

# The Invincible

**Texas Navy Association Newsletter**

Fall 2012



Image: Emil Bunjes

## A Tale of Three “Witches”

[Serving the Early Texas Navy]



*Admiral Smith's ancestor Robert O. W. McManus owned the longboat “Water Witch”. Admiral Smith tells the story of the value the “Witch” played in the early Texas Navy. The following*

*article is an excerpt of Admiral Smith's full publication.*

By: Captain Lewis M. Smith, USN (Retired),  
Admiral in the Texas Navy

**I**t was a desperate time for Texians as the new year dawned in 1836. Determined to fight for their independence from Mexico, the struggle had already heated up the previous October. Volunteers had held their ground in Gonzales, then successfully evicted Mexican forces from their garrisons in Goliad and San Antonio where they recaptured the Alamo along with a thousand defenders.

Despite those successes, it appeared they would be strongly challenged, and soon. General Santa Anna was on the march from Mexico City leading 6,000 troops determined to take back the Alamo and Texas from the rebels. Very aware of the threat, the Texians were hard at work organizing under their newly selected Commander-in-Chief Sam

Houston and taking steps to control the coastline which was wide open to Mexican troop movements and supply operations.

Texas did not possess a single fighting vessel and funds to establish a navy were almost non-existent. To deal with the problem as best they could, the provisional government on November 16th determined their best course of action was to issue Letters of Marque and Reprisal to permit privateers to “harass the enemy...”. When few requests for letters materialized, the Committee on Naval Affairs, at the urging of Gov. Henry Smith, recommended the “creation of a Navy owned and controlled by Texas” on November 18th. Both measures were enacted by the Provisional Council and signed by the governor on November 25th.

One of the first privateering commissions was granted December 5th to Ira R. Lewis and other owners of the schooner William Robbins which had already been at work supporting the Texians. In the preceding month, the schooner responded to pleas of Matagorda's citizens to drive off Mexico's Montezuma and General Bravo, and assisted the recently armed schooner San Felipe, which had gone aground near Cavallo Pass, the main channel into Matagorda Bay.

With San Felipe wrecked, the Matagorda

Committee of Safety's fears were amplified until the General Council provided help by authorizing the purchase of the William Robbins as a navy vessel at its offer price of \$3,500. William Hurd, former commander of the San Felipe, was appointed Captain.

William Robbins' first and only mission under Captain Hurd was to come to the aid of the merchant schooner Hannah Elizabeth which had been driven aground at Cavallo Pass November 19th by the marauding Mexican schooner Bravo. Heavy seas had forced Bravo to remain off the coast, giving Capt. Hurd the opportunity to free the stranded prisoners and cargo from an 11-man prize crew.

Hurd and his crew accomplished the task with the help of Captain S. Rhoads Fisher and 20 volunteers from his Matagorda company. They captured the Mexican force with little resistance. Subsequent miscommunications and misinterpretations regarding the sale of Hannah Elizabeth's cargo, however, cost Captain Hurd his post and placed Captain Fisher under a cloud. Both were later fully exonerated and promoted: Hurd to command the impressive Texas Schooner Brutus in March and Fisher was appointed Secretary of the Navy in October.

Following the Hannah Elizabeth episode, the

Robbins underwent a much needed refit at Velasco under her new commander Jeremiah Brown. Once ready for sea, she set sail for New Orleans December 26th with several representatives of the Republic to undergo a further refit and conversion to a schooner of war. As the Matagorda transaction wasn't found to be acceptable in the Republic's eyes, William Robbins was finally purchased on behalf of the provisional government by underwriters McKinley and Williams at the Matagorda offer price. Soon renamed Liberty, there's no doubt it was something of a bargain at \$3,500 -- amounting to \$100 less than the "annual wage" of one of her first commanders under the Texas flag, William S. Brown (Jeremiah Brown's brother).

