

ESTRADA PALMA

ON THE DISASTER

Thinks It Peculiar Accident to Maine.

APPALLING LOSS OF LIFE

His Heart Throbs for American Homes Made Desolate by Killing of Some Loved Ones.—Cutters Depart

Tampa, Feb. 17.—Tomas Estrada Palma chief executive of the Cuban junta, arrived this afternoon from Key West on the Olive. In reply to the Associated Press correspondent's inquiry, he replied:

"It certainly is a most peculiar accident, the like of which I have never heard in the history of any navy. Certainly the most rigid inquiry must follow and the entire civilized world will anxiously await the outcome. My heart still throbs painfully over the appalling loss of life. It is dreadful to contemplate and will carry a flood of misery into many Americans homes. I hope the reports have been exaggerated and that this very rare accident will be laid before the public in the fullest possible detail."

The significant shrug of the shoulders, which followed this statement spoke volumes in implying a disbelief in the accident theory.

Joseph M. Mann, of Providence, was one of the arrivals at the same time. He was strolling on the deck of the steamer City of Washington which was anchored about 300 feet from the Maine. He saw the first flame from the ship shoot high in the air, followed by the awful boom of the explosion. He says his ship was rocked like a cradle from the concussion and that the debris rained like hail against the Washington. Large pieces of cement from inside the Maine fell on deck and smashed a chair which had just been vacated by an officer who had not gone 10 feet away. The Washington being nearest, picked up the largest number of survivors. One man was asleep in a launch of the Maine and was picked up uninjured, but no traces of the launch has ever been found. Lieutenant Holman, navigating and second officer of the Maine was sitting at the table opposite Jenkins and was among those who were saved. He felt the explosion and before he could recover, he found the ship going down. He was pressed by the rushing waters against the top of the room and put up his hand to protect his head. He cut his finger on the blade of the propeller of a torpedo and at once realized where he was and swimming and feeling his way along, he reached the hatchway and escaped. This illustrates his rare presence of mind and also the rapidity with which the big ship sank after the explosion. Jenkins has never been heard from or found. All who came from Havana and who have any information, scout the idea of an accident.

Palma was met by an immense throng of Cubans this evening, there being at least 5,000 of them.

A monster demonstration and torch light procession had been arranged in his honor, but this awful disaster turned it into one of mourning. All their flags are at half mast as marks of respect.

This afternoon the commander of the revenue cutter McLean and Forward received orders of some kind and at once proceeded down the bay under full speed, taking their departure so hastily that they left some of their crew in the city.