Cuba was the third largest exporter of goods to the United States. In 1894, Madrid cancelled its favorable trade agreements with the United States cutting Cuban trade profits from \$89 million in 1889 to \$56 million by 1897 (Herring 1968:397). The drastic drop in revenue and the close economic tie to the United States left Cuba in a perfect position to gain a local and friendly audience for its independence movements.

The Florida-Cuban bond influenced American opinion of the Cuban Revolution, and gave Cuban Revolutionaries an unparalleled opportunity in Florida. As early as 1565, the Spanish held an outpost at St. Augustine, Florida. The close of the Seven Years War forced the Spanish to evacuate East Florida for Havana in 1763 when the Treaty of Paris gave Florida to the British. When Spain returned to Florida following the close of

the American Revolution, the Second Spanish period tightened ties between Cuba and Florida. Historian Louis Pérez, Jr., describes Spanish Cuba's influence on Florida this way; "Florida was once a dependency of Cuba, populated and subsidized from the island ("Between Encounter and Experience: Florida in the Cuban Imagination" in *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Volume 82, No. 2, 2003:170)." The return of Spanish control to Florida in 1783 meant Florida retained its Spanish Cuban flavor well into the nineteenth century, despite becoming an American Territory in 1823. The nineteenth century Cuban population in Florida was a separate and immediately identifiable community (Pérez 2003:171).

Cities like Tampa and Ybor City had long lasting ties to the Cuban independence movement. In 1873, Captain Joseph Fry, an ex-Confederate naval officer left Tampa Bay with a load of men and munitions aboard the filibustering vessel *Virginus* (*The Spanish-American War in Tampa Bay*, Alejandro M. de Quesada 1998:7). The Spanish Navy captured *Virginus* and held the crew prisoners. The American Navy gathered in Key West, Florida, and prepared to protest the taking of an American vessel, but the American fleet was heavily outgunned and never left the harbor. Fifty-two Americans and passengers were shot before the United States could issue a diplomatic protest. The remaining 155 passengers would have died if Great Britain had not intervened (Musicant 1998:13). The inability of the United States Navy to protect American lives became a factor in the decision to commission three modern battleships in 1890 (LaFeber 1993:80). Nonetheless, the Cuban influence on Florida towns gave the Cubans a place from which to fight for independence.

Cubans living in Florida during the nineteenth century brought their economic and industrial base with them. The Cuban migration to Key West, Tampa, and Jacksonville altered the cities economically and technologically, events that foreshadowed Miami's transformation a century later (Pérez 2003:174). The growth of cigar factories in otherwise small coastal Florida towns created a vital economy and community (Pérez 2003:174). The fight for Cuban independence was fought from small coastal towns such as Key West, Ybor City, Tampa, and Jacksonville where "filibustering expeditions destined for the fields of insurgent Cuba routinely departed (Pérez 2003:171, 172)."

According to Pérez, "The presence of José Martí in the Cuban communities of Florida and the pursuit of *Cuba Libre* by those communities had far-reaching and long-lasting implications in the historical development of Florida (Pérez 1995:7)." Unlike previous immigrant populations, Florida's Cuban population was comprised of whites, blacks, and Creoles all of whom were united by their common Cuban identity. This common culture enabled José Martí to create the *El Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, or the PRC in New York City on January 5, 1892, thereby tying together Cuban populations throughout the United States (Pérez 2003:175, Musicant 1998:45). In Florida, where the Cuban connection was strongest, the cities of Key West, Ybor City, Tampa, and Jacksonville emerged as the political centers of the Cuban Independence Movement after 1892 (*José Martí in the United States: The Florida Experience*, Louis A. Pérez, Junior 1995:7).

The PRC's focus was to raise funds, munitions, and fighters for the Cuban Revolution Martí and others were planning. *El Partido Revolucionario Cubano* focused on centralized Cuban populations, especially those found in Florida, a scant ninety miles from Havana (Musicant 1998:45). Martí used the PRC to create the *juntas* that later moved key personnel and arms into Cuba. The PRC's first attempt to send men, money, and munitions to Cuba started from Fernandina Beach, Florida, an obscure coastal town in December 1894; this attempt will be discussed later in this chapter (Musicant 1998:47).

The declaration of Cuban Independence in 1895 by revolutionaries brought unexpected allies into the fold. Cuban bandits joined the revolution on both sides. Many joined the revolution after Martí landed in 1895, but many fought for the side they thought would win (*Lawless Liberators: Political Banditry and Cuban Independence*, Rosalie Schwartz 1989:13). One notorious and patriotic bandit, Manuel García, used his band to help overthrow Spanish rule in Cuba (Schwartz 1989:18). Martí recognized the value of Cuban outlaws and used García's expertise to further the revolution. In 1893, Martí appointed García a general of the revolution (Schwartz 1989:158). García's gang collected ransom and protection monies from rich and poor alike. These funds protected the payees from being kidnapped or from having their fields burned (Schwartz 1989:19). Funds generated from ransoms and protection fees by Cuban bandits began arriving in PRC coffers stateside by 1896 (Schwartz 1989:117). Popular support for the bandits and the revolutionaries in Cuba matched the public outcry at Spanish policies in the United States.

By 1895, Cuban independence advocates won support both at home and abroad. The best-known advocate to Americans for Cuban independence was José Martí, who spent almost ten years in New York City before leaving to fight on Cuban soil in 1895 (Herring 1968:397). At the same time that revolutionaries in eastern Cuba declared independence, Martí and his followers delivered weapons to them from the New York *junta* (Herring 1968:397). Shortly after Martí's return to Cuba, he was killed in a battle with Spanish forces (Herring 1968:397). The contacts and allies Martí made in the United States served his successors well after his death. These same allies helped lobby Congress and printed news stories to fuel American interest and support for the Cuban uprising. American interest in the Cuban insurrection played an important role for the filibusters and the steamship *Commodore*.

Initial American disinterest in the 1895 Cuban revolution might have held steady had the Spanish not begun a policy of *reconcentrado* (Brand 1994:9-10). To fight an increasingly hostile Cuban citizenship engaged in guerrilla warfare, the Spanish rounded up the Cubans and removed them from their homes (Herring 1968:397). These citizens were resettled in mountain towns and put under guard. Any person found outside the mountain camps after curfew was an enemy and shot immediately. The brutal tactics infuriated American newspaper readers who protested loudly to the American government. In the Havana province, General Valeriano Weyler's *reconcentrado* policy resulted in the deaths of 50,000 people. Weyler's policies earned him the title *Carnicero* or Butcher (Herring 1968:397). Adding to Spain's image problem in American newspapers was the fact that Cuban revolutionaries made excellent use of American

yellow journalism by sending reports to the papers from American field correspondents. Spain's inability to protect American business interests and property in Cuba incited Americans and fueled sympathetic feeling for the Cuban insurgents. In the end, the Cuban revolutionaries succeeded in making the Spanish look brutish and harsh to a sympathetic American populace who demanded intervention.

Cuban revolutionaries gained popularity the longer they held out against Spain. By 1896, guns were shipped to Cuba in American hulls from several ports in Florida, including Jacksonville, Key West, and Tampa (*New York Times* January 6, 1898:1). Unfortunately, for Cuban interests, Spain felt the shipment of munitions from the United States aboard American vessels warranted censure. In successive correspondence with the United States, Spain decried a policy of American gunrunning by private interests as a ploy to assist Cuban freedom fighters. To avoid international repercussions the American government prohibited the running of munitions from American ports aboard United States vessels to Cuban ports. Several American filibusters were seized before the legality of American actions could be tested (*New York Times* January 6, 1898:1).

Filibusters³:

Filibustering has an American legacy that stretches to the early nineteenth century. Filibustering prior to 1850 focused on Mexico, but voyages following 1850 looked to Central America and Cuba to increase American power (*Manifest Destiny's*

³ *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Eleventh edition* defines the word filibuster as "an irregular military adventurer; specifically: an American engaged in fomenting insurrections in Latin America in the mid-nineteenth century....(2003:468)." Meanwhile the *American Heritage Dictionary Third Edition* defines filibuster as "an adventurer engaged in private warfare abroad (1994:314)."

Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America, Robert E. May 2002:45). The term filibuster, however, did not come into common usage until after Narciso López's attempts to invade Cuba using American volunteers in 1850 (May 2002:1). Antebellum Americans supported these "heroes" and thronged docks to cheer filibusters on their way. Filibusterers themselves, caught up in the glory, often signed up for successive voyages regardless of the expedition's outcome (May 2002:76, 107). Attempts by the United States to halt filibustering trips started in the eighteenth century and continued into the 1890s.

Despite a 1794 Neutrality Act which made it illegal to outfit armed expeditions on American soil, the first documented filibustering expeditions occurred in 1806 (*Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters*, Charles H. Brown 1980:6,3). Aaron Burr led an expedition to Mexico, while Francisco de Miranda led an expedition to Venezuela. Both expeditions aimed to overthrow Spanish colonial power and bring both Mexico and Venezuela into an American empire (Brown 1980:3). Between 1810 and 1824, rebellions occurred everywhere in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America except in Puerto Rico and Cuba (May 2002:5).

American opportunists used expeditions to unstable countries for personal gain, but undermined American foreign relations at the same time. The United States strengthened and passed a series of neutrality laws beginning in 1818. Article Six of the 1818 Neutrality Law mandated a three-year prison sentence and \$3,000 fine for those who assisted or started a military expedition against an area with which the United States

was at peace (May 2002:7). When the 1818 law failed to stop American expeditions, the United States warned targeted governments of planned invasions (May 2002:8).

