

THE BATTLE OF SANTIAGO

Captain Charles E. Clark, USS OREGON

USS OREGON, First Rate, Off Santiago de Cuba, 4 July 1898

I have the honor to report that, at 9:30 AM yesterday, the Spanish fleet was discovered standing out of the harbor of Santiago de Cuba. They turned to the westward and opened fire, to which our ships replied vigorously. For a short time there was an almost continual flight of projectiles over this ship, but when our line was fairly engaged and the Iowa had made a swift advance as if to ram or close, the enemy's fire became defective in train as well as range. The ship was only struck three times, and at least two of them were by fragments of shells. We had no casualties.

As soon as it was evident that the enemy's ships were trying to break through and escape to the westward we went ahead at full speed with the determination of carrying out to the utmost your order: "If the enemy tries to escape the ships must close and engage as soon as possible, and endeavor to sink his vessels or force them to run ashore." We soon passed all the ships except the BROOKLYN, bearing the broad pennant of Commodore Schley. At first we only used our main battery, but when it was discovered that the enemy's torpedo boats were following their ships we used our rapid fire guns as well as the 6's upon them with telling effect. As we ranged up near the sternmost of their ships she headed for the beach, evidently on fire. We raked her as we passed, pushing on for the next ahead, using our starboard guns as they were brought to bear, and before we had her fairly abeam she, too, was making for the beach. The two remaining vessels were now some distance ahead, but our speed had increased to sixteen knots, and our fire added to that of the BROOKLYN, soon sent another, the VIZCAYA, to the shore in flames. Only the CRISTOBAL COLON was left and for a time it seemed as if she might escape, but when we opened with our forward turret guns and the BROOKLYN followed, she began to edge in toward the coast, and her capture or destruction was assured. As she struck the beach her flag came down and the BROOKLYN signaled "Cease firing," following it with "Congratulations for the grand victory; thanks for you splendid assistance."

The BROOKLYN sent a boat to her and when the Admiral came up with the NEW YORK, TEXAS and VIXEN, she was taken possession of. A prize crew was put on board from this ship under Lieutenant Commander Cogswell, the executive officer, but before 11 PM the ship, which had been filling in spite of all efforts to stop leaks, was abandoned and just as the crew left she went over on her side.

I cannot speak in too high terms of the bearing and conduct of all on board this ship. When they found the OREGON had pushed to the front and was hurrying to a succession of conflicts with the enemy's vessels if they could be overtaken and would engage, their enthusiasm was intense.

As these vessels were so much more heavily armored than the BROOKLYN they might have concentrated upon and overpowered her, and, consequently, I am persuaded that, but for the way of the officers and men of the OREGON steamed and steered the ship and fought and supplied her batteries, the COLON, and perhaps the VIZCAYA, would have escaped. Therefore I feel that they rendered meritorious service to the country, and while I cannot mention the name of each officer and man individually I am going to append a list of officers, with the stations that they occupied, hoping that it may be of service to them should the claims of others for advancement above them ever be considered.