Soon after completion of the refit and recruiting a crew, Liberty set sail from New Orleans January 20th, again under the command of Jeremiah Brown, Texas schooner of war Liberty convoying four merchant vessels with cargos of munitions, equipment and provisions to Velasco for Gen. Houston's army.

Arriving there at about the same time was the 130-ton schooner of war Invincible which soon became the 2nd vessel to join the Texas Navy. Jeremiah Brown was named her first commander, while his brother William was appointed commander of the William Robbins/Liberty, effective February 1st.

### ***Enter Water Witch #1***

No record exists for the exact date a ship's boat named Water Witch was impressed and taken aboard the Liberty by Captain William Brown. Sworn documents, however, placed the occasion as "some time in February."

Although Water Witch, at the time it was impressed, was in the possession of Matagorda area pilot William Nye, later documents prove it was actually owned by Robert O. W. McManus who lived at Moss Bluff, near the town of Liberty on the Trinity River. While his boat was assisting the Texians at sea, McManus was serving with distinction in Gen. Houston's army with Erastus "Deaf" Smith's spy company.

Described as "an 8-oared, small sailing vessel," Water Witch fit the description of



a boat that would be ideal to support needs of the Liberty, including carrying crew and provisions from anchorage to shore or between other vessels. With limited deck space aboard, Water Witch was most likely

towed or attached to stern davits. She remained in the service of Liberty until after Captain Brown left the ship in May, when Liberty also left the service of the Republic. According to estimates requested from Captain Nye, Liberty Boatswain John Jefferys and Liberty Purser Henry Fisher, the value of Water Witch was placed at \$100 and the Republic paid Robert McManus that amount in May 1839.

Water Witch's service would prove crucial during Liberty's next enemy engagement as the schooner sailed southwest from Matagorda Bay February 13th seeking Mexican warships. On March 3rd, she approached the Mexican port of Sisal at the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula, spotting Mexican vessels in its offshore anchorage.

That night, Liberty crewmen and marines boarded and captured the Mexican three-gun schooner Pelicano during a brief, but vigorous battle. In all probability they were conveyed from the Liberty to the Pelicano by Water Witch along with another small boat forcibly pressed into service from a nearby American schooner. It was an incredibly risky action in that it took place within point-blank range of Sisal's garrison. Even though the Mexicans had anticipated an attack and taken elaborate precautions to prevent the Pelicano from being sailed away, Liberty's prize crew soon had her underway, headed homeward to Matagorda Bay.



Reaching Cavallo Pass on March 20th and guided by pilot Captain William Chase, Liberty had a safe passage into the bay, but Pelicano, following behind, strayed out of the channel and was wrecked.

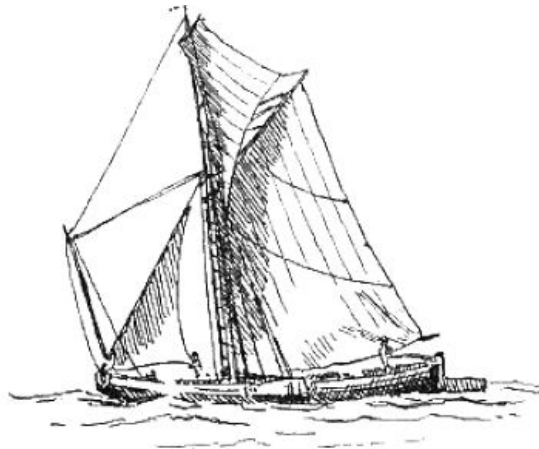
To handle this challenge, Captain Brown put Able Seaman Caleb Jefferys and 10 other crewmen ashore to manage the wreck and salvage as much of the cargo as possible. Most of the goods consisted of 600 barrels of flour, 460 of which were saved from the wreckage. A large portion of the barrels were later found to conceal 280 smaller kegs of gun powder -- a valuable prize that was later commended in a proclamation by Gen. Houston.

