Florida, Cuba And The Spanish–American War: The Intelligence Game

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In 1898 officers headed to the newly erupting conflict between the United States and Spain in Cuba were handed a valuable piece of information. Entitled “Military Notes on Cuba” and issued by the Adjutant General’s Office, Military Information Division (MID), this document provided the young commanding officers with valuable data on nearly every important city, railroad, harbor, etc. on that long-suffering island. The intelligence gathered to create this useful and carefully documented volume came from our military attache’s, the Spanish archives (and those of other countries), consular reports, travelers and numerous unnamed “insurrectionists” both in and outside of Cuba, many living in Tampa. Its compilation began with the efforts of Captain (later Brigadier General) George P. Scriven of the Army Signal Corps in 1892, a full three years before the outbreak of the revolution of 1895. Scriven not only gave a picture of the physical characteristics but also an explanation of the Cuban railway system, Cuba’s topography and it contained a general discussion of the military situation on the island. Some personal reconnaissance was also included in the volume but its most important components came from Cubans. As Colonel Bruce W. Bidwell has explained in his “History of the Military Intelligence Division, Department of the Army General Staff,” (the unpublished version), “In addition to this source, a well-organized Cuban Nationalist Junta had been functioning in New York City ever since 1868. Having engineered the still smouldering revolt against Spanish rule which opened in 1895, its members remained perfectly willing at all times to furnish the War Department with desired
information about the Caribbean area. When supplemented by a considerable amount of further research along similar lines, these two main sources enabled the Military Information Division, AGO, in June 1898, to publish a very comprehensive pamphlet entitled “Military Notes on Cuba …” This book was placed “at the disposal of every officer” of the Army headed to that troubled land.1

The gathering of military intelligence by the U. S. Army in an organized, bureaucratic sense did not begin until Adjutant General R. C. Drum, on his own initiative, established the Military Intelligence Division in the fall of 1885. This was three years after the U. S. Navy had created its own intelligence agency, the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI). Like the Navy the Army was very soon attaching Military Attaches to our foreign legations throughout most of Europe and the major capitals in Latin America and Asia. Drum created the MID from the Reservations Division of the Miscellaneous Branch of the Office of the Adjutant General. He placed the new organization under the command of Major William J. Volkmar, the chief of the Miscellaneous Branch. The assignment of the new agency was to gather as much information as it “deemed useful and beneficial to the Army at large.”2 Maps were gathered in great quantities from all available sources both at home and abroad and checked against each other for accuracy and other fine points that may be strategically useful. Reports from the newly appointed attaches also added to the depth of the Division’s knowledge and these officers were required to search newspapers, reports, libraries, archives for useful data and to question travelers about things they witnessed or saw in the country while visiting. The Division’s avid collecting demanded that the space and numbers allotted to it should be increased which soon brought it to the attention of the head of the Signal Corps who felt it was his office’s duty to collect this data. The infighting soon became very bitter and counterproductive.3

Briefly told the Signal Corps under the dynamic leadership of Brigadier General Adolphus W. Greely was certain that it had been assigned the duty of intelligence gathering and was not willing to share the responsibility. Greely based his assumption on an act of Congress passed in October of 1890 stating that the Signal Corps would “collect information for the Army by telegraph and otherwise.” By the beginning of 1892 Greely was ready to put up a full fight for this duty. Unfortunately for him, Drum had the strong support of Secretary of War, Stephen Elkins, and Lieutenant General of the Army, John M. Schofield who was then the Commanding General of the Army. By March 1892 the War Department General Orders were issued that gave the task of gathering “military intelligence” to the MID. Not only was the Division given this daunting task but it was also assigned the duties of making and

2 Bruce W. Bidwell. History of the Military Intelligence Division, Department of the Army General Staff: 1775-1941. Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1986. 54-55.
3 Ibid., 55.
issuing all military maps, books and instructions for use by the Army and militia officers and State troops. It was also to develop and prepare plans for mobilization and the transportation of volunteer units and State troops “and for the concentration of the military forces of the United States at the various strategic points on or near the frontiers of the country.” In other words the MID was to take on the functions of a smaller General Staff, which the United States had not yet implemented. Under the leadership of Major Arthur L. Wagner the Division soon began organizing for these tasks with a staff of eleven officers in addition to forty state based officers and sixteen military attaches. One of the most strategically placed attaches was Captain Tasker Bliss whose reports from Madrid, when added to the information provided by the Junta and exiled Cubans in Florida, allowed the Army to compute, “with unusual accuracy” the actual strength of the Spanish Army units located throughout Cuba.4 Wagner’s men also cooperated with the Secret Service in identifying Spanish

spies attempting to infiltrate American units headed for Cuba in Tampa after the war began.\(^5\)