Supplying weapons, ammunition, medicines, and men to Cuban revolutionaries required organization. Luckily, for Cuban freedom fighters, Americans happily assisted the Cuban cause. The failure and execution of Narciso López in 1851 led interested Americans in Lafayette, Louisiana, to create the Order of the Lone Star. Founder Dr. John V. Wren stated the Order was made up of those who were “sympathetically favorable” to López’s expedition and goals. The Order flourished in the Gulf States but also established groups as far flung as New York City. By 1852, the Order of the Lone Star planned a new filibustering trip to promote Cuban independence (May 2002:33). Unlike later Cuban-American *juntas*, the Order of the Lone Star failed to successfully launch an expedition. Like later *juntas*, the Order relied upon members in key positions to move funds and arms surreptitiously (May 2002:35, 129).

Americans have often found ways to profit from a war without participating directly, and the Floridian filibusters were no exception. Men like Alexander Merrill, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Jacksonville, worked with the filibusters by storing weapons on his estate and then lightering the goods to the departing vessels anchored in the St. Johns River (Buker 1992:103). Historian Charles Brown argued the 1895-1898 filibustering voyages differed greatly from those made in the 1850s. Brown suggested the filibustering fleet focused on gunrunning and profit while the 1850s voyages were bent on invasion:

The junta maintained a fleet of what were called filibuster boats, small sea-going tugs well known in the newspaper headlines – the *Three*

Friends, the *Commodore*, the *Dauntless*, the *Competitor* that left from the coasts of Florida and South Carolina with munitions to be unloaded at night on the island by small working parties of Cubans. Filibusterism, in the 1890s, was chiefly gunrunning by American captains, and crews hired by the junta, a trade in contraband. (Brown 1980:467).

Certainly, the captains and crews of the filibustering fleet in the 1890s profited from their voyages for the *junta*. The tugs' owners received \$10,000 for every cargo they carried regardless of success (Smith 1912:101). The captains also faced threats their compatriots of the 1850s did not face. Captains running munitions and men to Cuba in the 1890s not only risked their ships, American crews risked their lives in Spanish waters.

Spanish espionage and counterintelligence endangered the crews and their vessels as well. In January 1896, *Commodore's* captain (not Captain Murphy) accepted a \$5,000 bribe from Spanish spies to reveal the *junta's* plans. *Commodore* was docked in Wilmington, North Carolina, undergoing a machinery refit. The captain was fired immediately, but it is unclear whether he provided the Spanish with usable information (Smith 1912:79). The *juntas* often used misinformation to keep the Spanish Navy and spies at bay. In July 1896, *Commodore* faked leaving Charleston, South Carolina. The vessel's crew leaked its planned departure to the press, and Captain Dynamite Johnny O'Brien traveled to Charleston to take command of the vessel. Too late the Spanish and Americans figured out the ruse, and *Dauntless* cleared Jacksonville for Cuba unchallenged (Smith 1912:120).

Shipping from Jacksonville, Key West, and Tampa as well as many smaller ports in Florida, private American vessels under contract to Cuban *juntas* carried war materials and men. The ports had been used historically for previous voyages, and had the

necessary railroad hubs nearby. As early as August 1851, filibusters cached weapons in Jacksonville and along the St. Johns River for proposed expeditions (May 2002:31, 77). Following a path trod by *juntas* for forty-five years, José Martí planned a filibustering voyage departing from the St. Johns River in 1895. Martí chartered three vessels from New York and Boston in secrecy. Munitions were sent by rail to Fernandina Beach, Florida, where they were stored in a warehouse and labeled as foodstuffs. The Cuban revolutionaries planned to board in Key West, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica after the weapons were loaded aboard the three vessels in Fernandina Beach. Unfortunately for Martí, the Jacksonville collector of customs sniffed out the expedition, and the voyage was cancelled (“Fernandina Filibuster Fiasco: Birth of the 1895 Cuban War of Independence,” in *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Volume 82, No. 1, Antonio Rafael de la Corva 2003:16). The voyage’s failure can be partly blamed on the bragging of Cuban participants to the press. The yellow press then printed sensationalized accounts of Martí’s plan that tipped off both the Spanish and American officers tasked with preventing filibustering voyages (de la Corva 2003:42). Despite the voyage’s failure, Fernandina continued to be used by the filibusters, and both *Dauntless* and *Commodore* operated out of Fernandina in October 1896 (de la Corva 2003:41).

Despite Fernandina Beach’s use by filibusters, Jacksonville, Florida, was the nation’s major filibustering port by 1895 (*Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane*, Linda H. Davis 1998:172). Jacksonville’s ties to Cuba can be traced to the cigar distributor José Alejandro Huau. Señor Huau established the Jacksonville *junta* in 1896 as a means to arrange cargoes, fighters and ships for transport to Cuba (*St. Johns River*

Steamboats, Edward A. Mueller 1986:122). Huau, like many Cuban-Floridians, had a foot in Cuba and the United States through his Cuban mother who was expelled from Cuba in 1869, and his American father (Buker 1992:99). Those involved in the *junta*, those wishing to join a filibustering voyage like correspondents, and freedom fighters used Huau's cigar shop as a meeting place (Davis 1998:173). Martí's PRC relied on cigar manufacturers like Huau. Members of the *juntas*, primarily cigar makers, contributed ten percent of their wages each month to the *junta* (*A Captain Unafraid: The Strange Adventures of Dynamite Johnny O'Brien*, Horace Smith 1912:71). Huau arranged voyages, bought and moved arms, and even arranged transport from his cigar shop in Jacksonville. Like previous filibustering *juntas*, Huau had friends in key places. Alfonso Fritot, a local railroad switchman and *junta* member, rotated railroad cars in and out of the trains according to Huau's direction. The ability to move weapons and men under the watchful eyes of Spanish spies and American authorities made Huau an important member of the PRC (Buker 1992:100). Huau also played an important role in getting American reporters aboard filibustering vessels so Cubans could win the propaganda war.

The yellow press played an important role for both the filibusters and the Cuban revolutionaries. At the time of the Cuban Revolution, American newspapers were warring for readership. More sensational headlines splashed across the papers each day, as reporters sought bigger and more exciting stories. The Cuban Revolution and the illegal filibustering expeditions offered an opportunity that few reporters or papers could resist. Many up and coming correspondents of the day traveled to Jacksonville, Florida,

where they could secretly sign onto a filibustering crew and then send their stories home (Baker 1992:102). As reporter Ralph Paine described it: “the thing was to get afloat in one of those notorious steamers whose voyages had an air of mystery, whose departures and escapades were clouded in a baffling secrecy, and whose sailormen had the temper of the buccaneers who had cruised in those same seas long, long ago (*Roads of Adventure*, 1922:60).” Stephen Crane even felt the pull and excitement of the filibustering voyages and said filibustering “catches the heart of the lad (Davis 1998:172).” It was difficult for journalists to gain access to a filibustering voyage because of the neutrality laws and the U.S. policy of trying correspondents under the same laws as the filibusters themselves (Davis 1992:173). The reporters faced the same perils as the filibusters: jail, death, or sinking (*The Correspondents’ War: Journalists in the Spanish-American War*, Charles Brown 1967:65).

Filibuster historian Charles Brown said, “it requires a valor not common for a handful of men to embark on the seas in leaky sailing vessels with the intention of conquering a country;” imagine then the courage it must have taken to join the voyage simply for a story (Brown 1980:45). Unmindful of the risk, the correspondents knew their job was to secretly join the filibusters and then bring the story home where they could influence American popular opinion. Stephen Crane claimed to be an able bodied seaman so he could join *Commodore’s* crew and tell its tale. Little did he know it would become his most acclaimed short story.

The United States government tried to stop filibustering trips between American shores and Cuba during the 1890s and to prevent reporters’ stories from making the

papers. The Navy patrolled the East Coast from Sandy Hook, New Jersey to Key West, Florida, arresting suspected filibusters (Paine 1922:59). The navy succeeded several times, “but the famous *Three Friends*, the *Dauntless*, and the *Commodore* were stealing out of the Florida harbors and inlets with their lawless freighting and picaresque crews, so cleverly handled that they defied capture and left not enough evidence to trap them (Paine 1922:64).” Nonetheless, the successful impounding of ships, crews, and goods by the U.S. Customs Office resulted in discord amongst Florida captains and ship owners. In response to continued criticism, U.S. Attorney General Judson Harmon issued a statement in December 1896 declaring the shipment of arms to Cuba by Americans to be legal (*Daily Florida Citizen* December 13, 1896:1).

Arms running to Cuba continued unabated once Attorney General Harmon’s statements reached the press. Despite Spanish indemnity threats against the United States for damages caused by American shipped weapons, Harmon maintained American citizens were legally protected when shipping weapons to Cuba through American ports. Spain also accused the United States of violating international treaties by allowing continued gun running. Harmon, however, found that international law took “no account of a mere insurrection, confined within the limits of a country, which has not been protracted or successful enough to accrue for those engaged in it recognition as belligerents by their own Government or by foreign Governments (*Daily Florida Citizen* December 13, 1896:1).” Therefore, the international law that applied to neutrality or the recognition of belligerent parties did not apply to Cuba, and the United States did not violate international treaties by trading with revolutionaries.

