SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

*The U. S. battleship "Maine" was destroyed in Havana harbor February 15, 1898. War was declared against Spain April 25, 1898. Treaty of peace at Paris December 10, 1898.

In 1896, when the Cuban revolution was at the height of its military success the romantic and hazardous business of filibustering men and arms from the Florida coast to Cuba reached considerable proportions. There were several local boats engaged in this occupation; their names were often in the press dispatches of the time and were familiar to the American public. There was one the fame of which extended throughout the civilized world, the St. Johns River tugboat "Three Friends".

Filibustering

On the dark, raw night of March 11, 1896, the Three Friends made her first get-away as a filibuster. Loaded with arms and ammunition for the Cuban insurgents she drove rapidly down the river toward the bar, with such speed that the small fishing craft along the river were thrown up on the banks by the swell she made. The revenue cutter Boutwell was lying off Jacksonville at the time and immediately started in pursuit of the Three Friends. A fisherman at New Berlin trying to launch his boat from the platform where it had been thrown, was asked if he had seen a boat pass that way; his reply was, "Some d--- boat passed here throwing my boat up on the platform, and if she kept on at the same rate of speed she will by now have reached a place too hot for you to catch her in". At the mouth of the river the commander of the Boutwell enquired of the pilot if the Three Friends had passed during the night. The reply was, "God knows what passed here; something the color of blue dawn, with her forward deck piled high with boats and her after deck filled with boxes. The swell she made in passing washed our decks and floated our boats". The Boutwell then returned to Jacksonville.

Out at sea the Three Friends turned toward the south and at dawn was far down the coast driving full speed toward the Florida Keys. Her coat of white had been changed to gray and in great white letters she bore the name