The Navy also was just beginning its intelligence service in this era and had actually preceded the Army’s organization by a couple of years. The emphasis here was also with the attaches and their duties overseas. The Office of Naval Intelligence was created as a part of the Bureau of Navigation in 1882. There had been a movement within the naval establishment to modernize the United States Navy and a wide recognition of its decline since the Civil War in comparison to other navies. The reformers included Admiral Stephen B. Luce, Captain French Chadwick, W. W. Kimball, Charles C. Rogers and a young officer just then entering the main part of his career, Alfred T. Mahan. The first chief of the office was Lieutenant Theordorus Bailey Myers Mason, a widely traveled and savvy collector of data. At first, Mason tried to work with the established Naval Institute but found that this was too cumbersome and the participants were interested in the mechanical modernization but not intelligence gathering and distribution. Mason worked well with his bureau chief, Commodore John Grimes Walker, who appreciated his subordinate’s talents and tenacity. They were fortunate in having William H. Chandler as the new Secretary of the Navy who supported most of their efforts. At the 25 July 1882 meeting between Mason and Chandler the Secretary outlined a plan to gather intelligence, compile, record and correct information and he created fourteen categories into which each type of intelligence would be placed and organized. Following a period of political interference with the intelligence gathering by Under Secretary of the Navy James Russell Soley, the ONI underwent a dramatic change for the better with the appointment of French E. Chadwick as the new chief in 1892. Budget cuts in the election year of 1892 did not enhance the gather of intelligence preparatory to the war with Spain. The attaché staff was cut and the collection of overseas intelligence fell as a result. Chadwick did not have a chance to reform or improve the product since he was in only for about a year The second Cleveland administration did not have its eyes on collecting intelligence since it opposed the Republican expansionist program and was forced to deal with the Panic of 1893-94, domestic violence, labor disputes and inflation. Luckily, ONI had one ally in the new administration, Secretary of the Navy Hilary Herbert. Herbert allowed observers to go into the Sino-Japanese War area and sent intelligence agents to observe the harbor at Rio de Janeiro during the Brazilian rebellion of 1893-94. Herbert allowed ONI to dispatch attaches and others throughout Latin America, including Venezuela where the United States had a major disagreement with Great Britain. Despite the presence of a report that Spain had approached Great Britain about a possible anti-United States alliance, the ONI did not become involved in the immediate planning for naval operations in the Atlantic, Caribbean or Asia. Not until Lieutenant Commander Richard Wainwright took over ONI with the new McKinley administration did the office begin to gear for war.

\(^5\) Jeffreys-Jones, 26.
Wainwright shared many ideas with the old reformers with whom he had graduated from the Naval Academy and with the new Under Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt. In agreement with Mahan, Roosevelt, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and others, Wainwright shared the “large picture” concept.\(^6\)

Wainwright had to face the immediate task of getting vast amounts of information ready for distribution. Japanese interest in Hawaii had been brought to the fore with the pressure of the Hawaiian Revolution, the large Asiatic population in the islands and the development of U. S. interests in the Asian market and expansion. At the same time the German fleet had increased dramatically under the skillful guidance of Admiral Von Terpitz. Disputes with Great Britain over seals in the Pacific Northwest, Venezuela’s boundary and other little problems made the increasingly important Anglo-Saxon alliance between the United States and Britain unlikely although paraded constantly in the press and popular magazines.

By the advent of the McKinley administration the situation in Cuba was rapidly heating up. The war had begun in 1895 and was dragging on with neither side the apparent winner. The limited resources of Spain were being rapidly used up as was its eligible military-age population. With the beginnings of the revolution in the Philippines the end was clearly on the horizon. Getting information to answer policy questions and military inquiries meant that the ONI (and the other intelligence agencies) would have to greatly increase their presence. At the same time, the Naval War College was organizing and planning for the coming war by producing numerous scenarios that could be applied given certain situations. ONI was called upon to supplement the information available at the college and to quietly assist in implementing the plans should war come about in the near future. One of the major problems was where to focus the attention. In response to some alarming reports and Roosevelt’s public statements more attention was actually paid to German aims than those of Spain. Not until the sinking of the Maine was the attention entirely drawn to war with Spain.\(^7\)