There were two other Water Witches: Water Witch #2 was also in the possession of Captain William Nye when pressed into government service. No question, though, the "Witches" were very dissimilar. Sworn documents describe #2 as the "lighter Water Witch" or simply "lighter" (A lighter usually being a wide, flat-bottom, barge-type sailing vessel designed to carry bulky cargos).

The main element setting Water Witch #3 apart from #1 and #2 is that Captain William Nye's name is not mentioned in any documents or claims associated with her. Rather, the claims for the use and loss of #3 were submitted by Captain William Chase, another Matagorda Bay pilot, who

had recently guided Liberty over the bar at Cavallo Pass on returning with the prize schooner Pelicano.

Chase's claim was also linked to Liberty and Captain Brown who impressed the vessel described variously as "the lighter Water Witch" and "the sloop Water Witch." Both terms could easily apply to a lighter with a



sloop rig which would be consistent with the nature of the cargos and tasks she was assigned. The reason for her being pressed by Brown was to carry items salvaged from the Pelicano along with some residents of Matagorda from Cox's Point in Matagorda Bay to Galveston.

## 1836 Gold Coin



Admiral David Ayres kindly shares a photo of his 1836 \$5 Gold Coin. He says the actual size of the coin is that of a U.S. nickel. It is amazing that one still exists today and very fitting that a Texas Navy Admiral would have it. Many thanks to Admiral Ayres for sharing with our members. And if you're wondering, it's not for sale.

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## Nautical Quiz

"What is a "Matthew Walker Knot?"  
a bowline  
a slipknot  
a stopper  
a bosun's chair  
a timber hitch  
a carrick bend

Answer on page 9

## Save Texas History Symposium



**T**he Texas General Land Office held their annual preservation and educational symposium hosted by our TNA Admiral and Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson in Austin on September 15, 2012. This year's topic was "Civil War in Texas". This year's event was attended by some of our TNA Admirals. From left to right: Admiral Jack Dyess, Admiral Jerry Patterson (Texas Land Commissioner), Admiral Richard McCaslin and Admiral Michael Brazell.

The symposium highlights different topics each year. To keep informed check out these symposiums by clicking [HERE](#)

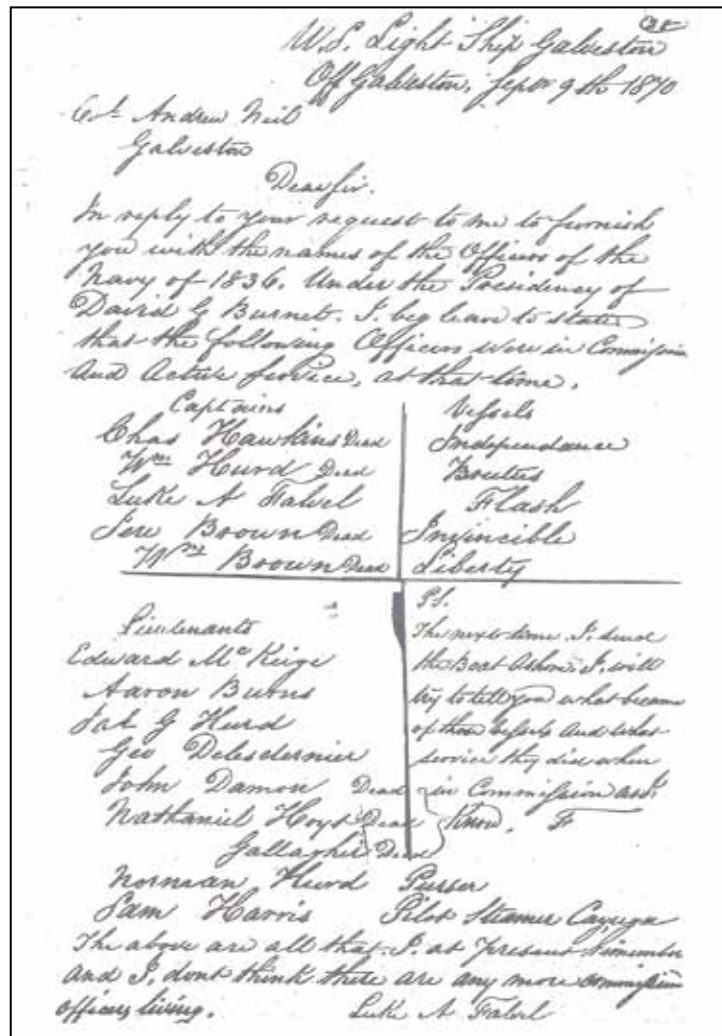
## TNA Admiral Receives Noteworthy Award