Harmon's decision quickly reached Jacksonville, Florida, and its Cuban *junta*. The attorney general's statements regarding the legality of American filibustering to Cuba reinforced the city's strong pro-filibustering opinion. According to the *Daily Florida Citizen*, "the reading of the opinion seems to establish the right of persons to ship arms direct from any port within the United States to a Cuban port and to demand the protection of the Government making such shipments (December 13, 1896:5)." For the filibusters to know whether or not the customs office would acknowledge the attorney general's ruling, a Jacksonville vessel had to try to clear port for Cuba. The newspaper reported a ship would be loaded with a cargo of war material and weapons, papers would be demanded from the customs office, and the vessel clear for Cuba. The newspaper reiterated Harmon's statement that "The shipment or carriage of such articles to Cuba does not become a violation of international law, merely because they are not destined to [illegible] thereof which is recognized by the Spanish Government as open to commerce nor because they are to be traded by stealth (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 13, 1896:5)." The first filibuster to comment on Harmon's ruling was J.M. Barr, part owner of *Three Friends*, one of the other two filibusters active in Jacksonville, (another partner in the venture was eventually elected governor).⁴ Barr told the paper he simply wanted to land arms in the revolutionary Cuban held two-thirds of Cuba and carry enough "porters" to land said cargo (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 13, 1896:5). Based on the remarks

⁴ Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, one of three owners in the *Three Friends*, used his connection to the filibustering vessel as part of his stump speeches as a Florida gubernatorial candidate in 1894. When asked about the vessel and current court case he responded he was "charged with filibustering from Florida to Cuba, and as we are not yet out of the woods...I can, without violating any of the neutrality laws, say that the THREE FRIENDS is one of the trimmest little crafts that ever showed her heels to another..." (Broward 1894:17)

of Barr and other ship owners the Cuban *junta* in Jacksonville had friends amongst the filibusters willing to risk their ships and crews despite international laws.

Despite Barr's eagerness to prove the attorney general's ruling valid, *Commodore's* owners moved first. On December 14, 1896, a *Daily Florida Citizen* headline read "Big Cuban Expedition. The *Commodore* and *Three Friends* Figuring In It. Test of Mr. Harmon's Decision. *Commodore* to Load with Arms Openly, and to Take Twenty-Five "Porters" – Party of Cubans Arrives From Tampa (1896:1)." The paper reported its correspondents in Tampa had telegraphed the night before that a crew of sixty-seven men left Tampa for Jacksonville aboard the Florida Central and Peninsular Train (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1). The men claimed they would depart Jacksonville immediately for Cuba aboard one of the filibustering vessels. These Cuban revolutionaries composed one of three expeditions enroute to Cuba under prominent Cuban General Carlos Roloff's command. According to the Tampa correspondent:

General Carlos Roloff has sailed from some Northern port in the *Bermuda*. It is said that he is to be met by two expeditions as he comes south. Rumor has it one is to be made up from the Atlanta Cuban colony and to go to the nearest port where they will embark. The second party left here this morning, as stated, among them being Americans. It is thought that they will go to Trout Creek, where there after dark [*sic*], and embark at once on the *Three Friends* (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1).

Tampa's unnamed journalist reported the Cuban revolutionaries were under Perez Gonzales and Augusto Arnao's leadership. The revolutionaries carried bundles to the Tampa train station in small, staggered "squads" to avoid suspicion (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1). According to the paper, *Bermuda* carried 6,000 rifles, 4 million cartridges, 4 Hotchkiss guns, 2 dynamite guns, 600 hand bombs, ammunition for

the cannon, and medicine. In all, around 300 men were involved in the expedition under Roloff's command. This test of the attorney general's ruling the previous day was met with "great excitement" among the Cubans in Jacksonville (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 13, 1896:2).

The success of *Bermuda*, *Three Friends*, and *Commodore* in clearing Jacksonville for Cuba in December 1896 gave the filibusters the legal footing they needed. *Commodore*'s loss only two weeks later did not impinge upon subsequent shipments of arms and men to Cuba. As late as January 1898, the Treasury Department was still studying the influence of filibustering in Florida on the nation's economy. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Scott Wike spent two weeks in Florida investigating the methods used by the Cuban filibusters. Wike visited the major ports in Jacksonville, Key West, and Tampa to ascertain public sentiment. He found that "the sentiment throughout Florida, both American and native Cuban, was almost entirely with the [Cuban] insurgents" (*New York Times*, January 6, 1898:1). He finished his report by stating that the popular feeling in Florida made it difficult for the government to stop the filibustering expeditions (*New York Times*, January 6, 1898:1).

Filibustering expeditions to Cuba continued until 1898 when the United States sent naval vessels into Cuban waters. More than three years of Floridian-Cuban gunrunning indelibly marked Florida's maritime history. *Commodore*'s loss during a fierce storm in 1897, while a small footnote in the history of the larger event, is still notable. *Commodore* was not only a filibusterer, but also an ocean tug like the other vessels in what became known as the Filibustering Fleet (See Figure 3).

The legal and political ramifications of filibustering from Florida to Cuba by resourceful businessmen both hindered and assisted the federal government's stated neutral position. At the close of the Spanish-American War, the federal government had spent six million dollars. Four million dollars of the total expenditure for the war was spent in Florida (de Quesada 1998:8). The link between Cuba and Florida not only brought the United States into the Spanish-American War, but also profited Floridians smart enough to recognize an economic opportunity when they saw one.

The Jacksonville *junta*'s power and wealth allowed it to contract three vessels for its filibustering trips: *Three Friends*, *Dauntless*, and *Commodore*. All three vessels were tugs, but only *Commodore* was not specifically built for filibustering. *Commodore* was initially built as an ocean steam tug for harbor use in New York City, but became useful for the Florida-Cuba run. The use of harbor tugs by the Jacksonville *junta* in its filibustering trips is particular to Jacksonville. The tug's importance in Jacksonville and type must be addressed if the vessel remains are to be matched to *Commodore*'s specifications. The evolution of tugboats, the success of the vessel type as filibusters in Jacksonville, and the *junta*'s deliberate use of tug boats for gunrunning are addressed in the next chapter.



Figure 3: The Jacksonville *junta*'s Filibustering Fleet: *Commodore* resembled *Dauntless* and *Three Friends*, pictured above, while tied up in Jacksonville. Unlike *Dauntless* and *Three Friends*, *Commodore* was not purpose-built for filibustering voyages. (*Roads of Adventure*, Ralph D. Paine 1922:118)

CHAPTER III:
“THEIR EYES...WERE FASTENED UPON THE WAVES:”
THE *COMMODORE*’S VESSEL TYPE

The evolution of vessel type based upon environmental, military, or economic factors dates to the start of seafaring. The building of specific vessel types for distinct purposes continues today, but is of interest here because all of the vessels in Jacksonville’s filibustering fleet, including *SS Commodore*, were steam tugs. The *Commodore* was built at a time when wooden vessels competed directly with iron-hulled vessels for the same jobs. A tugboat requires several things to be successful including the horsepower to haul or tow larger vessels and fight strong currents, and the ability to maneuver around tows, snags, and other shipping. This chapter addresses the *Commodore* as a tugboat and the filibustering fleet’s use of these specialized vessels unique ability to leave port at any time. The tugboat’s specific design and construction features will later be used to identify *Commodore*’s wreckage.

Vessel and Propulsion Type

The first documented steam-driven purpose-built tugboat was the *Charlotte Dundas*, built to tow coal barges on the Forth and Clyde Canal in 1802 (“Fair Wind Ahead: The Developing World of the British Tugboat” in *Maritime Life and Traditions*, Tom Cunliffe 2001:57). Despite the fifty-seven foot tugboat’s success, the vessel was shelved when it appeared that it was adding to erosion problems on the Forth and Clyde Canal’s banks (Cunliffe 2001:57). Tugboats quickly gained respect elsewhere, however, and by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Black Ball Line used New York

Harbor's tugboats to remain on schedule when entering and leaving port (Cunliffe 2001:58). The first purpose built tugboat in the United States was *Rufus King*, built by Smith & Dimon for the New York Dry Dock Company (*History of American Steam Navigation*, John H. Morrison 1903:539). *Rufus King* was built in 1825 to haul vessels to and from the New York Dry Dock Company's railways thus allowing the company to maximize profits (Morrison 1903:539).

Over time three types of tows evolved. The first, the horse-drawn tow, was used primarily on inland canals where the size of the canal necessitated the use of horses along the banks to guide canal barges through the locks. The best example of a horse-drawn tow is its application in the Erie Canal after 1825 (*Principles of Water Transportation*, Leslie A. Bryan 1939:171). The second type of tow was the mechanical tow. A mechanical tow was used when the size of the tow was too large to be handled by a horse, but the waterway is too narrow to allow for another vessel. An example of this tow was the use of electric locomotives to pull vessels through the Panama Canal (Bryan 1939:171). The last type of tow used by vessels utilizes another ship to help maneuver and dock. Tugboats are the tools used to move larger vessels in riverine, harbor, or open ocean environments (Bryan 1939:171).