ONI relied heavily upon the reports of attaches during this crucial period, especially those stationed in Europe. From Madrid Lieutenant Commander George L. Dyer reported in 1897 the Spanish rumors of war against the United States. The Spaniards, according to Dyer, had full faith in their squadrons and believed that if an encounter should take place they could defeat the U. S. Navy and destroy our commerce. Brash talk in Spanish circles of attacking the American coastline was also bandied about in Madrid. From Germany came the warnings of Albert Niblack that Spain had purchased two Italian cruisers more heavily armed than the New York, thought to be the best in the U. S. Navy. Roosevelt required ONI to produce a number of papers on coaling stations, fire power of opposing vessels, cruising range of


\(^7\) Ibid., 55-59.
both our ships and those of Spain, and other vital intelligence for military planning. With the small staff allotted over the recent years and the many areas to be explored it is no surprise that the intelligence system was not up to the standards of the day and both the Navy and Army had much to learn in a very short time.\textsuperscript{8}

Tensions with the government of Spain in Cuba were adding to the increased need for information. Many Cubans had migrated to the United States primarily to go into business to assist their families and friends back home. Many of these men and women brought back information concerning conditions in Cuba and the problems of the Spanish administration and army. This led to the arrest of numerous individuals who held such citizenship and put the United States in an awkward position relative to the disposition of their cases. The arrest in 1896 of Mark (Marcos) E. Rodriguez, Luis Someillan y Azpeitia and Luis Smoeillan y Vidal created such a sensation that the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs investigated the matter. Rodriguez was taken in broad daylight while boarding the \textit{Olivette}, of the Plant Steamship Line, for a return trip to Tampa. All three men were arrested and

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 60-62.
charged with sedition and rebellion. Senator Wilkerson Call of Florida led the charge to get these men released and returned to their families. Just what information these men could pass on is in question but the Spanish government was sure that they were spies assisting the rebels and refused to release them in a timely matter.\(^9\)

When it came to raising the diplomatic and emotional heat no one was better suited to the task than the great Cuban revolutionary, Jose Marti. Much has been written about this intriguing figure but one of the most important services he performed for his country was in getting the people of Florida, and especially Tampa, directly involved in supporting the revolution. As historian Joan Steffy has written: “Thus it was Tampa which became the catalyst for the movement to join all Cubans in the struggle for independence. It was in Tampa that Marti proposed his ideals of national unity, of democratic revolutionary activity, and the joining of all groups under a common banner.” It was also in Tampa where the Spanish government allegedly attempted to assassinate the writer-turned-revolutionary by poisoning his wine. From that time on each visit to Tampa found him in the home of Ruperto and Paulina Pedroso, an African-Cuban couple whom Marti trusted. Marti’s interest in Tampa was the cigar-workers and their associations. In these he found followers and contributors to the extent that the money donated by the people of Tampa and Key West grossed more than that received from all other Latin American countries combined. Almost all of the funds raised went to the purchase of arms, ammunition and medical supplies for the revolutionary army in Cuba.\(^10\)

Tampa was looked upon as “the very heart of the American conspiracy,” to free Cuba from Spanish control.\(^11\) It was in Tampa that Marti announced the creation of the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) and the place where the party organization began to take shape in the form of many localized “juntas”. Many of the local juntas, organized by the cigar workers and some of the manufacturers, were actively involved in fund raising and campaigning on behalf of Cuban independence. More directly some of the juntas in Tampa and elsewhere “coordinated support of filibustering expeditions leaving Florida for Cuba.”\(^12\) That these organizations were infiltrated by Spanish spies is undoubted but they were remarkably tight in their local security measures.

One of the stories of clandestine warfare, the notification of the revolutionaries in Cuba that the “grito de Guerra” was to begin, was sent wrapped in a special cigar marked by two tine yellow specks by Blas O’Halloran in the O’Halloran cigar factory in West Tampa. Miguel Angel Duque de Estrada carried the message through the

\(^9\) United States Senate Document No. 16, 54\(^{th}\) Congress, 1\(^{st}\) Session. 1896. Serial Set 3353.

\(^10\) Joan Marie Steffy. “The Cuban Immigrants of Tampa, Florida: 1886-1898.” Masters Thesis. University of South Florida, 1975, 43-74. The author would like to thank Consuelo Stebbins at the University of Central Florida for sharing her work regarding the Cuban Revolutionary parties in Tampa and Key West during this time period.

