

1949

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Recommended Citation

Rickenbach, Richard V. (1949) "Filibustering with the “Dauntless”," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 28 : No. 4 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol28/iss4/3>

FILIBUSTERING WITH THE *DAUNTLESS*

by RICHARD V. RICKENBACH

Through the indefatigable efforts of Jose A. Huau and Alphonso Fritot, Jacksonville was an active center of filibustering to Cuba in the years 1895-98. Huau was important for his local influence, and his store on the corner of Bay and Main streets served as the clearing house for negotiations of the filibusterers. It seems now that it would have been all but impossible for the revolutionaries to be successful had they not had the aid of Fritot, for he was the joint agent of all the railroads running into Jacksonville.¹ He had the power of being able to secure a special train or a private railroad car almost at will - an invaluable resource.

With each succeeding expedition, the Cuban *Junta* found it increasingly difficult to arrange the next one without detection. By the time of President Cleveland's second proclamation on July 27, 1896, concerning the violation of neutrality laws by the filibusterers,² the direct pressure had become so great on the filibustering ships and their owners, the *Junta* found it expeditious to obtain the regular services of another ship.

There was in Brunswick, Georgia, a tug available for \$30,000, which had the reputation of being one of the fastest tugs in the South. The *Dauntless*, for such was the tug's name, was built in Camden, New Jersey, in 1893, had a net tonnage of seventy-six tons, and carried a crew of seven.³ It was the common belief that tugboats were best suited for filibustering as they had already proven their ability in the preceding year to dodge around and about the Florida keys and to dash over to Cuba at night, unship the cargo, and be off quickly.

Alphonso Fritot submitted to the *Junta* a proposal from Jacksonville street paving contractors Bisbee &

1. H. Smith, *A Captain Unafraid*, p. 116.

2. J. D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902*, vol. IX, pp. 694-695.

3. Frank D. Bisbee, son of W. A. Bisbee, interview with writer, May 6, 1948.

Foster that the *Junta* advance a loan, the required sum of \$30,000, to purchase the tug. William A. Bisbee, the senior partner of the firm, had already shown himself a friend of the Cubans by assisting in arranging some of the previous expeditions.⁴ The loan was granted, and Horatio S. Rubens, attorney of the *Junta* in New York, was directed to go to Brunswick to make the purchase. He carried the purchase price in thirty \$1,000 bills hidden about his person.⁵ The negotiations were rapidly concluded and Rubens proceeded to Jacksonville, where he turned the ship over to Huau.⁶

At this time the notorious filibustering tug *Three Friends* was in her home port, Jacksonville, and was under constant observation, while the famous filibusterer *Commodore* was being detained in Charleston, South Carolina.

"Deception" was the key word in arranging for an expedition in order to keep its departure secret. Rubens, a master of intrigue, tells of his method of outwitting the Spanish spies and the United States officials. "Going to Jacksonville," said the Cuban, "I conferred casually with her [*Three Friends*] captain, giving the impression that *The Three Friends* was up to something new. At the proper minute, the now pleasantly suspected tug took on a considerable coal cargo. The spies swallowed the bait beautifully . . ." ⁷

General Emilio Nunez and "Dynamite" Johnny O'Brien⁸ went to Charleston knowing full well their movements were being watched and speculated upon. Their intention was to put the *Commodore* under sus-

4. Biographical sketch of W. A. Bisbee in possession of Frank D. Bisbee.

5. H. S. Rubens, *Liberty, The Story of Cuba*, (New York, 1932) p. 159.

6. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

7. Rubens, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

8. The famous captain received this nickname by his fearless transport of sixty tons of dynamite to Colombia, passing through a hurricane, a severe electrical disturbance, and generally rough weather, during which he had to make fast the slipping cargo. When the crew unloaded the boxes marked "dynamite" they became hysterical for they had been unaware their cargo was a dangerous explosive and subject to detonation by electricity or from being struck a blow. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-56.

pcion in order that the revenue cutter watching her would not leave, the officials suspecting a movement from that port.⁹ To convince and distract the faithful sleuths further, the *Commodore* got up a head of steam as if she were about to leave port. This was merely a subterfuge to delay the probable discovery of the true intentions of the Cubans, and a deception under which Nunez left for New York.

The New York *Junta* intended this to be an expedition *par excellence*. The steamer *Laurada*,¹⁰ 899 net tonnage, was owned by John D. Hart¹¹ of Philadelphia and she was chartered to take ammunition to Navassa Island, located at the southeastern end of Cuba, between Jamaica and Haiti. She left Philadelphia on July 31 for Wilmington, Delaware, and there took out papers for Port Antonio, Jamaica. Up to this time the voyage had been apparently innocent.¹²

From Wilmington the steamer went to Barnegat and was met by three tugboats from New York, the *Richard K. Fox*, the *Dolphin*, and the *Green Point*.¹³ The *Fox* had a few passengers on board, including Nunez, and the other tugs were loaded with munitions. All these were transferred to the *Laurada* and she sailed for Navassa Island on August 5.¹⁴

There seems to be some question as to the accuracy of the date set by Olivart. Hosea Horton, a yachtsman and fisherman of Atlantic City, testified before the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, November Sessions, 1896, that at 10 o'clock on the night of August 8, 1896, he was on

9. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

10. Hart named the ship for his two daughters, Laura and Ada. Rubens, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

11. The *Laurada* had been the British ship *Empress* and by an act of Congress, Jan. 18, 1895, became an American vessel, sold to John D. Hart Company.