L-R - Texas Navy Admiral RADM John D. Butler, USN (Ret), Presenter; Texas Navy Admiral John Paul DeJoria, Lone Sailor Award recipient; VADM John Totushek, USNR (Ret), CEO & President of the U. S. Navy Memorial

**T**NA Admiral DeJoria was recognized for service to Country and Community at the United States Navy Memorial's 2012 Lone Sailor Awards Dinner Gala in Washington, D.C. on September 18, 2012.

The U.S. Navy Memorial through its ceremonies, band concerts, and other public offerings, honors and celebrates the service of Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Merchant Mariners. Admiral DeJoria served honorably in the U.S. Navy and now is best known for his world renown company, with Paul Mitchell, "John Paul Mitchell Systems". *Congratulations Admiral DeJoria!*



In April 1836 David G. Burnet, ad interim president of the new Republic of Texas, impressed the Cayuga for public service. The ship began transporting provisions to the Texas army and rescuing officials and citizens fleeing the advancing Mexican armies. On April 15 Captain Harris, in command of the steamer, evacuated Harrisburg just ahead of Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna and his troops. The refugees included President Burnet, his cabinet, and all the inhabitants of the town. (Source)

## 1870 List Of Officers Of The First Texas Navy

Submitted By: Admiral Curt Osborne

The image on the left is a note from the Captain of the Flash, Luke A. Falwel to Andrew Neil of Galveston, regarding Osborne's Great-Great-Great-Grandfather who served on the Cayuga which was also part of the first Navy of Texas. His name was George Delesdernier.

Dear Sir:

In reply to your request to me to furnish you with the names of the Officers of the Navy of 1836 under the Presidency of David C. Burnet. I beg leave to state that the following Officers were in commission and active service, at that time.

### Captains

Chas Hawkins Dead  
Wm Hurd Dead  
Luke A. Falwel  
Jere Brown Dead  
Wm Brown Dead

### Vessels

Independence  
Brutus  
Flash  
Invincible  
Liberty

### Lieutenants

Edward McKiege  
Aaron Burns  
Jak G. Hurd  
Geo Delesdernier  
John Damore Dead  
Nathaniel Lloyd Dead  
Gallagher Dead  
Norman Hurd  
Sam Harris

P.S.

The next time I secure the Boat Andrew, I will try to tell you what became of those vessels and what service they did when in commission as I know. F

Purser

Pilot Steamer Cayuga

The above are all that I at present remember and I dont think there are any more commission officers living.

Luke A. Falwel



## Haltom City, Texas Supports Texian Navy Day



## TNA Hat Still Like New



Admiral Doug McLeod says he seldom wears his 15+ year old hat so as not to wear it out. Doug enjoyed time with his youngest of 8 grandchildren this past August at Disney Land in California. In honor of the occasion he wore his BEST hat! Admiral McLeod was commissioned in 1977.

## On-Line Ships Store

Store Manager: Admiral Will Fisher, V



The Texas Navy Association Ships Store has experienced record sales last month. The new Challenge Coin was a huge success, so make sure you have your Challenge Coins so you are not caught without one if challenged by a TNA member or Admiral of the Texas Navy.

Our inventory will be replenished in plenty of time for the holiday season. A few new items for our Lady Admirals have been ordered, so keep checking the Ships Store. Don't forget to take advantage of the sale items as they will soon be gone!

Thanks for all your support.