\(^11\) Steffy, 78.

tight Spanish customs office and delivered the message to Juan Galberto Gomez who set the final date for February 24, 1895.\textsuperscript{13} Recent scholarship and the publication in Havana of Juan Gualberto Gomez’s memoirs have brought to light the facts in this matter. In actuality the message was too large for any cigar to hold and it did not go through the closely watched Tampa Juntas but it was sent through the more tightly controlled Cuban Convention in Key West. The chain of curriers began with Gonzola de Quedada in New York through to Juan de Barrios thence to Manuel de la Cruz who delivered the final message in Cuba to Gomez. Although these men were known to the Spanish officials their quick and silent work within the growing network made their mission a success.\textsuperscript{14}

Publication of the Spanish correspondence between its Consuls and the Ministry of Ultramar by Dr. Consuelo E. Stebbins indicates the intensity of the intrigue at this stage. Since many of the revolutionaries were participants in the Ten Years War it was somewhat easier to follow them and report on their contacts in Tampa and Key West. In a report dated March 8, 1895, Pedro Solis, the Consul in Key West noted: “This consulate is closely observing and reporting on the activities of the Separatists, not only in Key West but also in Tampa and other cities in Florida. Since I assumed the responsibility of this office several years ago, I have maintained constant surveillance of the insurgents, and I have sent detailed reports of their plans to Cuba and Washington D. C. …” Solis then noted the eminent threat of an expedition to be led by Generals Carlos Roloff and Serafin Sanchez. It left Big Pine Key and landed in Las Villas province on July 24, 1895. Even with foreknowledge the consul could do little but inform those in charge of enforcement.\textsuperscript{15} The documents clearly show an active consular service but also the constant frustration it experienced in trying to halt the numerous filibustering expeditions or the revolutionary fund raising especially by the cells of the Central Revolutionary Council in Key West or the numerous clubs in Tampa.\textsuperscript{16} Even when Enrique Collazo was “organizing a council of war in Tampa,” the frustrated consul, M. R. Esudero, was advised not to even press charges as it would be a waste of time and money. Convinced that this assessment of the situation was accurate the consul did not press for charges knowing that no conviction could be won against the insurgents who had the support of the populace in both Key West and Tampa.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} Steffy., 79-80.
\textsuperscript{14} Consuelo E. Stebbins. “Key West Declares War on Spain.” Unpublished paper delivered to the Florida Historical Society annual meeting, Clearwater, Florida, May 26, 2007. See also Juan Gualberto Gomez. \textit{Por Cuba Libre}, Havana: 1905, 348-349; and Manuel Deulofeu. \textit{Marti, Cayo Hueso y Tampa}, Cienfuegos. ND. 285. The author would like to thank Dr. Stebbins for her assistance in seeing these sources and sharing her work in progress.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 177-233.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 232.
This map shows the proximity of the various encampments, the docks at Port Tampa City and the City of Tampa. Henry Plant’s single track railroad, connecting Tampa and Port Tampa, was overwhelmed by the number of people and amount of supplies that had to travel its nine-mile length.
Filibustering relied upon secrecy and tact in the face of constant observation. The Ten Year War had proven that the Spanish Navy could not stop all such traffic and this was to be true in the War for Independence too. However, Marti and company were not always successful in getting their arms and supplies to their compatriots in Cuba. In one of the most conspicuous captures made by the Spanish and American customs agents during the period before United States intervention the insurrectionists were stopped in mid-shipment in Fernandina. Simply put the plot at hand was the smuggling of arms and ammunition to Cuba through the sleepy port of Fernandina, which had little in the way of military shipping in early 1895. Marti, using the name of D. E. Mantell, a wealthy “Englishman” about to sail on a cruise to the West Indies, chartered the yacht *Lagonda* through the good offices of his friend, Nathaniel Barnett Borden, a prominent Fernandina businessman. Borden’s warehouse held a number of ammunition crates variously labeled and destined for the *Lagonda*. Two other vessels were hired for the adventure, the *Amadis*, out of Rockland, Maine, and tramp steamer *Baracoa* then in harbor at Boston. The latter was hired out to one “Abe Moreas of Tampa. The claim of Borden was that around two hundred men, laborers, would be picked up at various ports in the West Indies and transported to work on one of the islands, name unspecified. Such uncertainty aroused the suspicions of one of the captains. The New York *World* got wind of the sailing of the *Lagonda* and alerted its Fernandina correspondent, T. A. Hall, to be on the look out for anything suspicious because rumor on the New York docks had it that a filibustering expedition might be sailing from the quiet port. Hall, a county judge, showed this dispatch to the local Collector of Customs, George L. Baltzell who began to pay closer attention to the comings and goings of some newly arrived vessels. In New York City, an informant, James Batewell, wrote to Secretary of the Treasury John G. Carlisle, that the *Lagonda* and the *Amadis* had been chartered for a filibustering expedition. The fate of the expedition was therefore sealed before the arrival of the final ship. The agents of the customs service, including special agent S. W. Paul of Tampa, descended upon Borden’s warehouse and seized the vessels in the harbor. The expedition had been crushed. However, it did have a positive impact on the Cuban cause and, as historian Antonio Rafael de la Cova has noted, it inspired the cause with greater energy and determination to organize even more expeditions to obtain national independence for Cuba.\(^\text{18}\)