12. E. J. Benton, *International Law and Diplomacy of the Spanish American War*, p. 54.

13. C. Carlisle, *Report to the Spanish Legation*, vol. II, app. III, pt. I, p. 7.

14. M. de Olivart, "Le differend entre l' Espagne et les Etats-Unis au sujet de la question cubaine," *Revue general de droit international public*, tome IV, pp. 358-364.

a wharf in Philadelphia and saw three buses arrive with about eighteen men, J. D. Hart among them, and saw them board the *Laurada* and cast off the lines.¹⁵ This shows a discrepancy of a few days.

In the meantime a party of thirty men, mostly Cubans, had been sent by the *Junta* from New York to Charleston where they stayed in a hotel with about twenty detectives who were following them.¹⁶ The Cubans, leaving the hotel in small groups hoping to escape detection, departed under the guidance of O'Brien on the day following their arrival and boarded a south-bound train on the Plant Line (later the Atlantic Coast Line). Fritot had arranged a private car for the men and the ever present detectives were forced to make themselves comfortable in another car.¹⁷

Among the men recruited to make this trip was a young man named Frederick Funston who was put in charge of the twelve-pound Hotchkiss field guns that were being taken to Cuba. As was usually the case, there was a period of weeks of waiting for the departure of the expedition. The thirty recruited men were available at a moment's notice in the city, and during the long hours of waiting, Funston drilled and worked with the other men in the use of the Hotchkiss. Funston himself had been unfamiliar with the gun until he received full instructions of its operation from the firm, Hartley & Graham, from which it was purchased.¹⁸ Finally the long awaited message arrived. "Be at Cortland [sic] Street Ferry at 7 P. M. ready to leave the City," the telegram read,¹⁹ and off they were on their adventure.²⁰

15. Carlisle, *op. cit.*, vol. II, app. III, pt. I, p. 12.

16. F. Funston, "To Cuba as a Filibusterer," *Scribner's*, vol. 48, Sept., 1910, p. 311.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

20. This was the beginning of a colorful career for Funston. When he landed in Cuba he was under the command of Gomez and later Garcia, and while fighting with the insurrectionists he attained the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Later under his own flag, he was responsible for the capture of Emilio Aguinaldo, the leader of the

The night following the exit from Charleston the train reached Callahan, Florida, where the Florida Central and Peninsular (later the Seaboard Air Line) crossed the Plant Line. The train paused briefly and the last car, the private car in which the Cubans were riding, was quietly uncoupled, and the remainder of the train continued its journey to Jacksonville. A locomotive of the F. C. & P. picked up the car and headed for the coast. On the way toward the coast, the private train, as it had then become, stopped and picked up from a railroad siding, two freight cars ²¹ containing the ammunition which had been ordered from Bridgeport, Connecticut. These arms had been shipped to Jacksonville, but Fritot had them side-tracked at Callahan just as he had managed with the passenger car.

Finally the train stopped about one hundred yards from a bridge where the tug *Dauntless* was waiting. The men started transferring the freight to the tug just at sunrise on August 15, 1896, ²² and after five hours of hard work, the entire cargo was aboard the tug. The *Dauntless* headed south and gave several blasts with her whistle, steaming out of the Satilla River. This was just sixty miles north of Jacksonville where the detectives were patiently awaiting the arrival of the ammunition and anxiously looking for the Cubans who had disappeared overnight.

This type of venture was only for the courageous. It meant danger and hard work, and for the Cubans remaining in Cuba at the end of the trip, the only reward was that of patriotic pride and satisfaction. The

Philippine insurrection in March, 1901. He was in San Francisco as commander of the military district during the earthquake of 1906. He was in command of the United States troops that took part in the United States intervention in Mexico in 1914. In February, 1917, Major General Funston died while on the Mexican border and was succeeded in command by General John J. Pershing. *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. VII, pp. 73-75.

21. Funston's and O'Brien's stories differ on the number of freight cars there were. The former says three, and the latter states there were two.
22. An account by E. W. Cruikshank, an employee of W. A. Bisbee, in collection of newspaper clippings and letters of E. W. Cruikshank.

