

*New York World*  
May 6, 1898

***Inaction Deteriorates the Key West Fleet***

ON BOARD THE *World's* DESPATCH BOAT *Triton*, OFF HAVANA, May 4—Key West, May 5.—The officers and men of the squadron are not happy. Beyond the eighteen-minute bombardment of the batteries at Matanzas and the shelling of some cavalry between Mariel and Cabanas they have not been allowed to make war.

Constant sea service gradually impairs the ability of the ships. The longer delay the more danger to the lives of each one of our men in the first fight. The increase in risk may be minute, but it is just as certain as it is unnecessary.

In the case of the torpedo boats the fact is peculiarly obvious. The little craft are now performing the very hardest kind of service, and in the mad waters of the Florida Strait they spin about like tops. In a seaway which does not move the larger ships from even keels they roll and pitch crazily. Their thin plate sides are regular burning glasses for this glaring sun, and under decks the temperature remains always close to 100.

All hands remain on deck where the watches are either twelve hours long or else there are no set watches, since the whole crew may remain on watch for sixty hours at a stretch.

*(Source: The Collected Works of Stephen Crane, University of Virginia Press, 1973)*