For many in the United States the first real indication that the nation had an intelligence network was the assignment given to Lieutenant Andrew S. Rowan. Rowan was perfect for the job which entailed getting into Cuba, making contact with General Calixto Garcia Iniguez, commander of Cuban forces in the eastern end of the island. Like many others who preceded him to the island, he took advantage

of the network established by the filibusters in obtaining passage to Cuba. Rowan had experience at intelligence gathering in the field having made an inspection of the entire length of the Canadian Pacific Railroad. He also had experience in Cuba and authored a book on the island’s resources. In addition to contacting Garcia Rowan was also to attempt to contact General Maximo Gomez y Baez the leading military officer in the insurgent ranks and, like Garcia, a holdover from the “Ten Year’s War” from 1868-1879. Rowan’s mission was an overwhelming success but hardly the daring-do adventure written up in the famous “Message to Garcia” piece of Elbert Hubbard. Garcia was to give Rowan the layout of the Spanish forces on the island, their numbers, weapons, dispositions, etc. For MID this was not all new information but it supplemented that which was already known through other Cuban sources, namely the exiles in Florida and New York. For Americans reading the adventure published by Hubbard, it romanticized the roles of the filibusterers and others daring to flaunt the power of Spain.

On a less adventuresome level, local intelligence gathering took on some typically peculiar twists. In her charmingly brief “My Service in the Spanish-American War, 1898,” Mabel Bean (Williams) tells her story of minor but important espionage. Ms. Bean worked in her father’s store and post office at Port Tampa. After describing the impact of thousands of troops descending upon the town she tells of her sitting in the family parlor when Colonel Groesbeck arrived. The Colonel was an old friend of her parents and could be trusted to look after the young lady in her new role – following the activities and mailings of two well-known Spaniards suspecting of spying on the operations in Tampa. These men were regular customers and often seen in the vicinity. Her job was relatively simple. Keep an eye on these men and search their mail. She was to report her findings to General William R. Shafter, Commander of Fifth Corps, personally. There she often translated the documents for the general and presumably his staff. The bright young, curly headed girl in the trim sailor suit would hardly be suspected of being a spy by the men and that was what Groesbeck expected. As she summed up her experience: “Gen. Shafter, Col. Groesbeck and my father all seemed pleased with the work I had done but I couldn’t see that it amounted to much. Perhaps it did prevent contraband information from going through the mail.” Whatever she delivered it had to account for more than just general information for her to be reporting it directly to the commanding officer. In espionage little things add up to larger things and in the bigger picture it could be very important.


Few areas indicate the nature of the intelligence war during the Cuban Revolution and the Spanish-American War of 1898 than the episodes involving the filibusters, most leaving from Florida ports. The United States was neutral in the war between Cuban insurgents and the Spanish government and therefore was required by international law to forbid and prohibit such exploits as filibustering. Raids into Cuba from the United States were of long tradition. The most famous of the early expeditions were those of Narciso López in the period from 1849-52. During the Ten Years War there were many attempts to get arms to the Cuban insurgents and many of these came from Florida and Louisiana. The most famous affair in this era came with the capture and execution of Captain Fry and the crew of the Virginia. As soon as the war of 1895 began the boats coming from Florida, New York, Pennsylvania and other points along the eastern coast of the United States appeared to be a continuous flotilla. The Revenue Service was drawn into a constant game of cat and mouse all along the coast. The Morrill, the McLane, the Forward and the Hamilton all attempted to halt the traffic in arms, ammunition and men headed for Cuba. They received constant tips from the Spanish Ambassador, the Spanish Consular service and numerous spies up and down the coastline. The George W. Childs, the Lark, the Commodore and the Laurada were all part of the early ships attempting to land articles of war and men on Cuba’s beleaguered shores. In November, for example, the Spanish Ambassador requested that the Customs Service detain and search the James W. Foster as she sat