Dauntless headed straight for Cuba and on the way encountered heavy weather. Funston described the voyage as follows:

I can never forget those four days of suffering as the little steamer labored through the sea, rolling and pitching, our only home, the deck, swept from time to time by clouds of spray, with an occasional wave for good measure. We lay about in our water soaked blankets, getting such snatches of sleep that we could, and now and then staggering to the rail to make the required contribution to Neptune. We certainly were as unhappy and as unheroic-looking a lot of adventurers as ever trusted themselves to the sea.²³

On the night of August 16, the *Dauntless* approached the coast of Cuba at the inlet known as Las Nuevas Grandes, near Nuevitas harbor.²⁴ She stopped one-half mile from the beach, and an embankment on one side obstructed the view of any length of the coast. There were eight flat-bottomed skiffs aboard, each equipped with two rowing oars and one steering oar. The skiffs were quickly manned and loaded. To Funston was given the job of loading the Hotchkiss gun, piece by piece, and getting it ashore. There was considerable surf on the beach and it required skill to make a safe landing. Each skiff made several trips back and forth, between ship and shore, with no more than one upset, which was not serious.

When Funston was making his sixth trip, however, he became aware of a searchlight beyond the embankment. He could not determine its proximity because of the intervening land, but he was fairly certain that it belonged to a large Spanish ship, as the smaller ones carried no such light.

From the *Dauntless*, O'Brien discovered the search-

23. Funston, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 314.

light simultaneously and immediately weighed anchor. The *Dauntless* pulled out of the inlet none too soon, and undetected, or perhaps ignored, slipped out into the open sea.

Before this interruption, three-fourths of the cargo had been landed and the men on shore spent the rest of the night hiding as much of it as possible in the event that the Spanish might send out a searching party.

The next day at about eleven o'clock in the morning, the fearless O'Brien brought the *Dauntless* back to unload the remainder of the cargo. During the night he had taken the ship out to sea eight miles and there had awaited daylight before returning to shore. When the cargo was unshipped, the tug left her friends, who shortly joined General Capote under Maximo Gomez, and steamed for Navassa Island to meet the *Laurada*.²⁵

At the rendezvous the *Laurada* had expected to find three tugs, the *Dauntless*, *Three Friends*, and the *Commodore*. Each boat was to take one-third of the cargo to Cuba, but as the two latter ships were not allowed to leave port, the *Dauntless* was the only one able to keep the engagement. Necessarily then, the *Dauntless* took the remainder of the expedition in two consecutive trips. The first of these two trips she transported one-half of the cargo and men to Santa de Argo Niaco, twelve miles west of Santiago, and landed them in the afternoon of August 22. The landing was made without mishap and the tug returned to Navassa Island. The second trip, but the *Dauntless's* third since she left port, was completed on the following Monday morning, August 24, 1896.²⁶

This expedition was something for the authorities in Washington, Madrid, and Havana to think about, and it was a record so far as filibustering is concerned. In the testimony of a William J. Bruff, a dealer in munitions of New York City, given in the District Court of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania,²⁷ there appears

25. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

26. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-127.

27. *Suprap.* 4.

a list of the arms and equipment the *Dauntless* landed on Cuban soil within a week. The items were 2,100 Remington rifles, 250 Remington carbines, 250 Mauser repeating rifles, 250 carbine slings, 700,000 .43 caliber cartridges, 53,000 .44 caliber cartridges, 95,000 cartridges (seven millimeter caliber), 10,000 cartridges (7.65 millimeter caliber), two Hotchkiss twelve pound cannon, 500 rounds of cartridges for the cannon, ten pack saddles and harness for cannon, twelve holsters and belts, five pounds of glycerine, 200 burlap bags, fifty pounds of vaseline, six shovels, and three pick axes. All this material was delivered by the dealer at once and it was paid for in cash, the amount coming to about \$50,000.²⁸ This was an unusually large cargo for a filibuster, and the cost of the entire expedition was approximately \$110,000.²⁹

On her trip back to Brunswick, the *Dauntless* approached Key West and launched O'Brien and Nunez, with a party of fourteen, in a skiff and put out to sea again. The O'Brien-Nunez party entered Key West and, when questioned, freely spoke of the safe landing of three expeditions.³⁰ Nunez refused, however, to give any particulars further than the contents of the cargo landed, keeping the name of the ship secret.

At Brunswick bar, which was reached August 29, the *Dauntless* was put in quarantine. On September 3 she was released and went on up to Brunswick. There the Collector of Customs and the United States District Attorney questioned the crew of the ship.³¹ There were six Jamaican negroes among the crew who testified against the other men. On September 14, the ship was libeled, charged with violating neutrality laws. On September 22, she was released under a \$7,000 bond and sailed to Jacksonville.³²

After the cargo had been unshipped from the

28. Carlisle, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, app. III, pt. II, pp. 23-24.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

30. Tampa *Morning Tribune*, August 30, 1896.

31. Cruikshank papers.

32. Cruikshank papers.

Laurada at Navassa Island, the steamer sailed to Port Antonio and then returned to Philadelphia. Hart, her owner, was indicted for violation of neutrality laws. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and a fine of \$500 was imposed upon him. An appeal was made but an affirmation was made of the judgment of the lower court.³³ The judge held that:

A combination of a number of men in the United States, with a common intent to proceed in a body to a foreign country and engage in hostilities, either by themselves or in cooperation with the others, against a power with which the United States is at peace, constitutes a military expedition when they actually proceed from the United States, whether they are then provided with arms or intend to secure them in transit. It is not necessary that all the persons shall be brought into personal contact with each other in the United States, or that they shall be drilled, uniformed, or prepared for efficient service.³⁴

This decision established the principle that to secure a conviction it would not be necessary to show that the defendant had provided the means for carrying the expedition to Cuba, but only that if he provided the means for any part of its journey with knowledge of its ultimate destination and of its unlawful character, he was guilty.