Prior to construction of purpose built tugboats such as *Rufus King*, vessels entering and leaving New York harbor had few options. Oceangoing sailing vessels relied upon good weather or small passenger steamers to guide them in and out of New York (Morrison 1903:539). From 1816 to 1840, the size of ocean going vessels continued to grow, which required ever-larger steam driven vessels to guide the sailing

ships to dock (Morrison 1903:540). Compounding the need for tugboats at the turn of the nineteenth century was the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825; the canal increased the number of vessels and amount of goods traveling from New York to the Midwest (Morrison 1903:539). By 1830, three separate companies controlled tows on the Hudson River, and in 1832, the *Hercules* became the first tugboat in New York to work in “general service” (Morrison 1903:540). Harbors reliant upon waterborne trade such as Philadelphia quickly began utilizing tugboats to increase trade. In 1836, Philadelphia began offering steam tug service to entering vessels (Morrison 1903:540).

Like other steamboats, early tugboats relied upon paddlewheels for propulsion, and like other steamers, tugboats were incredibly inefficient in coal use (Cunliffe 2001:58). The evolution of propulsion in steam tugboats from paddlewheels to propellers is an important development when examining wooden hulled steam engine tugs. The necessity for tugboats to remain stable and maneuver easily made side paddlewheel tugboats with dual engines ideal. A dual-engine side paddle wheeler’s ability to pivot and maneuver is comparable to modern day dual and triple drive system tugs. A well-driven paddlewheel tugboat could shift, change loads, and maneuver around tows easily (Cunliffe 2001:61). The two engine, dual side-wheel steam tug’s maneuverability, postponed the transition to screw propellers in tugboats (Cunliffe 2001:63).

The transition to propeller propulsion signaled an important development in tugboat usage: the ability to place the towrope over the tugboat’s “center of longitudinal pivot” (Cunliffe 2001:63). The use of propeller-driven tugboats resulted in faster tugboats allowing for faster service in harbor and long-haul applications (Cunliffe

2001:63). The first screw tugboat built in the United States was *Samson* (Morrison 1903:542). William Cramp built *Samson's* wooden hull, and Reanie, Neafie & Company built the machinery in 1850 (Morrison 1903:542). The success of Philadelphia based Reanie, Neafie & Company's screw machinery quickly helped make the paddlewheel obsolete for tugboat applications (Morrison 1903:542). *Samson's* machinery and screw propeller proved reliable, fast, and powerful (Morrison 1903:542). For *Commodore*, both in New York Harbor service and later as a filibuster, speed was crucial when trying to outrun both the Spanish and American navies.

This necessitated heavier construction and larger engines than similarly sized vessels (*Archaeological Documentation and Testing of a mid-Nineteenth Century Tugboat at Hutchinson Island, Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia*, Gordon P. Watts 1992:1). Tugboats "differ in construction from most types of water craft since, in addition to pulling power and strength of construction, a maximum degree of stability is essential. The latter is acquired by having an especially low center of gravity and good depth for the propeller (Bryan 1939:171)." Specialization in the type of tows undertaken by a tugboat also altered the vessel's construction. A canal tug was built to be fast and powerful in order to fight current and move goods quickly (Bryan 1939:172). Dock and oceangoing tugs while powerful would be both stronger and more maneuverable than their canal counterparts (Bryan 1939:172). The need for a heavily reinforced hull to counteract the forces exerted when pushing a much larger vessel into position would be obvious with an oceangoing tug such as *Commodore*.

Commodore and other tugs were vital to New York's commerce because they guided much larger vessels to their wharves for unloading and loading. The use of steam tugs to position larger vessels in the harbor meant that ever larger ocean-going vessels could be built. Tugboats allowed shipping lines to build larger vessels to maximize profit. The Neafie and Levy yard constructed SS *Commodore* in 1882 to serve as a harbor tug for one of the world's largest and most active ports. With a four-bladed propeller and relatively short length, *Commodore* was designed to be maneuverable and powerful.

A tugboat requires tremendous horsepower housed in a maneuverable hull generally necessitating small vessel size with a powerful engine. The direct acting, single expansion steam engine of *Commodore* minimized size while maximizing horsepower. Although the wooden hull worked as the propeller rotated, *Commodore's* builder equipped the vessel with a Philadelphia Flywheel, or Loper Wheel – a four-bladed propeller specifically designed to minimize vibration. A ship's hull resembles a violin; the hollow wooden hull has a specific harmonic, or a point at which the hull will perfectly vibrate. In musical terms a perfect vibration or harmonic is heard when the note is pure and a sympathetic note one octave higher is heard. In a ship's hull, this sympathetic vibration is catastrophic. Placing a rotating propeller and a vibrating engine into the wooden hull can create a vibration that will destroy the ship. The evolution of the four-bladed propeller is linked with designing an engine that rotated at a period that neither matched the hull's harmonic nor was a multiple of the hull's vibration period (Desmond 1998:35). In other words, if either the engine or the propeller's harmonic

matched the hull's harmonic, the hull broke apart. It was necessary to cancel out the hull's vibration with the vibrations produced by both the propeller and the engine. For this reason a balanced four-bladed propeller was paired with an engine that vibrated at a different rate than *Commodore's* wooden hull.

A critical component of a tugboat's machinery is the winch that held the towrope or cable. Although tugboats initially used standard heavy gauge line to hold the tow, by 1870 wire cable was in use for sea tows (Cunliffe 2001:66). The use of steam-powered winches to haul in or release cable made it easier for tugboat men to haul heavier loads and control a tow (Cunliffe 2001:66). Like other tugs of the late nineteenth century, *Commodore* could have had a steam-powered winch on the aft deck powered by a donkey boiler.

Commodore's forward pilothouse allowed the captain an unobstructed field of view when under a load (See Figure 4). The critical center point for the *Commodore's* longitudinal pivot as on other tugboats was aft of the pilothouse allowing the ship to maneuver under heavy strain without capsizing. Much like the derelict tugboat at Hutchinson Island in Savannah, Georgia, the *Commodore* operated under heavy loads with a massive single expansion engine. To accommodate the added strain, both vessels were reinforced near the engine footings, and utilized oak frames (Watts 1992:35-36).

Tugboats served an important function in the nineteenth century, just as they do today. The need for vessels that could tow, push, and maneuver larger vessels in and out of tight harbors, rivers, canals, and to and from berthing docks made tugboats necessary. The nature of the types of tows a tugboat could be called upon to perform required

flexibility both in the vessel's maneuverability, but also in the captain's ability to contract jobs. Tugboats could be called upon at any time to undertake a salvage or vessel rescue. This meant the tugs could leave port without clearance papers for a specific destination (Paine 1992:69). This loophole in port papers made oceangoing tugs the perfect choice for filibustering voyages. The owners, captains, and crews could avoid filing illegal papers by simply sailing under the pretense of a salvage job. Often the illegal munitions and medicines carried aboard the vessels to Cuba were mislabeled as "fish, bacon, lard" to prevent customs agents from investigating the tugboats (Mueller 1986:127). If the Jacksonville filibustering fleet relied primarily on powered vessels that could leave port on a moment's notice, it explains the need for sea-going tugboats in the filibustering trade. The success of *Dauntless*, *Three Friends* and *Commodore* as filibusters is directly linked to their ship type. The answer to what role SS *Commodore* played in the filibustering trade and events leading to her sinking are discussed in the next chapter.

