

CAPTURE OF THE "BUENA VENTURA" BY THE "NASHVILLE."

## AN ARTIST WITH ADMIRAL SAMPSON'S FLEET.

BY WALTER RUSSELL.

ON Thursday afternoon, April 21, 1898, I was at work upon a drawing in my room at the Key West Hotel. The usual quiet of the town was disturbed by unusual cheering beneath my windows. "*Viva Cuba libre! Vivan los Americanos!*" by Cubans, had been the only sounds of cheering I had heard in Key West; but this cheering was by *Americans*. In the corridors I found a scene of confusion. Correspondents and artists were making pell-mell for their rooms, while others were appearing with hastily packed grip-sack in one hand and wearing apparel in the other. A glance assured me that *war had begun*.

Without delay I placed my half-packed luggage, three cameras, and nine half-gallon bottles of a popular spring water in a carriage at the door, and drove to the despatch-boat *Sommers N. Smith*, which was to take me, with four others, to the seat of war.

The *Puritan*, *Amphitrite*, and *Terror* were throwing out great volumes of black smoke, hastily getting up steam; the *Marblehead*, *Wilmington*, and one or two other gunboats were already under way, moving very slowly. Torpedo-boats were skipping from one ship to the other with messages; sailors who had

had shore-leave, and had been searched for by the master-at-arms's assistants, were being many of them literally shipped on the *Somerset* for delivery aboard their respective ships. An army of correspondents and artists were in Key West, representing newspapers and magazines all over the globe.

Supper was served under the awning of our trim little craft. We were about to push out into the stream, when one of our crew sheepishly sneaked ashore, then another and another. This was a wholly unanticipated defection; but we were not alone in our misfortune, for we soon discovered that the entire crew of the despatch-boat at the next wharf had deserted. Immediately we steamed out half a mile or so to insure keeping the remainder of our crew with us. "Did you think you were shipping to go to a Sunday-school picnic?" thundered our captain to his mutinous men.

That night the fleet lay at anchor between Key West and Sand Key, all ready for an early morning start. We were informed that if challenged we must show a signal similar to the one shown us. For that purpose we lacked one red lantern, and I was sent in a



CAPTURE OF THE "PANAMA" BY THE "MANGROVE." (THE LARGE VESSEL IS THE CAPTIVE.)

small boat to the *Cincinnati* to borrow one. I was glad of the opportunity, for it afforded me a chance to see how Jackie felt about going to war. The American sailor was even more anxious than I expected. "Remember the *Maine!*" was the watchword. It was chalked upon the gun-shields, inside turrets,

on the ceilings, and over the hammock-hooks. That night we had drawn lots for turns at the watch, it being agreed that "discipline" would be good for us. One of the party put several slips of paper in his hat, and our hours for watch were picked from its depths. We all sat out the first watch, and



then the second. Then, as we were all sleepy, it was agreed that we should postpone our "discipline" until the morrow. That night "discipline" died.

At five o'clock the next morning all hands took a plunge into the sea. Then we saw the *New York* signaling. Soon the flag-ship was moving, followed in double, indented column by many other ships. Two torpedo-boats were doing scout duty on each side of us. We covered about seven square miles of the Atlantic, no ship more than four hundred yards from the one immediately preceding it. It was an impressive sight. The sun beat down with tropical fervor; but with an awning over our heads, and an ice-box at our side, war up to that point was luxury. As we passed one ship, then another, down the line, and shouted to some friend by megaphone, invariably the cry came back, "Remember the *Maine!*"

The *Nashville* was seen to leave the line of formation. With my field-glasses I saw on the horizon a smoke-stack, two masts, and a flag with a peculiar device—a Spanish flag, sure enough. One or two others joined in the chase. So did we. When the *Buena Ventura* had surrendered, a boat was lowered from the *Nashville*, and I was close enough to note the eagerness of our sailors, and the joy on the face of the young officer detailed to board the prize. The crew of the *Buena Ventura* were soon reassured and the captain pacified; and our sailors, pulling away at ropes and chains, their cutlasses dangling at their sides, soon brought the ship about, and prize and escort disappeared below the horizon, *en route* for Key West.

Toward five o'clock that afternoon the coast of Cuba loomed up ahead. A faint suggestion of masonry, with a thimble-shaped tower, appeared later. That was Morro Castle. A puff of smoke was seen issuing from the bow of the *New York*, followed by a loud report. She turned sharply to the east, and ran like a race-horse toward a pinhead on the horizon. Black smoke curled from her three funnels. Chief Engineer McConnell was getting all that was possible from her boilers. Soon the prize began to run close in to shore, while shot after shot went flying after her. Our little yacht tore through the rough water in a frantic endeavor to keep up with the race. The seas off Havana are treacherous in the extreme. Soon two sick men were watching the exciting race. In due time the *Pedro*, our second capture that day, was on her way to keep the *Buena Ventura* company. She made a