When the *Dauntless* entered the St. Johns River and put in at her wharf in Jacksonville on September 22, 1896, plans were already underway for her next expedition. William Bisbee had a clear title to the tug when she returned, for in the agreement reached between the owner and the *Junta*, the former was to receive from the latter \$10,000 for each landing.³⁵ By

33. Hart's final conviction came on March 18, 1898. F. E. Chadwick, *The Relations of the United States and Spain, Diplomacy*, p. 417.

34. J. B. Moore, *A Digest of International Law*, vol. VII, pp. 911-916.

35. Rubens, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

virtue of the fact that the ship had made three landings on her first voyage, Bisbee had received a credit of \$30,000, the amount of the mortgage held by the *Junta* on the *Dauntless*. This venture could be considered successful thus far.

In the plans for the new expedition, Fritot was again an important factor. The arms to be taken to Cuba were shipped on a Clyde Line steamer from New York to Jacksonville. The cargo included a recently invented Sims-Dudley Dynamite gun, one-half million rounds of ammunition, machetes, medicine, and the usual accouterments. Fritot arranged for the private car of the vice-president of the Florida East Coast Railway, J. R. Parrot, to be used by Nunez, O'Brien, and other leaders in the *Junta* on their trip from Charleston to Jacksonville. These men had journeyed to Charleston again to cast suspicion on the *Commodore*. In order to give the train an official appearance, R. T. Goff, general superintendent of the railroad, accompanied the Cubans on their trip to Jacksonville.³⁶

The special train with its important passengers continued south from Jacksonville and a few miles below that city picked up two side-tracked cars of ammunition. Upon reaching New Smyrna, two day-coaches from Tampa with seventy-five Cubans aboard, were coupled to the train. It continued southward and at Palm Beach the cargo and passengers were transferred to the waiting *Dauntless*.³⁷ That tug had left Jacksonville on October 5 escorted by the revenue cutter *Boutwell*, but she had eluded the federal ship.³⁸

On October 9 the *Dauntless* left Palm Beach and landed the expedition at the San Juan River, fifteen miles east of Cienfuegos on October 13, 1896.³⁹

On October 21st the *Dauntless* was seized off the coast at New Smyrna, where she was laying by for coal,

36. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

38. Tampa *Morning Tribune*, October 13, 1896.

39. *Correspondencia Diplomática de la Delegación Cubana en Nueva York durante la guerra de independencia de 1895 a 1898*, tomo primero, p. 89.

by the revenue cutter *Raleigh*. The tug was taken to Fernandina and put in quarantine. From that time until December 29, the *Dauntless* was held in Fernandina and Jacksonville by the customs officials. Many times she applied for clearance papers to do salvage work only to be denied again and again permission to leave.⁴⁰ Captain Kilgore of the *Boutwell* even threatened to sink the tug with a shot on November 26 if she tried to leave without permission. The captain of the *Dauntless* was supposed to have received word of a valuable salvage job at that time and the owner was extremely anxious to do the work.⁴¹

At last on the night of December 29, the *Dauntless* was able to escape from Jacksonville. That day her captain had applied for clearance to Nuevitas, Cuba, but had been refused. That night, which had become unusually dark due to a dense fog, the tug left Jacksonville and at 11:00 P.M. steamed out at top speed, passing within a few yards of the cutter *Vesuvius* in the St. Johns River. The captain of the *Vesuvius*, caught unawares, had his ship facing in the opposite direction from the course of the *Dauntless*, and in a few minutes the tug was lost from sight in the impenetrable fog. At 1:30 A.M. the tug crossed the St. Johns bar and headed south.⁴²

In the meantime the *Three Friends* had gone on an expedition from Fernandina on December 14 but had been unable to land her cargo.⁴³ She had taken the men and munitions to No Name Key, a few miles east of Key West, and had returned to Jacksonville. "Dynamite" Johnny O'Brien had been the captain of that expedition but he had gotten off the ship at Key West and had there gone aboard the passenger boat *Olivette* for Tampa. From that city he took the train to Jack-

40. Once during this period she was fined for not having fire drill. Cruikshank papers.

41. Unidentified and undated newspaper clipping among Cruikshank papers.

42. Cruikshank papers.

43. This was the eighth voyage of the *Friends*.

sonville arriving there in time to take command of the *Dauntless*.⁴⁴

On New Year's Day 1897 the *Dauntless* reached No Name Key and loaded the cargo. In addition to a strong wind blowing from the northeast, making it difficult to effect a quick transfer, the loading was interrupted by the approach of a schooner mistaken for a government torpedo boat. The schooner was sighted coming straight for the key and it routed the Cubans. Every craft traveling from ship to shore raced off in a different direction while Captain O'Brien stood on the deck of the *Dauntless* cursing their luck.⁴⁵ He too was convinced that they had been caught.

