

Darwin Robert Merritt

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DARWIN ROBERT MERRITT.

BY JUDGE H. E. DEEMER.

"A plain, blunt man." Such were the characteristics given to the subject of this sketch in the class book of the Annapolis Naval Academy, issued during the year of his graduation. This homely, direct phrase quite accurately describes some of the most noticeable traits of that promising young engineer, Darwin Robert Merritt, who so recently found a watery grave while on duty upon the U. S. S. Maine in Havana Harbor.

April 12th, 1872, and February 15th, 1898. These two dates fix the limits of his earthly existence; and yet crowded within this brief span is a record of which all Iowans are proud. Born in Red Oak, of sturdy, reliable, intelligent New England parents, he early gave evidence of integrity of purpose and great strength of character, somewhat unusual in these days of nervous excitement and intense mental activity. He was one of those rare young men, whose blithe and youthful personality promised the strength and maturity of coming years. His father is one of the well-known and much honored pioneers of the State—having held many offices of position and trust. His uncle, sometime Consul General at London, is a conspicuous figure in the politics of New York. But it is of the son, and of his characteristics that I would write. Raised upon a farm, educated in the common schools, and trained by watchful, tender hearts and hands, he was quite ready both physically and intellectually to enter the Naval Academy at Annapolis at the beginning of the school year in 1891. His appointment came through the recommendation of Ex-Congressman Thomas Bowman of Council Bluffs.

Of splendid physique, dauntless courage and noble bearing, he was soon a favorite with his fellows. He was active in all athletic pursuits, attentive to his books, circumspect in



D. R. Merritt.

DARWIN ROBERT MERRITT.

Engineer on the U. S. Warship Maine which was blown up in the harbor of Havana,
Cuba, Feb. 15, 1898, where he perished at his post of duty.

his conduct, and at graduation stood third in a class of eighty-four. Finishing at Annapolis in 1895, he went upon the usual two years cruise, and finally graduated with high honors in July, 1897. During these two years he was assigned to duty upon both the "Amphitrite" and the "Indiana;" and was designated by the government to estimate the speed and horse-power of the last named battleship upon her final trial. He was with the "Indiana" fourteen months and is very highly spoken of by her Commander, Capt. R. D. Evans. Leaving this vessel he spent a few months at the Brooklyn navy yard, and after a short furlough at home, during the latter part of the summer of 1897, (which was his last visit) was assigned to duty upon the ill-fated "Maine." His actual service was short but is highly commended by the Navy Department at Washington.

One of the officers under whom he served thus spoke: "I would rather have Merritt on board and in charge of my engines than all the rest of the engineer officers combined." Another officer said: "We unanimously voted him the perfect shipmate. He was sweet-tempered, unselfish and thoughtful of others. Above all he was a man, in every sense of the word." Chaplain Chidwick of the "Maine" said: "Your boy was a noble son. . . . He was a great favorite with his fellow officers, and I can assure you his conduct was without reproach."

Naturally quiet and reserved, his naval training made him self-possessed, reflective, almost stoical. Meeting him you were immediately impressed with the presence of large reserve power, perfect self-control, and singular mental calmness. He was indeed an ideal soldier.

The exact manner of his going is not known nor has his body been recovered. That he was at his post of duty, and bravely responded to the call, is all that is certainly known.

He died for his country's honor, and for her flag as truly as those who have perished upon her battle-fields; and when the Memorial month of May rolls around, and all nature is reminding us of our obligations to the patriotic dead,

the people will remember with flowers and tears the unmarked grave of this Martyr of the Maine.

Darwin R. Merritt is Iowa's first contribution to the defense of American citizenship upon Cuban soil, and to final intervention in an unrighteous and cruel war.

JUDGE JOSEPH WILLIAMS, OF IOWA.—This gentleman, distinguished for great versatility of talent, paraded with the volunteers of Bloomington, Iowa, and marched at the head, playing the fife. The Judge is a perfect specimen of a happy man. He is a devout member of the Methodist Church, and attends scrupulously to his religious duties. He is, also, one of the best temperance lecturers we ever heard; Judge of the 2d District, Iowa; Associate Judge of the Supreme Court; a fine poet; a superior musician; fifer for the Texas volunteers; the tallest kind of a companion we ever met at the social board;—and he tells the best story of any humorist of the day. "Alas! poor Yorick."—*St. Louis Organ, June 8, 1846.*

IMPORTANT MAIL IMPROVEMENT.—By a letter from the Post Office Department to the Hon. A. C. Dodge, in reply to an application made by him on the 23d of February last, we learn that the Post Master General has directed the local agent of the Department at Saint Louis, to engage the transportation of the mail by steamboats, twice a week from Saint Louis to Keokuck, Iowa, commencing as soon as practicable, and to continue for five months, at which time it will be discontinued, unless it shall yield at least the expenditure involved in the improvement. By this arrangement the Eastern and Southern mails will reach Iowa from three to five days earlier than at present.—*Bloomington Herald, May 5, 1843.*

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