The Starry Flag Weekly was a popular Dime Novel during the time of the Spanish-American War. Though “Tampa’s Dynamite Fiend” was a fictional story, the threat of Spanish saboteurs was on the minds of many Americans during this time.
off of the Delaware Breakwater. In January of 1896 the Spanish minister stated that the steamer *J. W. Hawkins* was just leaving New York to rendezvous with the *Commodore* somewhere near Palm Beach and that the arms confiscated earlier at Cedar Keys figured into the mix headed towards Garcia’s army. By March of that year the minister was complaining once more about the schooner *S. R. Mallory* taking its cargo from Cedar Keys to meet with the schooner *Adel* off of Tampa where they would later connect with the famous *Three Friends* which would make the final leg to Cuba. This last exploit even stated that the *S. R. Mallory* contained thirty tons of supplies for the insurgents and that the *Adel* was transporting Enrique Collo and a body of men to join up with the *Three Friends* after leaving Longboat Key (stated as Longport Inlet in the report) and rendezvousing somewhere near Alligator Key. Such specific information could only have come from a rather sophisticated spy network operating out of Tampa and Jacksonville. The *S. R. Mallory* was seized in this instance but soon released for lack of direct evidence showing a violation of the neutrality laws.

According to a report to the House of Representatives given in February of 1898 the U. S. Customs Service allegedly put its entire eastern force of 2,408 men onto the task of suppressing the trade in arms and the shipment of men to Cuba. This same report stated: “That only 6 out of 13,585 American vessels succeeded in reaching Cuba and that less than 50 have had any share in these expeditions …” It bragged that the U. S. citizens were thereby proven to be law abiding and that a “wholesome and repressive fear” kept those more disposed to undertake such action in line. The Service even produced an impressive chart to show the results of sixty attempted expeditions, which it claimed very few ever reached Cuba. According to Dr. Samuel Proctor, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward’s biographer, the *Three Friends* alone had eight successful voyages to Cuba providing weapons, men and hospital supplies to the insurgent army. The *Three Friends* was assigned a “shadow” in the Revenue Cutter *Boutwell* while in Jacksonville, however there were many well known escapades where the captain of this cutter simply waived goodbye after *Three Friends* crossed the bar. The same report stating that the Revenue Service had stopped so many of the expeditions also noted how many times (complete with dates) these same vessels actually delivered their cargoes to Cuba. In light of most of the evidence and the numerous newspaper reports of these exploits the report can only be viewed as “window dressing” for the Spanish government and an answer to its charges that the United States had been too lenient with the violators.

The Cuban Revolution of 1895-1898 was financed heavily by Cubans and their sympathizers in the United States, especially in Tampa and Key West, Florida.

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Many of the funds raised by the efforts of the Cuban Junta and its numerous sub-organizations went directly to fund the guns, ammunition and hospital goods shipped by the filibusterers. According to historian James Robertson, “General Maximo Gomez, commander-in-chief of the Cuban Army, early and continually emphasized the importance and necessity of promoting filibustering as a means of sustaining the revolutionary movement, …” Cuban historian Jose Rivero Muniz has also noted that even though the attempts to raise money for the revolution were publicly known and promoted in the local press, United States authorities did little if anything to prevent them. The nearly constant military preparations which the Spanish Ambassador and others denounced and demanded a halt to were almost totally ignored by the powers in Washington and throughout Florida. Clearly the sympathy and admiration for the Cuban cause was one that struck a responsive cord in the hearts of Floridians and other citizens. Tampa’s denizens in particular were very supportive of the Cuban cause and donated as much from this one town as was raised in all the other Americas. Indeed, the cigar-makers of Tampa contributed the astounding amount of twelve to fifteen thousand dollars per month, or $150,000 per year (in round numbers). The centers of Cuban emigrant population, Tampa, Key West and New York were the most fertile fields for fund-raising. With a combined population of over 8,000 Cubans Tampa and Key West were quick to raise needed funds.