It was all a mistake. Two men from the *Three Friends*, one a newspaper reporter, Ralph Delahaye Paine, the other a Cuban named Carbo, had gone to Key West and had learned about the escape of the *Dauntless* just in time to return to No Name Key. They had gotten the schooner *Vamoose*, a dispatch boat owned by William Randolph Hearst for whom Paine was running an errand to Cuba, to take them to the key. This harmless boat had been the cause of all the excitement, and when its occupants attempted to overtake some of the fleeing craft to tell them of their mistake, they only caused the boats of frightened men to flee faster.⁴⁶

By four o'clock in the afternoon most of the men had returned and the cargo was loaded. The *Dauntless* headed west, passing Key West at sunrise, and on the morning of January 3, reached Corrientes Bay at the extreme western end of Cuba.⁴⁷

The landing that followed is probably one of the most colorful and amusing events of its kind on record:

This final performance was more like a Fourth-of-July celebration than the secretive landing of a filibustering expedition [relates

44. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

45. R. D. Paine, *Roads of Adventure*, p. 131.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

47. *Idem.*

O'Brien]. As we came to an anchor I intended to give one short blast of the whistle to summon some of Maceo's troops, who we thought were waiting for us near the cape; but something went wrong with the siren, and it boomed its loudest for a full five minutes before we could shut it off. The *Dauntless* had a siren that would have done credit to an ocean liner, and if there were any Spanish troops or a gunboat within ten miles of us they ought to have heard it. Our nerves had hardly recovered from this shock when a careless Cuban dropped a box of dynamite on a coral reef and it exploded with a roar that started the echoes to going again. Fortunately, the man with the slippery fingers was far enough away from the rest of the party so that no one else was killed.⁴⁸

The cargo was landed without further mishap and the *Dauntless* returned to Jacksonville.

Upon the tug's return to home port, January 7, she was seized by the Collector of Customs, was libeled on January 22, and was subsequently released on a bond of \$15,000 on January 25.⁴⁹ A careful examination of the whole crew of the *Dauntless* was made by a grand jury but she was released by a unanimous vote because of insufficient evidence.⁵⁰

In the month following the seizure of the *Dauntless*, her owner, W. A. Bisbee, filed two damage suits.⁵¹ The first was against Captain Kilgore of the *Boutwell* for not allowing the tug to go on valuable salvage jobs, November 26 and December 10, 1896. The amount sued for was \$20,000. For the same reasons the second suit of \$20,000 was filed. This suit was filed against the ship owner's brother, Cyrus R. Bisbee, Collector of Customs of Jacksonville. In February another suit was

48. *Smith, op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

49. *Florida Times-Union*, January 26, 1897.

50. *Smith, op. cit.*, p. 156.

51. *Florida Times-Union*, January 5, 1897.

filed against C. R. Bisbee for \$60,000. This was based on alleged losses suffered when the collector refused to clear the *Dauntless* for Port Antonio and for Nuevitas, Cuba. This brought a total of \$100,000 in suits filed by W. A. Bisbee.⁵²

Finally on May 1, 1897, the *Dauntless* was cleared for Savannah to do towing at that point. On May 17th she left Savannah at 6 A.M. for a "cruise" in southern waters with O'Brien as captain.⁵³

A cargo valued at \$80,000 was shipped from the New York *Junta* to Jacksonville but before reaching that city was transferred near Wilmington, North Carolina, from the railroad to a tug, *Alexander Jones*, at the dock of the Wilmington & Newbern Railway on the night of May 13. When the *Jones* reached Palm Beach, she took aboard Emilio Nunez and sixty Cubans from a fishing schooner and proceeded to Damas Key, May 19. Here she was met by the *Dauntless* which carried the cargo from the *Jones* to Cuba in two successive trips.

The first landing was made on May 21 about ten miles east of Nuevitas, and the second landing on May 24 was made about one and one-half miles east of Morro Castle. This daring second landing was made in answer to a threat from General Weyler.⁵⁴ After the last expedition (January 1897) the General had issued a letter stating publicly that he would hang O'Brien the next time he landed an expedition. O'Brien answered the threat with a public announcement that he would land the next expedition near Havana and that he would capture Weyler and use him for fuel in the *Dauntless*.⁵⁵ O'Brien came very close to fulfilling his promise entirely, for part of the dynamite he had landed was used to blow up a train on which Weyler was supposed to be traveling. The General was on the train that followed

52. *Ibid.*, March 3, 1897.