## First Texas Navy In A Bottle

By: TNA Admiral John Hamlett

Admiral Hamlett loves Texas Navy history so much that he painstakingly recreated the First Texas Navy in a bottle. Giving a little insight to his love of making ships in a bottle he says, "During my Regular Navy career, I began to build wooden ship models from kits. Some of these took many months while another took several years to finish the way I wanted it to.

My dad continued to build his models and would actually build them from the keel up with meticulous care. All of his models were passed on to my children and grandchildren as were those that I had made.

Several years ago, a miniature "Pinch" bottle was given to me while I was flying back to Puerto Rico where I was stationed. I visualized a tiny sailing ship in this tiny bottle and began to build them whenever I could find a suitable bottle to use. This led to using the larger bottles with the "Pinch" being my favorite since they would accommodate a taller mast for the sailboats. I was never actually a small boat enthusiast, but my brother was. My ships were of the large grey variety that wouldn't fit very well in bottles! It is no secret as to how the models are placed in the bottles. They simply are constructed outside the bottles, but with each mast

erected with a tiny swivel which allows it to collapse aft. When I received a large square bottle recently, I thought of making it hold more than one ship and the four original Texas Navy ships came to mind.

Copying pictures of the four, I constructed four tiny ships as much to scale as possible and inserted them into the bottle onto a "sea"



of clay. I have a collection of tools that I use that range from pieces of bent coat hangers, to ten inch long tweezers narrow enough to fit through the neck of the bottle. My tool kit resembles that of a dentist with all the other picks, probes, and scissors. Everything constructed on the outside must be able to pass through the neck of the bottle or it simply won't go in.

Many a time I had to rub out and start over to make the whole thing slide through. Try as I may, I still can't get my fingers through the outside of the bottle when I am trying to place a boat on the inside!

Most of my models are given to my family, but a couple still remain with me. I've always said that it is fun to make the ships in the bottles, but it's much more fun emptying the bottles.

Those pictured are not of my best quality, but others have been displayed at various events here in Richardson".



(R) TNA Admiral John Hamlett aboard the USS Fort Worth in Galveston with grandson (L) Luke Hamlett.



## What's Happening With The Battleship Texas?

By: Admiral Will Fisher, IV

On July 17, 2012, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Navy hosted the fourth consultation meeting as required under NHPA. This meeting provided consulting parties with an update on the recent flooding events on board the Texas, and an overview of the anticipated ship repairs planned for the ship. I have been attending



these meetings on behalf of the TNA as a TPWD/USN consulting party.

For over five years the TNA has monitored the situation with the Battleship Texas by having members attend numerous meetings. The Battleship Texas actually took on over 1,000,000 gallons of water from many leaks in the hull in June 2012. The ship sank to the bottom of the slip and listed 6 degrees to the Port side. For more details this link was prepared by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. You can lick [HERE](#) for a comprehensive report.

The overall deterioration of BB35 is very severe. The support

structures for the two huge steam turbine engines are so wasted the engines could at any minute break through the bottom sinking the ship. If that were to happen other very important structural elements within the ship are so decayed that the ship could come apart. Therefore, TPWD plans to use approximately \$23,000,000 it has on hand to partially repair the interior structural elements. New money will be needed to repair the hull in order to stop the leaks and preserve the ship for the long term.

For more details a report was prepared by one of the World's leading ship surveyors/consultants. The Lombardi report on Emergency Structural Repairs will be available soon and that will allow the State to take bids for the described repairs in place at San Jancinto. Click [HERE](#) for the link to the USS Texas Hull Assessment Report.



After the TNA Board receives a copy of the Lombardi report on the recommended internal repairs the TNA Board will meet to discuss what our association might be able to do to help save the Battleship Texas for the future.

