



Texas Navy Association

Historical Article



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Navy members gather to commemorate history

It was 153 years ago that Texas won its independence, helped by the victories of the First and Second Texas Navies.

To commemorate the event, Commissioned Admirals of the Third Texas Navy, and their ladies, gathered at the San Luis Hotel in Galveston.

According to Admiral John M. Thiel, M.D., Chief of Naval Operations, the purpose of today's Texas Navy is to preserve the memory and sea-borne valor of those who helped create the Lone Star State.

Principal speaker for the annual gathering was Lt. Cmdr. John M.

Shrewsbury, USN, Galveston Homeport Project Officer. His topic was "Navy Homeporting."

Presiding was Admiral W.R. (Billy Bob) Crim of Kilgore, who also served as master of ceremonies for the evening.

The Admirals and their guests gathered for a reception beginning at 7 p.m., followed by dinner.

Colors were posted by the U.S. Marine Corps, commanded by Capt. John M. Allison, U.S. Marine Corps Training Center, Ft. Point, Galveston.

The Very Rev. Charles Anastasiou, Texas Navy Chaplain, gave the invocation, followed by the

Pledge of Allegiance by Cpt. David K. Karey, USCG.

Presentation of the Texas Navy Admiral's Trophy to the winner of the Texas Ocean Racing Circuit Series for 1988, was by Admiral Thiel.

Participating in the meeting, in addition to the Navy and Marine Corps representatives, were officials from the Army, area Power Squadron and Yacht Clubs.

Receptionists for the affair were Mrs. Stephen L. Walter, Treasurer and Board Member, and Mrs. Luis A. Prada.

NAVIES OF TEXAS

In 1836 when Texas proclaimed its independence, the small nation was immediately faced with invasion, on land and sea by overwhelming forces from Mexico - a power having many times the population and naval and military resources of the infant Republic of Texas.

The army of Texas finally triumphed over its larger and much better equipped foe at San Jacinto but historians now agree that one of the most important elements in that great victory was the brief but furious maritime activity of the First Texas Navy.

The First Texas Navy, consisting of four hastily purchased and minimally equipped small sailing vessels headquartered at Galveston, prevented the Mexican government from landing a second army on the Texas Coast - an army which would have trapped General Sam Houston and his small command between immensely superior forces.

During a series of lightning forays in the Gulf of Mexico, the audacious Texas Ships *Independence*, *Brutus*, *Invincible* and *Liberty* kept the Mexican coast in an uproar and forced the much larger enemy navy to disperse its strength in order to protect its cities and shipping.

The Texans thus prevented Mexican ships from supplying Santa Anna and in the process captured munitions which were then delivered to Houston's army and used to help win the victory at San Jacinto.

Shortly after that triumph, the First Texas Navy was disbanded; its task completed.

Mexico refused to acknowledge Texas' independence, and in 1839 began to organize a new and much larger expedition against the struggling and nearly bankrupt Texas Republic.

The Texas Congress was equal to the occasion, however, and with six hurriedly acquired vessels, the

Second Texas Navy was sent to sea under the command of young Commodore Edwin Moore, formerly of the U.S. Navy. Sometimes nearly starving, often maintained by the personal credit of its commander and the Secretary of the Navy, S. Rhodes Fisher and by its captures of Mexican ships and cargoes, the Texans repeated the tactics of the First Texas Navy on a larger scale.

The Second Texas Navy harried the Mexican coast from Rio Grande to Yucatan for three strenuous years and dominated the Mexican fleet which was largely commanded by mercenary officers on furlough from Britain's Royal Navy. Keeping the initiative by seizing and raiding the burning Mexican cities and shipping, and making reckless attacks without regard to odds or size of ships, the Navy kept the enemy government on the defensive; too busy trying to protect its own coast to be able to mount a land invasion of Texas.

Finally, fighting off a much larger Mexican naval force off Yucatan - a battle unique because it marked the only known occasion on which a sailing war ship engaged and defeated a war steamer - the exploits of the sea-going Texans forced the abandonment of the Mexican invasion plans. The Second Texas Navy maintained the sovereignty of the Republic on the high seas without great difficulty thereafter until Texas joined the United States in 1845.

The Texas Navy was then absorbed by the United States Navy.

The story of the hardship and savage fighting of those small fleets of battered ships and intrepid seamen was largely forgotten until the Third Texas Navy was established as a commemorative organization by Governor Price Daniel in 1958.

The headquarters of the Texas Navy was returned to its original base at Galveston by Governor Preston Smith in January 1970.

A move designed to assure the survival of Texas' Naval History. Today, Texans and others who are interested in preserving the history, rights, boundaries, water resources and civil defense of Texas are banded together in the Third Texas Navy to help preserve the memory of the sea-borne valor of those who helped create the Lone Star State.