53. Cruikshank papers.

54. The commander of Spanish troops in Cuba, commonly called "The Butcher" by the Cubans because of his ruthless methods.

55. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

the wrecked one, however, and so narrowly escaped death.

During the exciting adventures of these expeditions down among the keys and on Cuba's coast, there were frequent accounts in the American press concerning the persistent rumors of filibustering activity. There was no conclusive proof published of these activities, and W. A. Bisbee took advantage of this circumstance to try to counteract the effects of these rumors. In the *Florida Times-Union* on May 27, 1897, there appeared a statement made by this local businessman to the effect that he did not like the reports that had been published in regard to his ship, the *Dauntless*. The reports had stated that the ship had been loaded with arms the previous week in Savannah and that she had gone to Cuba. Bisbee offered a reward of \$250 to any person who could produce proof that the *Dauntless* had taken on arms or that she had violated any [neutrality] laws of the United States. As no proof was forthcoming, the shipowner scored a point in his fight against the customs officials.

The men in the *Junta*, the behind the scene promoters of filibustering, were continually at work. Huau and Fritot, realizing that the *Dauntless* would probably be detained when she returned to Jacksonville, arranged for her to pick up another expedition at New River Inlet, just below Fort Lauderdale.

Two carloads of arms and ammunition were placed aboard the sternwheeler *Biscayne*, along with thirty Cubans in command of a Colonel Mendez. On Saturday, May 29, the cargo was to be transferred to the *Dauntless*.⁵⁶

Quite by chance there was vacationing in Fort Lauderdale at this time a special Treasury Department Agent, Hambleton by name. He had been following the movements of the *Junta's* expeditionary planning and was taking a short leave from his work. Friday night, while with some friends on a sloop in New River Inlet,

56. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

he watched the *Biscayne* slip into the bay. Hambleton, feeling that the movement of a sternwheeler in that locality was unusual, kept a close watch on its activities.⁵⁷

The same night a "southeaster" blew in and delayed the transfer of the cargo until Monday. The *Dauntless* drew too much water when loaded to cross the bar and the *Biscayne* could not go in the open sea in a storm. On Monday, May 31, when the storm had subsided, the *Dauntless* took on coal and general supplies in addition to the cargo.⁵⁸

However, the loading of the *Dauntless* was interrupted. While the transfer was being made, Hambleton, in a rowboat and armed with a double-barreled shotgun, approached the tug and boarded her exclaiming, "In the name of the law I command you to stop putting those arms on this vessel! You are all under arrest!" The leader of the expedition stuck a revolver in the agent's ribs and spoke to the crew which had momentarily stopped in surprise. "Don't pay any attention to this person," said he. "He's not going to shoot anyone. Go ahead and load the ship."⁵⁹ After a brief conversation Hambleton was disarmed and thrown back into his rowboat in which he quickly returned to shore.

Two hours later about one-half of the arms had been loaded, and the men aboard the *Dauntless* saw a ship coming up from the south. At first they supposed it was the revenue cutter *Winona*, which they could outrun, but they soon realized that it was the *Marblehead*, a federal ship they could not outdistance. The crew of the *Dauntless* immediately cut loose from the *Biscayne* and steamed toward the Bahama Bank, seventy-five miles away.

In the six hour chase which ensued, the *Marblehead* gained on the tug considerably and fired a blank shell as a signal for her to stop. O'Brien, who was always ready to take a chance, was in favor of continuing, but

57. *Idem.*

58. *Idem.*

59. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Nunez, the leader of the expedition, persuaded him to stop.⁶⁰

The *Marblehead* overtook the *Dauntless* and sent a lieutenant aboard. The transfer of the cargo had been so hasty that the crew had not had time enough to put all the arms below. Consequently when the officer boarded the ship, he beheld a deck cluttered with boxes marked ".43 caliber" and bundles of rifles wrapped in burlap. He inquired of Captain Jim Floyd⁶¹ where he was taking the boat, to which Floyd answered that they were looking for a wrench at Bahama Bank. "What are these?" asked the lieutenant, indicating the cartridges, "sardines, I suppose." The amazed captain answered in the affirmative.⁶²

This brief incident, wholly authentic or not, is significant in graphically displaying an attitude which was probably widespread among the populace of the countries neighboring Cuba. The federal agents were well aware of the truth and did not want to hinder the progress of the revolt in any way, but they had their duty to perform and had to make some semblance of performing it.

The *Dauntless* was ordered back to Key West where two inspectors looked over the ship and reported nothing out of order. Nevertheless, the tug was held *incommunicado* for twenty-four hours and orders were received from Washington demanding proceedings against her on the charge of being engaged in an organized military expedition.⁶³ The case was suspended June 8, due to lack of evidence.⁶⁴

Two days later, June 10, the *Dauntless* left Key West and went to Bahia Honda Key, just below No Name Key. There she was met by the *Biscayne* and the remainder of the cargo was transferred from that vessel to the tug. Early on the morning of June 18, when the

60. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

61. A negro from Jacksonville frequently aboard the *Dauntless*.

62. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

64. *House of Representatives Document No. 326*, 55th Congress, 2nd Session, pt. B, p. 27.

