



A newspaper illustration of the USS *Maine*'s baseball team identified several crewmembers, including Fireman William Lambert (who was an African-American). These men were the nine starters of the *Maine*'s 1897 championship team.

Disaster struck the entire team—and many of their *Maine* shipmates—on the day the *Maine* blew-up in Havana's harbor. As the Library of Congress tells us, every single team player was killed in the explosion except for one person:

"The Maine base ball club"--All blown up at Havana except no. 1 J.H. Bloomer [the team's right fielder, seen at top left].

What caused the ship to explode, killing 268 men? The actual answer to that question is still not totally clear, but one thing is certain. The explosion helped to push the United States into the Spanish-American War.

We can learn [more about the explosion from PBS](#):

At 9:40pm on February 15, 1898, the battleship U.S.S. Maine exploded in Havana Harbor, killing 268 men and shocking the American populace. Of the two-thirds of the crew who perished, only 200 bodies were recovered and 76 identified.

The sinking of the Maine, which had been in Havana since February 15, 1898, on an official observation visit, was a climax in pre-war tension between the United States and Spain. In the American press, headlines proclaimed "Spanish Treachery!" and "Destruction of the War Ship Maine Was the Work of an Enemy!"

William Randolph Hearst and his New York Journal offered a \$50,000 award for the "detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage." Many Americans assumed the Spanish were responsible for the Maine's destruction.

On March 28, 1898, the United States Naval Court of Inquiry found that the Maine was destroyed by a submerged mine. Although blame was never formally placed on the Spanish, implication was clear.

Recent research suggests that the explosion may have been an accident, involving a spontaneous combustion fire in the coal bunker. Some conspiracy theorists have even suggested that sensational journalist William Randolph Hearst may have set the explosion in order to precipitate a war.

While historians will never know exactly what happened the night the Maine went down, it is clear that the incident was a significant force that propelled the United States into the Spanish-American War.

Not long before all-but-one of the men in this picture died, they had won the U.S. Navy's baseball championship.

In the championship game, which took place in Key West, the *Maine*'s team beat the USS *Marblehead*'s team by a score of 18-3. William Lambert—seen here in the back row at the far right—was the *Maine*'s best pitcher.

A left-hander from Virginia, and the only African-American on the *Maine*'s team, Lambert had formidable skills. He was [known as](#):

...a master of speed, curves, and control

About nine weeks after Lambert and his ship mates died aboard their vessel, the Spanish-American war erupted on April 25, 1898. One of the rallying cries was:

Remember the Maine!

Click on the image for a better view.

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