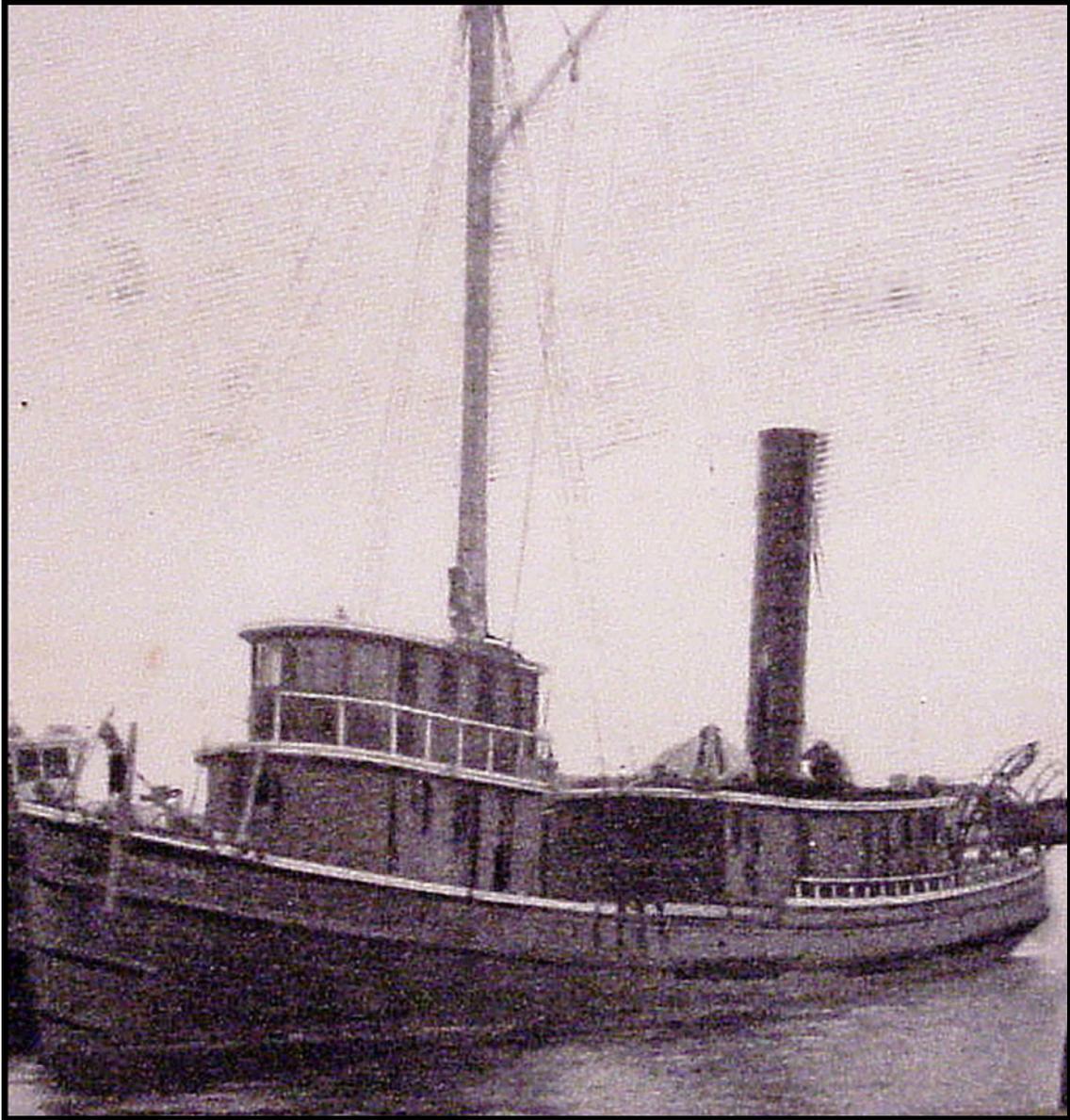


Figure 4: The only known photograph of *Commodore*. Jacksonville, Florida, circa 1896. (Image courtesy Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association 2002)

CHAPTER IV:
“THE WAVES WERE OF THE HUE OF SLATE:”
SS *COMMODORE*’S WORKING HISTORY

Primary historical source research on SS *Commodore* yielded interesting information about the vessel’s history. Unfortunately, much of the information reflects eyewitness stories that disagree about the events of January 1-2, 1897. Yellow journalistic practices of the era define much of what is known about the vessel’s loss, and Stephen Crane’s own account of the voyage provides few clues. Several questions require attention here. First, what do historical sources tell us about *Commodore*’s construction, refits, and adaptations for filibustering? How did Captain Murphy and the Cuban *junta* use *Commodore* to fulfill the *junta*’s needs once *Commodore* was based in Jacksonville, Florida? Finally, and most importantly, what event or series of events sent the *Commodore* to seafloor the night of January 1, 1897?

Construction:

Commodore was constructed in 1882 at the Neafie and Levy yard, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (GPO Vessel Registry 1884:298). Any information that could be gleaned from company records or ship plans was lost when the yard went bankrupt at the close of World War I, and the records were lost.⁵ According to the first registry record in 1882, Neafie & Levy constructed the ship with one deck, one mast, one plain head, and a round stern (Philadelphia Registry May 5, 1882). *Commodore* held 129.78 tons under the

⁵ All enquiries into the yard’s records have been met by historians and archivists alike with the same result: no one knows what happened to the yard’s records, but they have been lost since shortly after the war.

tonnage deck, 4.85 tons at the forward break, 39.20 tons at the aft break, and 4.42 tons in the aft crew space (Philadelphia Registry May 5, 1882). The vessel had a registered length of 122.5 feet, a breadth of 21.0 feet, and a draft of 9.0 feet (Philadelphia Registry May 5, 1882). According to the ship's 1884 registry in the *Merchant Vessels of the United States*, the *Commodore* (official registry #126017), was rated at 178.25 gross tons and 99.25 net tons (GPO 1884:298).

Commodore had a maximum draft of 10.0 feet and an average interval of 12.65 feet between each of the ten hull sections (Tonnage Admeasurement of Steam Tug *Commodore* of District Philadelphia, May 5, 1882). The surveyor noted the vessel had ten sections with three enclosures (Tonnage Admeasurement of Steam Tug *Commodore* of District Philadelphia, May 5, 1882). The 1884 American Shipmaster's Association Record lists *Commodore* as a screw steam sloop built in Camden, New Jersey (*American Shipmaster's Association Record* 1884:805). The *Record* indicates the Hawkins Brothers owned the tug and used it as a fishing vessel. According to the *Record*, the ship was built of oak and yellow pine with copper, and iron fasteners. *Commodore* had two bulkheads, a single engine boiler (it makes no mention of deck boilers or machinery), and an engine with a 26-inch bore and 30-inch stroke (*American Shipmaster's Association Record* 1884:805). Although the vessel's usage as listed in the 1884 *American Shipmaster's Association Record* contradicts the usage reported in the 1882 Philadelphia Registry and the 1884 *Merchant Vessels of the United States* records the vessel's construction details match. It is possible the Hawkins Brothers could not find work for the tug at first and instead registered the vessel as a fishing boat. Until further information can be found, the

usage of the *Commodore* as a fishing vessel is uncertain, but it is clear the records match the tug *Commodore*.

The ship was built with a single expansion steam engine that attached to a four-bladed propeller. The listed 1884 homeport was Greenport, New York, corroborating her New York service record (GPO 1884:298). Built as a harbor tug, the *Commodore*'s minimal net tonnage allowed her to maximize the engineering spaces.

The *Commodore* was issued a temporary enrollment at the Port of Wilmington, North Carolina, in July 1896. Temporary Enrollment No. 11 (July 14, 1896) records that the vessel had one deck and one mast (Temporary Certificate of Registry, December 8, 1896, Jacksonville, Florida). The New York harbormaster affirmed that Frank L. Arnold (also of New York) was *Commodore*'s rightful owner, and Thomas H. Morton the vessel's master (Temporary Certificate of Registry, December 8, 1896, Jacksonville, Florida). At the foot of the document, a notation indicates SS *Commodore* was "duly registered at the port of Jacksonville" (Temporary Certificate of Registry, December 8, 1896, Jacksonville, Florida). The temporary enrollment corroborates the vessel's refit in Wilmington, and relocation from New York to Wilmington, North Carolina, and to Jacksonville, Florida. The vessel's boiler and machinery were refit in Wilmington after sixteen years in service and three covert trips to Cuba. The tugboat's refurbishment did not solve the aging vessel's problems, if Captain Murphy's comment to Stephen Crane after the ship's loss is to be believed: "The *Commodore* was a rotten old bucket of junk" (Paine 1922:169). How then was this "old bucket of junk" used in the Filibustering Fleet?

Filibustering:

After the Wilmington refit, *Commodore* was relocated and based at Jacksonville, Florida. By March 1896, *Commodore* was actively running guns for the Jacksonville *junta*. On March 14, 1896, *Commodore* passed *Three Friends* at Cedar Key (where the crew was loading men and munitions) while returning from a successful voyage to Cuba (Mueller 1986:124). According to some sources, *Commodore* was on her eighth filibustering trip to Cuba at the time of the ship's loss (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1897). By the fall of 1896, *Commodore*'s crew, like other filibusterers, was having a more difficult time simply clearing United States waters.⁶

The *Daily Florida Citizen* reported on December 14, 1896, the *Commodore* would receive clearance papers from Jacksonville provided the vessel was not headed for Cuba. A telegram sent from the secretary of the Treasury to Jacksonville granted the *Commodore* clearance for Truxillo, British Honduras. The permission to leave was granted only because of affidavits sworn by Captain Morton. The affidavits claimed *Commodore* would neither take arms to Cuba nor violate neutrality by taking an expedition to Cuba. In an interesting twist of fate, however, Captain Morton became ill before sailing, and Captain Lewis of the filibusterer *Dauntless* took Morton's place (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1).

Captain Morton's sudden illness after signing sworn affidavits about the *Commodore*'s voyage appears to have been a ploy to gain *Commodore* clearance to undertake another trip to Cuba. Without Morton on board, *Commodore* was not required

⁶ Chapter II addressed the legal issues filibustering crews had when attempting to run guns to Cuba and the landmark decision issued by Attorney General Harmon about the legality of such trips.

to adhere to the sworn sailing orders; *Three Friends*'s captain had played the trick before with great success. With clearance in hand, *Commodore* left the Jacksonville customs dock and moved across the St Johns River to the Old Savannah Florida & Western Railway Wharf. Local Cubans admitted to the newspaper that the wharf contained a cache of weapons that was being loaded onto *Commodore* for transport to Cuba. Cubans also informed the paper that the clearance papers would be obtained from the collector of customs (thanks to the attorney general's ruling on filibusters), and that if clearance were refused, *Commodore* would still leave Jacksonville. Jacksonville's collector of customs maintained that if *Commodore* attempted to leave port without the proper paperwork, the vessel would be interdicted by the Revenue Cutter *Boutwell* and impounded by the U.S. government (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1).