Dauntless was forty-five miles north-northeast of the Key Piedras light off Cardenas harbor, the crown sheet of the boiler blew up, and the boat had to resort to her sails. Two days later she was picked up off Indian Key, Florida, by the revenue cutter *McLane*. An officer who boarded the tug found a crew of thirteen men, 175 rifles, 300,000 rounds of ammunition, three cases of hospital stores, and a number of machetes.⁶⁵ The revenue cutter towed the *Dauntless* to Key West where the crew was brought before a United States commissioner for questioning. As a result of the inquiry, the ship and crew were released and the *Dauntless* returned to Jacksonville in tow,⁶⁶ arriving there July 1.

From July 1 to August 18 the *Dauntless* was in dry-dock. While the repairs were being made, the cargo which she had been unable to put ashore in Cuba was unloaded and hidden. For the next two months, that is until October 17, the *Dauntless* was engaged in legitimate business in and around Savannah.

George Foster, junior partner of Bisbee & Foster, Jacksonville, was assisting Fritot in arranging another expedition in the week preceding October 17. Foster became ill, however, and had to leave many of the details to his employee, E. W. Cruikshank, as he had done in times previous.⁶⁷ In a letter to Cruikshank, dated October 14, Foster gave the following instructions:

I think she [*Dauntless*] better leave Savannah some time Friday night (tomorrow) because it is reported that the *Vesuvius* is coming there, and is liable to be there any minute; and besides it is better for us to know here that she is out before we get on the special train here;

65. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

66. Cruikshank papers.

67. An affidavit in possession of Mr. Cruikshank states "To all interested in the cause of Cuba Libre. I take pleasure in certifying that Mr. E. W. Cruikshank during the past two years has been identified with the work this Subdelegation has been carrying on in Florida and has been a hearty and earnest worker with the Cubans in their struggle for liberty. Jacksonville, June 12th, 1898. [signed] Jose A. Huau, Subdelegado."

we will leave here at seven Saturday night. Have seventy tons coal aboard, get the Ice, Meat, and Eggs, and see that the engineer has a plenty of good oil to last twenty days.

The connections were made and the *Dauntless* cleared the port.

A two-masted schooner, *Silver Heels*, from Rockland, Maine, had been chartered to carry the munitions for this enterprise from New York to Conception Island, located on the eastern side of the Bahamas. A Moran Line tug was chartered to tow the *Silver Reels* six hundred miles down the coast and from there the schooner would sail under her own canvas.⁶⁸

Bridgeport, Connecticut, was the city from which the munitions for the expedition began a trip which took six weeks to complete. The steam-lighter *Lizzie Henderson* was loaded in Bridgeport and steamed to Sandy Hook, where on Saturday night, October 17, the cargo was transferred to the *Silver Heels*. The Moran tug then took the schooner in tow at dawn Sunday. The trip to Conception Island lasted sixteen days because of adverse winds, and the delayed schooner arrived at her destination just six hours after the *Dauntless*, which had been waiting for her twelve days, had left for Key West to replenish the coal in her bunkers.

The authorities at Key West had orders from Washington to detain the *Dauntless* upon her entry to that port, therefore, she was seized immediately upon entering. Nevertheless, through friends of the *Junta*, including the deputy collector, one Ramon Alvares, the *Dauntless* was released on an affidavit stipulating that she would proceed to Jacksonville before going to any other port.⁶⁹ In fixing the time limit in the affidavit, within which the tug was to reach Jacksonville, enough time was allowed for her to go to Conception Island.

The meeting of the two boats came about when the *Dauntless* arrived at Conception Island where the *Silver*

68. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-217.

69. Cruikshank papers.

Heels had been for a week. The Cubans aboard the *Dauntless* were transferred to the *Silver Heels* and the tug towed the schooner to Orange Key - a more convenient location for the eventual completion of the expedition - and then continued her voyage to Jacksonville.⁷⁰ Upon the *Dauntless's* return to her home port, she was ordered to Fernandina to quarantine and was released therefrom on November 11.

On November 19, the filibustering *Dauntless* left Jacksonville for Savannah with the schooner *Jennie Thomas* in tow. This towing was just an excuse to leave port, and when the tug was stopped and searched in the St. Johns River no incriminating evidence was found. On the twentieth she was allowed to continue her trip.⁷¹ The *Thomas* was left at Savannah on the twenty-first and the *Dauntless* put to sea the morning of November 23, after having procured provisions from waiting lighters at Brunswick.⁷² Ordinarily the tug would have made at least two trips to Cuba with the cargo aboard the *Silver Heels*; but since the arms had been enroute so long and the Cubans were waiting for them, O'Brien decided to take the entire cargo in one trip.