Probably the most famous intelligence coup of the war came with the discovery of the whereabouts of the fleet of Admiral Pascual Cervera y Topete. This fleet was well understaffed, incomplete in composition and did not have all of its guns and turrets in place, yet as a “fleet in being” it presented a threat, especially to the frightened and nearly hysterical governors of the New England states who feared the bombing of Plymouth or some other coastal community. It had to be found and destroyed before a land invasion of Cuba could be attempted because the Army could not sail unprotected to Cuba in open boats. Two operatives of the Navy Department, not linked to ONI, were Ensigns Henry H. Ward and William H. Buck who chartered yachts to cruise off of the Spanish coast and keep watch on the fleets of Cervera and Admiral Miguel de la Camara. Thrown into the intelligence mix in Europe were the various operatives of the Naval Attaches, including Edward Breck, a former fencing champion who went in disguise to Spain and played the role to the hilt and did not get caught. Unfortunately, none of these operatives or attaches could locate the vital fleet of Cervera once it left the Cape Verde Islands. Not until it reached Curacao on 14 May 1898 did the United States Navy have an idea where it was headed. It

27 Muniz, 101.
had been assumed that Cervera would head to Havana where coal and naval stores awaited him. The North Atlantic Fleet, under Admiral William T. Sampson was charged with the blockade of Cuba, especially the northern coast. The blockade was extended east and west of the capital city but covered little of the southern coast. The second assumption was that if not Havana then Cienfuegos would be the next logical port of call. The “Flying Squadron” under Admiral Winfield Scott Schley was called upon to prevent this possibility. Yet, for ten complete days, so the old story goes, the fleet of Admiral Cervera was lost to Naval Intelligence. This is surely not the case.

At the official declaration of war President William McKinley ordered the head of the U. S. Army Signal Corps, A. W. Greely to take control of all telegraphic lines in the country. This order included both cable and land lines. Most important were those from Havana to Key West and from Cienfuegos to Haiti. This latter was cut under severe circumstances on 11 May. The line from Havana to Key West was not cut during the war for good reason, it provided too much intelligence, including on 19 May the arrival of Cervera’s fleet in the harbor at Santiago de Cuba. Captain James Allen had been assigned to Key West and this energetic officer soon recruited the local manager of the telegraphic service, Martin L. Hellings. Hellings immediately offered his services and those of his men in Havana, in whom he had explicit trust. He had done the same for Captain Charles Sigsbee arrived in Key West with the battleship Maine. Besides the control of the official telegraph office and staff, Allen now had access through to the highest offices in Cuba. It was through one of these operatives, named Villaril that the arrival of Cervera’s fleet became known. This information was immediately sent to Washington where Greely states he gave his assurance to the President and Secretary of the Navy Long that it was for real and reliable. Commodore George C. Remey, then commanding at Key West, was given the information directly and he also vouched for its authenticity. As Remey related: “The next morning, May 19th, about 9 A.M. Captain Allen U.S.A. the chief Signal Office, came, excited, and evidently in great haste, and said that [he] had a very important dispatch to tell me. So I cleared the room, and he informed me that his office had, a few minutes before, received a telegram from Havana, stating that Admiral Cervera’s fleet was entering the harbor of Santiago de Cuba.” Remey then sent the message onto Washington where, he later learned, the officer of the day at the Navy Department did not believe the story until he got several stories over the next few hours. Admiral Sampson was notified of the event and he soon sent his message to Schley, then on the way to Cienfuegos, to continue on to Santiago de Cuba and blockade that port. Schley did not believe the story either and delayed for several days before actually confirming the story by direct observations done by

29 Dorwart, 64-65; and O’Toole, 195-97.
Lieutenant Blue aided by his Cuban guide. Inner-service rivalry appears to have been the culprit in not getting Schley into position earlier and the fact that Schley was upset that Sampson was over him even though he had longer service made it doubly bad and forced the two men into a disagreement that led to Congressional hearings and public disgust.

A final note to this episode came with the publication of Willis Moore’s account of the founding of the West Indian Weather Service, a branch of the Department of Agriculture. According to Moore’s story, the important message was encoded into the weather observations from Belene College in Havana and deciphered at Key West. If this is the case the President’s fear of a hurricane and its effects on the fleet made an important contribution to the war effort.  