The intrigue surrounding the December 14 expedition continued when reporters at the *Florida Daily Citizen* found a leading Cuban to comment: "twenty-five men would be taken along on the *Commodore* as 'porters' to assist the crew in handling the arms. Of course, these men will have to come back on the boat," he said, "as we cannot leave them in Cuba under the law" (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1). If the voyage proceeded to British Honduras according to Captain Morton's affidavits, there would be no reason for the Cuban "porters" to be left in Cuba. Apparently, the captain's illness was indeed faked. Adding to the intrigue surrounding *Commodore*'s December filibustering trip was the arrival of *Three Friends* at the mouth of the St. Johns River. *Three Friends*'s arrival forced the Revenue Cutter *Boutwell* off station to the river's mouth to investigate. Luckily, the newspaper's reporter again had the scoop and reported

Three Friends' role in the affair was to take "a large number of Cubans to their destination." Unfortunately, the reporter could not confirm the information because the Cubans in question were not due into Jacksonville until the morning of the 14th. The article concluded by claiming *Commodore* was bait for Spanish spies so *Three Friends* could sail unnoticed (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1). Based on the newspaper's account, the ploy, if it was indeed a ploy, failed miserably. News stories surrounding *Commodore*'s loss two weeks later mentioned stranded Cubans waiting on *Commodore* and *Three Friends* on a desolate key at the time of the ship's sinking. Perhaps the stranded Cubans were part of the December 14 expedition.

Commodore's final voyage to Cuba began with a celebratory send-off by local Cubans and well wishers at the city dock on December 31, 1896. Before *Commodore* cleared Jacksonville for Cuba on January 1, 1897, she ran aground four times in the St. Johns River. Ironically, after grounding at Commodore's Point, the Revenue Cutter *Boutwell* assisted *Commodore* off the bar. *Boutwell* was tasked with preventing filibusterers from leaving port. Strangely, either *Boutwell*'s captain ignored *Commodore*'s reason for clearing to sea (it was in all the newspapers at the time), or he failed to see a reason to stop the ship from leaving. *Commodore* crossed the bar into open ocean at 1400 hours on Friday January 1, 1897, and by midnight had run one hundred miles down the coast (*Daily Florida Citizen*, December 14, 1896:1). The *Commodore*'s crew steamed southeast to Cuba and into a fierce nor'easter that almost swamped the ship at the St. Johns bar. Meanwhile, USS *Newark* remained anchored in Key West overnight despite orders to depart for Jacksonville to "prevent filibustering

expeditions (Captain Mchisten to US Secretary of Navy, January 5, 1897).” *Newark* arrived in the St. Johns on January 2 and learned of *Commodore*’s departure and sinking from the *Boutwell* (Mchisten 1897). The *Newark* steamed for Mosquito Inlet to proffer assistance to the wrecked crew and to learn what had happened to *Commodore* (Mchisten 1897). When the vessel arrived seven to twelve miles NNE of Mosquito Light, the captain noted a great deal of wreckage and concluded *Commodore* was a complete loss (Mchisten 1897). Assuming all survivors were accounted for, *Newark* steamed towards Jacksonville (Mchisten 1897). While enroute, *Newark* met with SS *Three Friends*, whose captain informed *Newark*’s captain that eight men were still missing from *Commodore*. Returning to *Commodore*’s wreckage, *Three Friends* and *Newark* searched in vain for survivors (Mchisten 1897).

Accounts estimating the value of *Commodore*’s cargo vary between \$3,000 and \$10,000 (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1897, *New York Times*, January 3, 1897). Allegedly, *Commodore* had fifteen tons of arms, dynamite, and war matériel aboard when she sank (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1897). The cargo also supposedly contained Mauser, Winchester, and Remington rifles (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1897). Many newspapers of the time claimed the ship’s loss was a great blow to the *juntas* in the United States because of the large quantity of munitions lost. The New York *junta* publicly disagreed:

The report that the expedition was a valuable one is a mistake. We sent the *Commodore* out with a very small cargo of arms and ammunition on board to test the possibility of being able to ship arms to Cuba openly. I do not believe that all the material on board is worth more than \$3,000,

and the greater part of this may be saved. (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1897)

Witnesses and “experts” also disagreed over the cause of *Commodore*’s sinking. Cuban crewmembers claimed a traitor hidden in the aft hold scuttled *Commodore* (Philadelphia January 3, 1897). An anonymous expert from Brooklyn claimed the ship sank because the chief engineer left the main seacock open while running the pumps. The expert claimed that the open seacock fed four major areas within the ship and quickly overwhelmed the pumps (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1897). In the same issue, the paper reported that the ship was overloaded with coal, and the groundings in the St. Johns River resulted in split seams. These split seams caused the ship to take on prodigious amounts of water in the open ocean and finally sink (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1897).

Commodore’s loss resulted in the death of eight crewmen, but at the time of the accident, those on shore had no way of knowing what had happened. One of the first individuals to learn of *Commodore*’s loss off Mosquito Inlet was Principal Keeper Thomas Patrick O’Hagan at Mosquito Inlet Lighthouse (See Figure 5). O’Hagan had served as principal keeper at the lighthouse since 1893 and was responsible for rescuing two lifeboats containing *Commodore*’s passengers on January 2, 1897 (*The Beacon of Mosquito Inlet: A History of the Ponce De Leon Inlet Lighthouse*, Thomas Taylor 1993:34). When the two lifeboats of Cubans arrived on the beach shortly after noon, Keeper O’Hagan transferred the men across the inlet to New Smyrna Beach in his sailboat, *Irene* (Taylor 1993:34). Once in New Smyrna Beach, the crewmen boarded the



Figure 5: Ponce Inlet Lighthouse and the second Keeper's House. From the *Commodore* wreck site, this red brick tower matches Crane's description, and looks "precisely like the head of a pin (Image courtesy Rick Allen, Nautilus Productions 2002)."

train for Jacksonville, where the survivors told a tale of betrayal and treason. None of the men, however, gave a detailed accounting of the ship's loss. For information about the shipwreck, Stephen Crane is the best source of information.

Stephen Crane's Eyewitness Account:

SS *Commodore*'s loss on the night of January 1, 1897, in a nor'easter left the yellow press scrambling for more information. Stephen Crane, the most literate and only author among *Commodore*'s crew, was the only member to publish an eyewitness version of the loss. Prior to writing his famous short story, "The Open Boat," Crane first published a newspaper account of the *Commodore*'s last voyage in 1897 for the *New York Times*, while recovering from his wounds in Jacksonville. Much of the account was later altered and edited to create "The Open Boat," but the initial story was written from a newsman's perspective.

There was a feeling of celebration surrounding the ship's loading on January 1, 1897 (Crane in Staffman, *Stephen Crane's Own Story* January 6, 1897: 255). Crane described the black stevedores loading boxes of ammunition and bundles of rifles into *Commodore*'s hold, while Cubans sang along the dock. "There was none of that extreme modesty about the proceeding which had marked previous departures of the famous tug," Crane wrote (Staffman 1952:255). The report mentioned the disinterest of Revenue Cutter *Boutwell*'s officers riding at anchor only a short distance away (Staffman 1952:255). The departure of the ship was delayed when the custom office detained the Cuban leaders and *Commodore*'s officers at the customhouse until after dusk (Staffman

1952:255). Crane described a fog rolling in just as the *Commodore* released her dock lines and headed down river to the ocean (Staffman 1952:256). Less than two miles from the dock the “atrocious fog caused the pilot to ram the bow of the *Commodore* hard upon the mud and in this ignominious position we were compelled to stay until daybreak (Staffman 1952:256).” The following morning Revenue Cutter *Boutwell* came to *Commodore*’s aid and pulled her free. (Staffman 1952:257). Suspicious now of *Commodore*’s mission, *Boutwell* trailed the steamship from a half-mile astern to make certain the tug did not pick up more Cuban fighters as had been done in the past by the “Filibustering Fleet” (Staffman 1952:257).

At Mayport, the river pilot, who had already run the tug aground once, disembarked *Commodore*, and an ocean pilot came aboard (Staffman 1952:257). No sooner had the ocean pilot joined the hapless *Commodore*’s crew than the ship once again ran aground on a sand bar. This time the crew freed the tug by running the engine in reverse (Staffman 1952:257). At this point *Boutwell*’s Captain Kilgore seemed to have thought *Commodore* unlucky and asked Captain Murphy if he truly planned to head to sea. Murphy replied the ship was indeed headed to sea (Staffman 1952:257). Crane wrote, “the *Commodore* came to enormous rollers that flee over the bar...a certain light-heartedness departed” the ship’s crew (Staffman 1952:257).

The oncoming tempest clearly frightened Crane even at the outset of the voyage. He described the storm-tossed voyage and the *Commodore*’s passage: “as her stout bow lunged at the great black waves she threw flashing, roaring cascades to either side” (Staffman 1952:258). Crane’s description of rollers crashing over the tug’s gunnels and

his inability to sleep for fear of being “fired through a bulkhead” painted a vivid image of the storm’s violence (Staffman 1952:258). Crane later went to the pilothouse where he dozed off and on (Staffman 1952:259). Near midnight when the captain came on watch, the chief engineer reported that the water in the engine room was rising (Staffman 1952:259). Neither the captain nor the engineer spoke Spanish, so they woke the Cuban leaders to ask them to get their men to help bail in the engine room (Staffman 1952:259). Crane volunteered to bail and described the scene in the engine room: “There was a quantity of soapish sea water swirling and sweeping and swishing among machinery that roared and banged and clattered and steamed, and, in the second place, it was a devil of a ways down below (Staffman 1952:259).” At this time, Crane and the Cubans formed a bucket brigade dumping the water from the engineering spaces out a door to windward (Staffman 1952:259).