The site selected for the landing was Cape Lucrecia, a few miles from Banes. In O'Brien's opinion it was not a good place to attempt to discharge the cargo as the approaching channel was rather narrow. Nevertheless, there was no choice, as it was the rendezvous already agreed upon with some of the Cuban rebels.

The landing was executed on the night of November 28. When the greater part of the cargo had been beached, a Spanish ship was seen approaching and the *Dauntless* immediately weighed anchor, the captain not wishing to chance being captured. As later events showed, the Spanish ship did not see the *Dauntless*, because, as the tug departed, she passed unseen in the wake of the

70. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-230.

71. Unidentified newspaper clipping in possession of F. D. Bisbee, dated November 20, 1897.

72. Cruikshank papers.

Spanish boat.⁷³ The *Dauntless* did not return to deliver the remnant of the cargo but continued north to Jacksonville. Before entering the city on December 2, however, the undischarged part of the cargo was unloaded and concealed a few miles from Jacksonville.⁷⁴

In the month of December the *Dauntless* resumed her legitimate business of salvaging. There had been no charges made against the ship at the time of her return, and her movements, though watched by the United States officials, were unrestricted. On January 8, 1898, the *Dauntless* went to Savannah to do some towing and was in that locality until February 12. On the latter date she went to Fernandina.⁷⁵

A shipment of arms from Bridgeport to Tampa had been diverted to Callahan by Fritot, an experienced hand at that kind of work. While Nunez and O'Brien remained in Jacksonville, General Sanguilly and a party of Cubans went to Tampa as a decoy. The ruse worked. The movement toward Tampa of men and arms, even though the latter never reached Tampa, was enough to lure the Spanish spies and United States inspectors to that city.⁷⁶

The night of February 12 was excellent for filibustering—dark and foggy. Nunez and O'Brien went to Fernandina with a party of Cubans who were to land with the arms. The *Dauntless* eased down the St. Johns River to Jim Floyd's house where the arms that had not been landed at Cape Lucrecia in December were hidden, and the overdue arms were put aboard. The tug then proceeded down the river, and by the time she reached its mouth she was steaming at top speed. She passed the revenue cutter *McCullough*, which was patrolling the St. Johns River, and quickly drew out of sight. The tug moved on to Fernandina, there picking up the waiting Cubans and arms, leaving that port at 3 A.M.

73. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

74. Letter from E. W. Cruikshank to Dr. Guillermo Belt, Ambassador of Cuba in Washington, dated March 8, 1946.

75. Cruikshank papers.

76. *Florida Times-Union*, February 12, 1898.

On the night of February 15, the *Dauntless* landed one-half of her cargo inside Point Nuevas Grande, a short distance from Nuevitas. The following night the other half was beached inside the harbor at Mantanzas.⁷⁷ Both landings were without mishap.

The next day Nunez, O'Brien, and other passengers were put off at Bahia Honda, in the Florida Keys, and the *Dauntless* returned to Jacksonville with only the original crew aboard. On February 26, the men on the key were picked up by a Miami bound steamer, at which time they first heard of the sinking of the battleship Maine.⁷⁸

When the *Dauntless* reached Jacksonville, February 27, her filibustering days were over. On March 7 she was libeled for violating the neutrality laws and a United States deputy marshal was placed aboard.⁷⁹ On April 18, 1898, the Associated Press gave bond for \$25,000 and chartered the *Dauntless* to serve as a dispatch boat, operating between Cuba and the United States.⁸⁰

It is difficult to estimate the value of the aid given to the cause of *Cuba Libre* by the *Dauntless* and her owner, but it is a fact that this tug made more successful filibustering landings on Cuban soil than any other ship in the years 1895-1898.⁸¹ Even though the owner was well paid by the *Junta*, the Cuban people felt they were still indebted to that man. When the independence of Cuba was a reality and President Palma arrived at Havana, all the boats at anchor in the harbor went out to meet the presidential ship and escorted it to the landing. To the *Dauntless* was given the honor of leading the procession.⁸² At a later date the president of the republic presented Mr. Bisbee with a silver sword in acknowledgment of the gratitude of the Cuban people.⁸³

77. Cruikshank papers.

78. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

79. *Florida Times-Union*, March 9, 1898.

80. F. D. Bisbee to writer, interview, May 6, 1948.

81. Benton, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

82. F. D. Bisbee to writer, interview, April 6, 1948.

83. Biographical sketch of W. A. Bisbee in possession of F. D. Bisbee.

This daring little ship, the *Dauntless*, is now owned by the Wood Towing Corporation in Norfolk, Virginia, and is known as the *Restless*. She is probably regarded as just another one of those indistinguishable tugs that work in and around the harbor. However, she is no ordinary boat. Her past will not permit her to sink into ignominious obscurity, even though her exciting days of adventure are long gone, and it is possible her present owners know nothing of her colorful history.