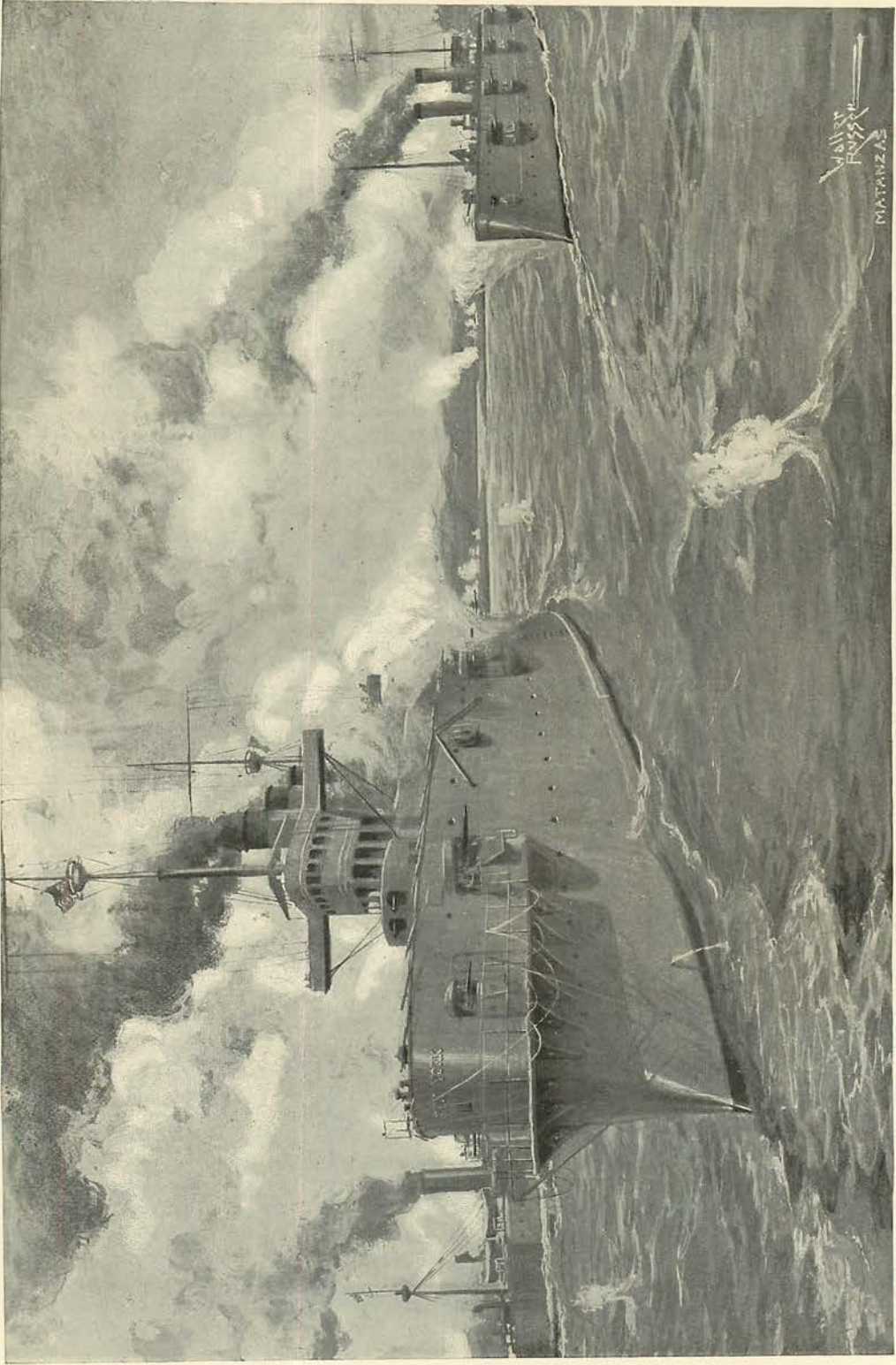
noble run; five miles more would have put her safe in Matanzas harbor.

Off Matanzas I witnessed the first serious bombardment. After our ships had fired for five minutes, the Spanish batteries answered, the first shell striking about a hundred yards to the left of the *New York*, and out toward us. The Spaniards banged away wildly, their shells either going over our heads or falling widely right and left. Our shells rained into the Spanish batteries, raising columns of sand mixed with black specks (I wondered if the black specks were Spaniards) high in the air, the dust blotting out the distant mountains for a moment. The *New York* had a monopoly of the firing until the Spaniards returned the fire. I could see the *Puritan's* guns training upon the enemy long before permission was given from the flag-ship to fire. When a few puffs of smoke had revealed the Spanish batteries, the *Puritan* and the *Cincinnati* were allowed to try their skill. The signals had not reached the yard-arm before advantage was taken of them. In all about one hundred and five shots were fired by our ships, the last one, a thirteen-inch shell from the *Puritan*, entering the battery upon the left shore, utterly demolishing it. The fire ceased as suddenly as it began, and then the three ships steamed toward Havana for a mile or two and stopped.

We steamed alongside the *New York*, shouted our congratulations to Admiral Sampson, who stood upon the bridge, and offered to take to Key West any mail or despatches he might have. He accepted our offer. Suddenly a blue-shirted, bare-armed creature with flying hair appeared through the superstructure door, and spoke to an orderly, who, raising a megaphone to his lips, shouted: "Mr. — wants to know how long you will wait for him to finish his article for the —?" And picturesque Mr. —, stripped for action, was given ten minutes.

A great monotony overhangs the whole fleet on blockade. Sometimes two or three ships are together; more often they are ten miles apart. We lay near one or another the greater part of the time, and occasionally went aboard for a chat with her officers and crew. The day following the bombardment of Matanzas we sighted the *Iowa*. Some one suggested that we go tell Captain Evans about the fight. We steamed alongside. Captain Evans stood on the bridge over our heads. Then came the cry (always the first cry from the ships to a despatch-boat), "What's the news?" We told him about the fight, while his eyes dilated. He leaned





ENGAGEMENT AT MATANZAS, APRIL 27.