Crane helped the engineer and crew operate the pumps. Quickly the water overwhelmed first the pumps and then the men, leaving Captain Murphy no choice but to give the order to abandon ship (Crane 1897:260). The first small boat away from the ship carried twelve Cubans and luggage. The remainder of the ship’s crew was still aboard the sinking tugboat (Crane 1897:260). After several hours all the men were clear of *Commodore*; this left Crane, Murphy, the ship’s engineer, and the ship’s cook in the captain’s yawl, which remained tethered to the sinking *Commodore* by a 40-foot line in the hopes of keeping the crew together until the last moment (Crane 1897:262). By dawn, the ship was still afloat, and men were back aboard the sinking vessel. The third mate’s boat had foundered leaving him and his men to fashion rafts (Crane 1897:263).

Crane's account stated the first mate and several men were stranded aboard the tug when their small boat was smashed against the hull (Crane 1897:264). Rather than wait for the captain's yawl to return to the ship, these men leapt into the sea never to be seen again (Crane 1897:264). At this point, several crewmen lashed together a makeshift raft and begged Captain Murphy for a tow. Murphy obliged them and had a line fastened between the yawl and rafts (Crane 1897:264). The men aboard the rafts in search of safety began to pull themselves closer to the yawl, and Crane was forced to cut the connecting towrope (Crane 1897:264). Crane and Montgomery rowed the yawl towards the engineer on the raft in hopes of tossing him a line (Crane 1897:265). They failed, and the men on the raft were lost (Crane 1897:265). Eight men were lost the night of the wrecking, and the oiler (Higgins) later succumbed to his wounds after reaching shore.

Commodore finally slipped beneath the waves early in the morning, according to Crane:

She lurched to windward, then swung afar back, righted and dove into the sea, and the rafts were suddenly swallowed by this frightful maw of the ocean. And then by the men on the ten-foot dingy [Crane, Murphy, Higgins, & Montgomery] were words said that were not words – something far beyond words. The lighthouse of Mosquito Inlet stuck up above the horizon like the point of a pin. We turned our dingy toward the shore. (Staffman 1952:265)

Crane's account remains the only complete accounting of the events surrounding the *Commodore*'s loss in the early morning hours of January 2, 1897. Crane did not interject an opinion as to the cause of the sinking. The loss of eight men clearly horrified Crane and was more important for him to relate than to speculate about the cause for the ship's loss. His account lacked the sensationalism of other news reports. His was no tale of

traitors or treason, no explanation about faulty valves or engineering, no commentary on the groundings. Crane focused on how the tug sank and how the crew failed to prevent her loss.

“The Commodore Sinks At Sea:” The Newspaper Accounts⁷

Newspaper accounts of *Commodore*'s loss are somewhat more sensationalized than Crane's version of events discussed above. Papers along the eastern seaboard picked up the story of *Commodore*'s loss and relayed it to their readers in Jacksonville, Philadelphia, and New York. The *Florida Times Union*'s headline “The Commodore Sinks At Sea,” was the least sensational of the headlines following *Commodore*'s sinking, but the article's author was not without poetic license (*Florida Times Union*, Sunday, January 3, 1897 headline.) The story proffered one of the more likely hypotheses regarding the ship's loss when it suggested: “It is thought that when the vessel went ashore in the St. Johns River, her heavy shock caused her seams to open (*Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 1897:1).” The article went on to report confidently that *Commodore* was “now resting on the bottom of the sea, twenty fathoms below the surface, about eighteen miles north of Mosquito Inlet (*Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 1897:1).” (Unsurprisingly to divers and boat captains familiar with Florida waters and affiliated with the *Commodore* Project, the site actually lies in 11-13 fathoms of water.) The picture painted of *Commodore*'s last moments was vivid, and if accurate, is of considerable value. The story follows Crane's version of the events in agreeing that the

⁷ It should be noted here that none of the newspaper accounts list reporters' names under the story title. For this reason, credit can only be given to the newspapers quoted, not the reporters who wrote the stories.

vessel ran aground several times leaving the St. Johns River, and was almost swamped crossing the bar to sea at 1400 hours on Friday. According to the *Florida Times-Union*, by midnight the ship was taking on water:

The swash of the water in the hold as the vessel rolled from side to side soon alarmed everyone on board. A panic ensued, but Captain Murphy, Stephen Crane, R.A. Delgado and one or two others soon quieted the excitement and put everybody to work on the pumps and with buckets....The steam pump was started and for two hours the water poured over the sides in streams....(*Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 1897:1)

While the story agreed with Crane, with the exception of the remark about the newsman's heroism in quieting the panic, a new detail was revealed. According to the *Times-Union* story, the vessel's crew continued to pump the bilge while turning westward. Captain Murphy and the crew apparently believed they were more than forty miles offshore, since they attempted to steam east to avoid running afoul of USS *Newark*. At 0230, Captain Murphy ordered the men to abandon ship and by 0300, the ship was emptied of crew. This report did not mention any loss of life; in fact, the reporter wrote that all the men were believed alive and well. The story noted that twelve of the men had already made it to Jacksonville aboard the Florida East Coast Railway, no doubt the men rescued by Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Keeper Thomas O'Hagan (*Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 1897:1). The article's terse prose could not have been complete without the romantic sensationalism so prevalent in newspaper stories at the time:

The night was dark and they could not see what became of her, but as she was rapidly filling with water, they are all confident that she is now resting on the bottom, and old Neptune has been supplied with enough arms and ammunition to blow up the island of Cuba....(*Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 1897:1)."

The *Times-Union* presented a filibuster loaded with enough war matériel to change the course of the Cuban insurrection but lacked the factual nature of Crane's account. The *Times-Union*'s story did corroborate Crane's assertion that the ship's pumps simply could not keep up with the amount of water pouring into the ship. The image of water pouring "over the sides in streams" signals the catastrophe about to overcome *Commodore* and her crew (*Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 1897:1). The *Times-Union* has also given archaeologists a hypothesis to test when looking at the wreck site. If the groundings caused the *Commodore*'s ultimate demise, perhaps the evidence is still present beneath the sand.

In reporting *Commodore*'s story, the press became caught up in the heroic actions of one of their own. A story appearing in the *New York Press* quoted the cook as saying "That newspaper feller was a nervy man...these newspaper fellers have got spunk, if they do tell such awful whoppers at times" (*New York Press*, January 3, 1897:3). An interesting quote no doubt, particularly since it allegedly came from a correspondent in Daytona Beach, perhaps Crane himself.

Not to be outdone, the *New York Press* printed an account of the ship's loss on January 4, 1897 (three days after the sinking). The three-line headline showed the leanings of yellow journalism: "More of the Filibusters Safe. Young New York Writer Astonishes The Sea Dogs By His Courage In The Face Of Death! Cubans Assert a Traitor Sunk the Vessel." (*New York Press*, January 4, 1897:1). By the night of January 3, 1897, the paper had reports of seventeen of the twenty-eight men safely ashore and said there was a "slight chance of seven more yet alive" (*New York Press*, January 4,

1897:1). By the time this article made the front page, Crane, Captain Murphy, the cook (Montgomery), and two seamen had made landfall in Daytona (*New York Press*, January 4, 1897:1). According to Crane's account, there were only four in the boat including himself. The paper quoted a survivor who stated, "The tug sank at 7 o'clock Saturday morning, twenty miles off New Smyrna, and the Americans on board remained till the last moment. A traitor in Spanish pay was the cause of the leak (*New York Press*, January 4, 1897:1)." According to the source, *Commodore* turned toward shore at 0300 and deployed two boats filled with Cubans at that time. The story mentioned the capsizing of one boat, which killed six Cubans, and the swamping of another lifeboat containing nine men. It also mentioned the nine men who were swamped built a raft, but were lost from sight (*New York Press*, January 4, 1897:1). The unnamed source described the final moments of the *Commodore*:

Captain Murphy, Stephen Crane, the novelist and correspondent; Higgins, myself and one other sailor took to the ten-foot dingy at the last moment. We tried to save the men in the water around us, but the heavy seas and blinding wind swept them from us. The spray was so thick that we could only see a few rods. Their cries were heartrending, but we could do nothing, it requiring all our efforts to keep our small boat right side up. (*New York Press*, January 4, 1897:1)

The remainder of the story printed in the *New York Press* closely matched Crane's account. It told of the men in the small boat bailing for twenty-four hours before being capsized near shore. The story ended with the death of Higgins (the oiler) who was clobbered by timbers and died on shore (*New York Press*, January 4, 1897:1). Perhaps the most interesting item was the story's allegation that someone in Spanish pay must have caused *Commodore*'s sinking, an allegation that is still unproven.

While other papers told a story of treachery and loss, the *New York Tribune* on January 4, 1897, addressed the loss of not only the ship but the crew as well. In a desperate attempt to locate the missing men and lost ship, Jacksonville's customs collector authorized another well-known filibustering ship, *Three Friends*, to search for survivors (*New York Tribune*, January 4, 1897:1). The article pointed out that the customs collector's unwillingness to grant leave for *Three Friends* to search for survivors for almost forty-eight hours meant almost certain death for the eight men still missing (*New York Tribune*, January 4, 1897:1). According to the article, the crew's status was as follows on January 3: twelve survivors were in Jacksonville (these were the first Cuban survivors), three survivors in Daytona with one dead (Murphy, Crane, and Montgomery survived, but Billy Higgins died), four were alive in Ormond (the second Cuban boat), and eight from the raft were missing, but believed alive (See Figure 6) (*New York Tribune*, January 4, 1897:1). The discrepancy in this story was that the reporter claimed the eight men on the raft were Cuban-an impossibility (*New York Tribune*, January 4, 1897:1). The raft held the eight men whose boat was smashed and who returned to *Commodore*. Of those men, three were drowned on the ship and three were on the raft that was cut free (Crane 1897). None of these eight men were Cuban; all were Americans including the first mate, the chief engineer, and several black sailors (Crane 1897, Taylor undated:2).