In one of the strangest fetes of imagination the Cuban Army does not receive any credit for its role in the five month campaign conducted by the United States in Cuba which brought about the end to the Cuban Revolution and the Spanish-American War. The movement of Fifth Corps, under the command of General William Rufus Shafter, was slow and ponderous. There was little secret as to its destination once Cervera was bottled up on Santiago’s narrow harbor. Prior to their leaving Tampa the S. S. Florida took 312 Cuban volunteers from Tampa and other Florida cities and landed them near Banes. The Rowan mission had also introduced General Nelson Miles to two of Garcia’s most trusted subordinates, General Enrique Collazo and Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Hernandez. These gentlemen gave the Major General some of the most vital information on the strength of the Spanish forces near Santiago, the entrenchments and the possible reinforcements available to General Linares commanding Santiago. Miles sent a message back to Garcia and asked him to provide more details and broached possible cooperation. Garcia replied on 9 June that he would consider Miles’ orders as his orders and cooperate any way he could. He offered almost exact numbers of Spanish troops in the area and promised to hold the forces at Holguin in place. When Shafter and the Fifth Corps finally arrived, the officers immediately disembarked and rowed to shore to meet with Garcia unopposed by any Spanish guns. Garcia’s forces had cleared the area before the shelling of the “forts” by Schley’s fleet and few were left to oppose either the officers’ landing or the disembarking of the Fifth Corps. Reinforcements from Manzanillo, Holguin and Guantanamo had been blocked by smaller forces under Garcia. When Shafter and the Army landed at Daiquiri and Siboney on 22-24 June they were unopposed. All of this thanks to Garcia’s forces and a feint of about 500 men attacking from the west of Santiago under his command. Miles acknowledged the contribution of the Cuban Army and noted that they held the most strategic locations on the western side of the town and harbor and assisted in the assault on the entrenchments before the town. Yet no where do you see this contribution mentioned in the text giving the history of this war.

This cursory review of the Cuban Revolution and the Spanish-American War’s intelligence battles is not meant to be all inclusive. However it should bring questions to mind as to why Shafter, Miley and others testified in front of the Dodge Commission into the Conduct of the War that they had little intelligence concerning the forces in front of them. Given the “Military Notes on Cuba” compiled so carefully by Scriven, the very large number of exiles willing to give information, the forces of Garcia and Gomez who assisted in the landing of United States troops and the nearly four hundred years of interaction with the island these assertions ring very hollow.
Almost every harbor and the road network surrounding it were mapped and available to the commanding officers. The train schedule and other transportation facilities were well known as was the topography of most of the island. The Consular reports and the information gleaned from our attaché corps added even more depth to the available knowledge. To make the claim that there was little intelligence to use is almost ludicrous.

In one of the more revealing letters of the day, Brigadier General William Ludlow, then Chief Engineer, wrote to Adjutant General Henry T. Corbin the following: “The Spanish strength has been greatly exaggerated. They claim to have had 250,000 troops. They never had them. They have existed on paper doubtless, and drawn pay, but 150,000 would cover all they had. Of these, many have been sent home, many have been killed, and very many have died of disease in their filthy and unsanitary barracks and hospitals.” Ludlow continued: “At this time, from detailed and specific information, checked from several well informed sources, I cannot find more than 70,000 Spanish soldiers in the entire island of Cuba, and these are divided into scattered garrisons. I can approximately locate them from recent data.” Ludlow then became very specific as to how many forces were in what locations. Most importantly for the operations around Santiago, he noted that the eastern troops were almost totally isolated from the middle and western groups and that the transportation system did not allow any rapid consolidation or concentration of Spanish forces. He also speculated that it would be very difficult, even with four rail lines leading into Havana to concentrate any more than 40,000 troops for the capital’s defense. General Ludlow then stated that with the Spanish treasury nearly broke, the fall of Manila in everyone’s mind, the constant sighting of the Navy cruising along the coast intercepting all traffic, knowledge that their fleet was bottled up in Santiago and knowing that the Cubans were constantly being further supplied by the expeditions sent by the Army and supporters in the United States that the only course open to thinking Spaniards in Cuba was a rapid capitulation. The letter is dated 5 June 1898, and was sent from Tampa. Just three days before the first order to sail was given and executed General Ludlow was in possession of some very specific data that allowed him to give such an accurate picture of what was going on in Cuba. The problem was not enough or accurate information but how to put it to use during the campaign. That is the crux of the problem for Major General William Shafter and his staff. It would take this type of campaign complete with all the errors and faults to bring about the most important change in the Army, the creation of a real General Staff.

Henry T. Corbin Papers: Library of Congress. Container No. 1, Folder “Gen. Wm. Ludlow.” Manuscript Division. Washington, D.C. The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Gerard Casale of Bethesda, Maryland for his procuring of this document.