

New York World
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Sampson Inspects Harbor at Mariel

ON BOARD UNITED STATES FLAGSHIP New York, HAVANA, April 29, VIA KEY WEST, April 30. The flagship New York at daybreak this morning was at her station to the northeast of Havana. In her company were the Newport and the Ericsson. The flagship shaped a course to the westward, meeting and speaking off Havana the Wilmington, Algonquin, Indiana, Iowa, Detroit and Mangrove.

It was rumored on board that we were bound for Mariel to see if the Spaniards were erecting new batteries there. The Newport left us and the Porter came in from the horizon. Thereafter the torpedo boats Ericsson and Porter remained, one on each quarter. As Havana was passed the squadron presented rather an imposing appearance with five newspaper dispatch boats pounding along in the rear.

We were within long range, but the fortifications did not open fire. The enemy apparently has been perfecting his batteries to the eastward of Morro Castle.

The bay of Mariel, thirty-five miles to the west of Havana, was reached in the middle of the afternoon. An old Martello tower stands on the point to the left of the entrance and on a higher point to the right stands a blockhouse of the kind that sentinel the trocha. There is a big old-fashioned smooth bore battery near the blockhouse. These seemed to constitute the sole defenses.

The entrance to the bay is very narrow and faces due north. There is only fourteen feet of water on the bar. The flagship steamed up within easy rifle range of the shore, but a more lifeless and desolate place could hardly be imagined. At the great tobacco warehouses on the edge of the bay there was no movement. The town beyond seemed like a cemetery around the large church.

However, on the green palm-covered mountains to the left smoke rose in slanting lines. Two little gunboats and four schooners lay in the bay. The flagship could not get in very close, but was satisfied, perhaps, that the five smooth bores, the Martello tower and the blockhouse were not very worthy of attention by the flagship. The New York continued her way down the coast toward Cabanas, thirteen miles away.

On the route the little Castine swooped out of the northwest with a motionless white-clad lookout high on the head of her single mast. She was sent back toward Mariel.

The junior officers of the flagship were at supper in the steerage when about 6 o'clock the foggy voice of the boatswain could be heard roaring on the deck: "Man the port battery."

The boatswain of the New York has a voice like the watery snuffle of a swimming horse. It is delightfully terrible and no ballad singer could hope for such an ovation as he will have whenever he shouts "Man the port battery!"

Below decks was empty in a moment. The cruiser was off Cabanas and almost opposite the ruined hacienda of a tobacco plantation, from a point near which a troop of Spanish cavalry had dismounted and opened a musketry fire upon her.

The after port four-inch gun of the *New York*, taking a range of 3,700 yards, immediately sent a shell into that vicinity, and this shot was followed by six others from the after port guns.

When the flagship came about, Captain Chadwick himself aimed the after starboard four-inch gun. By this time the cavalry had decided that the engagement was over and were proceeding up a hill. The captain's shell dropped into the middle of their formation and they wildly scattered.

The flagship then placidly continued her way back toward Mariel. The venture ended, leaving only one thoroughly dissatisfied man on board. Gunner's Mate Lentile, whose station is in the after turret, grumbled bitterly because those two eight-inch guns, "General Lee" and "Stonewall Jackson," were not called upon to disperse the Spanish soldiers.

Meanwhile the Spaniards are now probably gathered around some cognac bottles: "Ah, we fifty Spanish soldiers, we fought today a great battleship. Yes, we fifty men—a little band of fifty men—we fought a great ship. More cognac! Just think how easily we can thrash these Americans when fifty men can fight the flagship."

The signal officer on the after bridge states as the silent fleet passed Mariel in the earlier afternoon a man in a small boat was fishing in the harbor. He had his back to the squadron and did not turn his head. However, one of the gunboats had better eyesight and upon seeing the *New York* bolted so abruptly that she dragged half the mud in the bay loose with her anchor. Her men could be seen moving excitedly to and fro upon her decks. She was within an easy range of three miles, but in direct line with the town.

The coast from Havana to Cabanas is high and beautifully wooded, with lofty mountains in the background. This part of the island must be at all times more healthy than low-lying Florida and more suitable for military movements.

The flagship has returned to her station. The torpedo boats are evidently keeping Havana rather nervous tonight, for the searchlights have been frantically flashing on the horizon.