The *New York Press* on January 5, 1897, agreed with the January 3 *Florida Times-Union*'s story and theory about the *Commodore*'s sinking on January 2. The

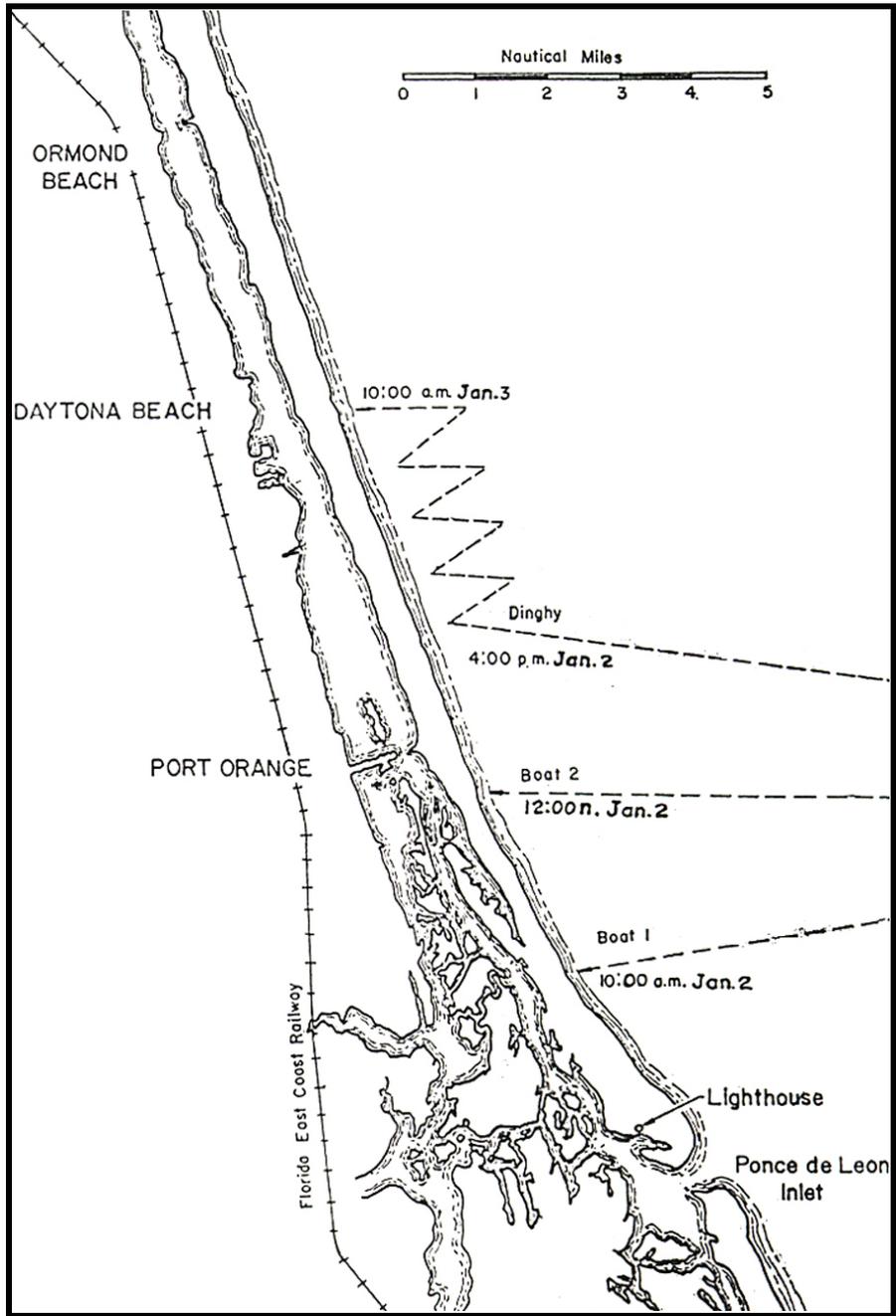


Figure 6: Map showing the three boat landings made by *Commodore* survivors. Boats one and two contained Cuban freedom fighters. Boat one was rescued by Keeper O'Hagan at Ponce Inlet, and boat two landed in Port Orange. The dinghy held Stephen Crane, Captain Murphy, Montgomery, and Higgins aboard. The dinghy's voyage inspired Crane's story "The Open Boat." (Image courtesy Ponce Inlet Lighthouse Association 1998)

headline for the *New York Press*'s January 5 story read "Commodore Said to be Overladen" (*New York Press*, January 5, 1897:1). The paper went on to quote Captain Murphy, and acknowledged the captain doubted treachery caused the wrecking (*New York Press*, January 5, 1897:1). When forced to comment decisively on the cause of the leaks and their appearance, Captain Murphy only stated "the leaks were not there early Friday evening, but were there at midnight (*New York Press*, January 5, 1897:1)." Murphy stated the Cubans appeared dispirited when the ship began taking on water, but Crane was the first to proffer aid during the disaster (*New York Press*, January 5, 1897:1). The *New York Press* first seized on treachery and treason as the likely cause of the *Commodore*'s demise. By January 5, however, the *New York Press* embraced the theory that the ship's loss was caused by overloading with coal, munitions, arms, and medicines, paired with the groundings in the St. Johns River.

By January 5, 1897, the Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union* convinced Captain Murphy to allow an interview. The captain revealed the engineer informed him at midnight that *Commodore* was taking on water and "the pumps would not heave the water" (*Florida Times-Union*, January 5, 1897:6). Murphy was informed the pump was blocked, and the suction gone. The captain explained that when the coal in the engine room became inundated, coal dust was washed into the pumps thereby causing the blockage. He went on to state that he believed the engineer's neglect and not sabotage caused the pump's failure (*Florida Times-Union*, January 5, 1897:6). For the first time, it was learned the captain ordered wood, oil, and alcohol into the furnaces to provide enough steam to reach Mosquito Inlet only eighteen miles to the west (*Florida Times-*

Union, January 5, 1897:6). If true, the addition of these fuels would have certainly increased the temperature in the boiler and furnace to the point that when the ship sank, the seawater could have caused an explosion. Captain Murphy also stated the ship carried enough steam to travel three miles before the ship's fires were doused (*Florida Times-Union*, January 5, 1897:6). If *Commodore* steamed three miles to the west, she would have been within fifteen miles of Mosquito Inlet – within range of where the wreckage lies today.

The captain's accounting of the wrecking event itself is a vital clue to the way the ship sank. The final important detail related to the *Commodore*'s wrecking event comes from the captain's statement: "I let go the anchor to get her head to the sea and told the men to quietly proceed to man the boats (*Florida Times-Union*, January 5, 1897:6)." Dropping the anchor to deploy the ship's boats is a common practice when abandoning ship, and it should have brought the ship's bow to windward. The archaeological evidence, however, shows the aft portion of the wreck running from the southeast to the northwest. Perhaps the vessel pivoted when sinking to the bottom, but there is little explanation for how the vessel came to lie on the bottom if anchored with head to wind. The bower anchor may still be present on the site in its deployed formation, and it is for this reason as well as Captain Murphy's statements that archaeologists are still looking for the anchor. Reports from the Volusia County Reef Team place the bower anchor in an incongruous position to the northwest of the wreckage. Captain Murphy's recollection also describes who was in which boat at the time the *Commodore* sank. (See Table 1) Unfortunately, Captain Murphy only accounted for twenty-seven of the twenty-nine men

aboard *Commodore* the night she sank. Of the twenty-seven listed, First Mate Graines, Tom Smith, the unnamed stoker, an engineer, and three men in Boat 3 were all lost. All eight men killed at the time of the ship's sinking were Americans.

Table 1
Placement of Men in *Commodore's* Boats at Time of Sinking

| Boat 1 | Boat 2 | Boat 3 | Captain's Yawl | Raft | <i>Commodore</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Julio Rodriguez Baz (commanding) | Paul F. Rojo (commanding) | First Mate Graines†‡ (commanding) | Capt. Murphy (commanding) | Chief Engineer†† | First Mate Graines†‡ |
| Manuel Gonzalez | Ricardo Delgado | Tom Smith†‡ | Montgomery (Steward)† | Stoker†‡ | Three unnamed men†‡ |
| Luis Sierra Madros | Felix de los Rios | Stoker†‡ | Billy Higgins (Oiler) | Tom Smith†‡ | |
| Jesus Alvarez | Emelio Marquez | Chief Engineer†‡ | Stephen Crane (AB, author) | | |
| | Vetura Linares | Three unnamed men†‡ | | | |
| | Romeo Hernandez | | | | |
| | J. Francisco Blanco | | | | |
| | Jose Hernandez | | | | |
| | T. Becenor | | | | |
| | Lino Soldera | | | | |
| | Gabriel Martin | | | | |
| | Santiago Diaz | | | | |
| Total: 4 | Total: 12 | Total: 7 | Total: 4 | Total: 3 | Total: 4 |

† Denotes the eight men known to have died as a result of the sinking.

‡ Denotes the seven men who were in Boat 3 at the time it was smashed. These seven returned to *Commodore* and either boarded the raft and died or were lost when the tug slipped beneath the waves.

(Based on data from the *Florida Times-Union*, January 5, 1897:6)