

## "Harry Huber, Westminster's Sailor Boy"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

The outbreak of the Spanish-American War in April 1898 led to military actions with the Spanish forces in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands. Several local men participated in the naval actions, including Harry Huber, dubbed by the local press as "Westminster's Sailor Boy". Huber frequently wrote his family about his experiences; two of his letters were published in the May 14, 1898 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"Two Letters From Harry Huber, on Board the Flag Ship New York.

The two following letters from Harry Huber, the first to his brother Winter, and the other to his father, were received on Monday last. They are interesting because of being the first received since the bombardment of San Juan, in which Harry's ship was engaged:

ON BOARD THE FLAG SHIP NEW YORK, AT SEA, MAY 13TH 1898.

MY DEAR BROTHER:

I received your letter and intended to write you while we were at Key West coaling ship, but we left before I had the time. I then concluded I would write when we got back again to Cuba, because there we always had a tug or torpedo boat that was going to Key West, but as you know we didn't go to Cuba, and when I found that was the case, which was two days afterwards, I concluded to wait. I found that our fleet was going to Porto Rico, where we expected to meet the Spanish fleet. It took us ten days to go. We reached the harbor of San Juan night before last. We waited until morning. Finding no fleet we made preparations to bombard the forts and the city. At three o'clock we breakfasted, and at 10 minutes past five, with our Admiral on the Iowa, we commenced the fight. We had with us the New York, Iowa, Indiana, Terror Amphitrite, Detroit, Montgomery and Porter. The fight ended at half-past eight.

During the battle we had one man killed and two wounded on our ship. A shell from one of the forts struck one of our light boats and exploded.

One of the pieces hit one of our men at the port waist eight-inch gun, and passed through his head, killing him instantly. One of our wounded men was struck in the leg. I suppose it will have to be amputated. The other wounded man was injured in the arm. He is getting along first rate. Pieces of the same shell that hit our man went through three boats beside the one first struck. Some of the pieces struck the after smokestack and ventilators. One piece went all the way through the search light and left nothing but the drum. One big piece went over the forward bridge and fell on the turret.

When we stopped firing we found that we had silenced all of the batteries, except two, had blown up one of the magazines, and that the town was on fire in seven places.

Last night we gave a seaman's burial to our comrade who was killed at the eight-inch gun.

Admiral Sampson is again on our ship. We are now on our return to Key West.

From your Bro. HARRY"

"U.S. FLAG SHIP, NEW YORK,  
KEY WEST, FLA., MAY 19TH, 1898  
DEAR FATHER:

We arrived here yesterday afternoon (Wednesday 18th) where we found the Brooklyn, Massachusetts and Texas, of Commodore Schley's squadron. This morning they left for Cuba. When we got in we found eight bags of mail matter for our ship alone.

The man who was struck in the leg at the San Juan fight was compelled to have it amputated. He is now in the hospital ship here, and has the honor of being the first wounded man ever aboard her.

While on our way from San Juan to Key West, on the 17th, we captured a Spanish bark, bound from Montevideo, S. A., to Havana. (As you know, I was in Montevideo last summer. This summer I expect to be in Havana.) We tried to tow her into port but the line parted twice. Then the Captain decided to put a prize crew aboard and sail her in. She is not in sight yet.

You remember my friend, Campbell, who is sitting with me in the picture taken at Montevideo. I received a letter from him last night. He is on the Brooklyn in Commodore Schley's squadron. Had his ship stayed long enough I would have gone to see him.

You need not be worried about me. During the bombardment at Matanzas, about which you wrote, I wasn't doing much except looking on. My duties then required no more. I felt as though it wasn't much more than target practice.

We are coaling ship, a schooner on one side and a brigantine on the other. The Iowa as well as all our ships have been coaling all night. I send by this mail a souvenir spoon for Maggie. I am very

well.

Your son HARRY"

As Huber pointed out in his letter, the naval actions were largely one sided with few casualties among the American forces. Huber remained in the Navy, became a chief electrician and served in World War I. Photo caption: Harry Huber of Westminster struck a nautical pose for his portrait at about the time he served in the Spanish-American War. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Harry Koller.