



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS  
NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.

1 March 2024 / Volume 5, Issue 2

## VFW Post 8555 Newsletter/Calendar

### Sinking of USS Maine

The Spanish-American War (21 April to 13 August 1898) was a turning point in the history of the United States, signaling the country's emergence as a world power. The blowing up of the battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor on the evening of 15 February was a critical event on the road to that war. In order to understand the role the ship's sinking played in the start of the war, one must know the context in which the event took place.

Tensions between Spain and the United States rose out of the attempts by Cubans to liberate their island from the control of the Spanish. The first Cuban insurrection was unsuccessful and lasted between 1868 and 1878. American sympathies were with the revolutionaries, and war with Spain nearly erupted when the filibuster ship *Virginius* was captured and most of the crew (including many American citizens) were executed. The Cuban revolutionaries continued to plan and raise support in the United States.

On 24 January, President McKinley sent the second-class battleship USS *Maine* from Key West to Havana, after clearing the visit with a reluctant government in Madrid.

The battleship arrived on 25 January. Spanish authorities in Havana were wary of American intentions, but they afforded Captain Charles Sigsbee and the officers of *Maine* every courtesy. In order to avoid the possibility of trouble, *Maine's* commanding officer did not allow his enlisted men to go on shore. Sigsbee and the consul at Havana, Fitzhugh Lee, reported that the Navy's presence appeared to have a calming effect on the situation, and both recommended that the Navy Department send another battleship to Havana when it came time to relieve *Maine*.

At 9:40p.m. on 15 February, a terrible explosion on board *Maine* shattered the stillness in Havana Harbor. Later investigations revealed that more than five tons of powder charges for the vessel's six and ten-inch guns ignited, virtually obliterating the forward third of the ship. The remaining wreckage rapidly settled to the bottom of the harbor. Most of *Maine's* crew were sleeping or resting in the enlisted quarters in the forward part of the ship when the explosion occurred. Two hundred and sixty-six men lost their lives because of the disaster: 260 died in the explosion or shortly thereafter, and six more died later from injuries. Captain Sigsbee and most of the officers survived because their quarters were in the aft portion of the ship.

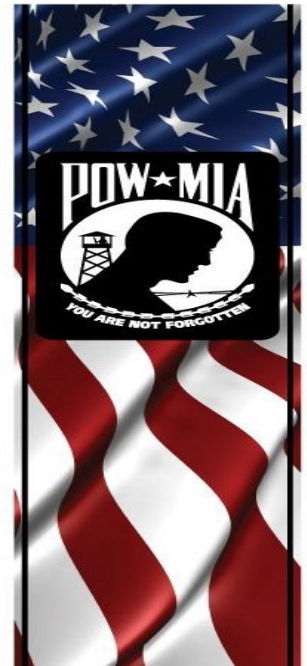
Spanish officials and the crew of the civilian steamer *City of Washington* acted quickly in rescuing survivors and caring for the wounded. The attitude and actions of the former allayed initial suspicions that hostile action caused the explosion, and led Sigsbee to include at the bottom of his initial telegram: "Public opinion should be suspended until further report."

The U.S. Navy Department immediately formed a board of inquiry to determine the reason for *Maine's* destruction. The inquiry, conducted in Havana, lasted four weeks. The condition of the submerged wreck and the lack of technical expertise prevented the board from being as thorough as later investigations. In the end, they concluded that a mine had detonated under the ship. The board did not attempt to fix blame for the placement of the device.

When the Navy's verdict was announced, the American public reacted with predictable outrage. Fed by inflammatory articles in the "Yellow Press" blaming Spain for the disaster, the public had already placed guilt on the Spanish government. Although he continued to press for a diplomatic settlement to the Cuban problem, President McKinley accelerated military preparations begun in January 1898 when an impasse appeared likely. The Spanish position on Cuban independence hardened, and McKinley asked Congress on 11 April for permission to intervene. On 21 April, the president ordered the Navy to begin a blockade of Cuba, and Spain followed with a declaration of war on 23 April. Congress responded with a formal declaration of war on 25 April, made retroactive to the start of the blockade.

The destruction of *Maine* did not cause the U.S. to declare war on Spain, but it served as a catalyst, accelerating the approach to a diplomatic impasse. In addition, the sinking and deaths of U.S. Sailors rallied American opinion more strongly behind armed intervention.

In 1911, the Navy Department ordered a second board of inquiry after Congress voted funds for the removal of the wreck of *Maine* from Havana Harbor. U.S. Army engineers built a cofferdam around the sunken battleship, thus exposing it, and giving naval investigators an opportunity to examine and photograph the wreckage in detail. Finding the bottom hull plates in the area of the reserve six-inch magazine bent inward and back, the 1911 board concluded that a mine had detonated under the magazine, causing the explosion that destroyed the ship.



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# MARCH 2024

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10 Daylight Saving	11 Ramadan begins VFW Meeting	12	13	14	15	16 District Mtg Post 4815																																																																																				
17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19	20 Vernal equinox	21	22	23																																																																																				
24 VPR Start of Kosovo Campaign	25	26	27	28	29 Good Friday	30																																																																																				
31 Easter VPR End of Operation Re- store Hope-Somalia	<div> <div>February 2024</div> <table> <tr><th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>Th</th><th>F</th><th>Sa</th></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td></tr> <tr><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> </div> <div> <div>April 2024</div> <table> <tr><th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>Th</th><th>F</th><th>Sa</th></tr> <tr><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td></tr> <tr><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td></tr> <tr><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> </div> <div>Notes:</div>					S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa					1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29			S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30					
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# APRIL 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 April Fool's Day	2	3 Food Distribution	4	5	6
7	8 VFW Meeting	9	10	11	12	13 Ride to Remember
14	15 Taxes Due	16	17	18	19	20
21	22 Earth Day	23 Passover	24 Admin Assist Day	25	26	27
28	29	30				