Nautical Quiz Answer

A Stopper

## Texas Navy Admirals Attend USS Fort Worth Commissioning



The USS Fort Worth was commissioned in Galveston on September 22, 2012. Charles Harrison, Texas Navy Admiral and Commander of the Captain Jeremiah Brown Squadron, presented the crew of the USS Fort Worth with a replica of the famous Navy Colt along with a little Texas Navy History:

“In 1843 the Texas Navy was effectively down to two wooden sailing ships commanded by a former US Navy officer, Edwin Moore. Campeche was blockaded by an enemy force of 12 warships, two of which were the newest and most powerful warships of the world at that time. These two warships were steam-powered. One was an iron-clad warship. Each carried cannon twice as powerful and with twice the range of any in the Texas Navy.

Never mind, Commodore Moore took his two ships to break the blockade, and break it he did. At one point in the battle he positioned his vessel between the two most powerful warships in the world, and, firing broadsides from port and starboard, he whipped them, saving both Texas and Yucatan from invasion. Never before or since has history seen a victory of fighting sail over powered warships.

Sam Colt was so impressed that he carved the battle in steel on the cylinder of his 1851 pistol. This was the famous Navy Colt. It was the Navy Colt that won the west, carried by the Texas Rangers and such men as Wild Bill Hickok. The Navy Colt was relied on by the US Army, the Confederate Army, the British Army, the British Navy, and by countless others.

The Captain Jeremiah Brown Squadron of Texas Navy Admirals of Fort Worth presents this Navy Colt replica to the crew of the USS Fort Worth as a commemoration of that naval victory that is the heritage of both the Texas Navy and of the United States Navy. I have no doubt but that it will serve as an inspiration and reminder of what Grit and Tenacity can do to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds.

Sir, the Navy Colt”.

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## Welcome Aboard Admirals!

Newly commissioned Admirals Ann Shafer and Admiral Ejike Okpa, II received their commissions as Admirals in the Texas Navy and also caught a mention in the local Bridgeport Index.

The commissions were presented on August 18, 2012 in Dallas. Admiral Ann Shafer was the guest speaker for the evening and she is also a direct descendant of the second secretary of the Texas Navy, Samuel Rhoads Fisher.

*Congratulations and Welcome aboard Admirals!*



Admiral Shafer

Admiral Okpa

## TNA License Plates

“For Admirals Only”. You can help support the TNA by buying a personalized license plate proudly displaying the TNA Logo. To order click on this link: [www.myplates.com](http://www.myplates.com)

Click on: Create a plate  
Choose a category: Luxury Series  
Select: Texas Navy plate in the  
“Sponsored Organizations”



Image submitted by: TNA Admiral D.A. Sharpe



## USCG Corpus Christi Presents Commissions

Submitted by: Admiral Mark Underhill

**A**t a recent ALL HANDS on Wed., 26 SEPT 2012.

On the right CAPT Samuel Creech, Commander, Sector Corpus Christi is presenting Auxiliarist Charles Dekle his Certificate as Admiral in the Texas Navy.



**A**dmiral Jamie DeSanno (R) (Officer In Charge Coast Guard Station Port O'Conner) presented Admiral Peter Davidson (Marina Superintendent, City of Corpus Christi) his Admiral in the Texas Navy commission certificate.

The presentation was during Coast Guard Sector Corpus Christi's Chief's Call on September 20, 2012 in the Chief's Mess (Building) at Hanger 41 on Naval Air Station Corpus Christi.

The presentation was in recognition of Mr. Davison's support to the men and women of Coast Guard Sector Corpus Christi.

*Congratulations and welcome aboard Admirals!*

## New TNA Technology Committee Member



**M**ichael G. Hubmer is a Systems Engineer for Astrium North America. In this position he does flight software verification for the International Space Station Columbus Science Module and ESA's ATV resupply vehicle. He works closely with the European, Russian, and Japanese international partners.

Michael served in United States Army between 1987 and 1991, serving as a Cryptographic Repair Specialist and is a Desert Storm veteran.

Michael is a graduate of Sam Houston State University and studied in Industrial Electronics and Computer Science.

He is an Eagle Scout and is currently a cub scout den leader. Michael resides with his wife Terrie and son in Houston, Texas.

We welcome Michael as a member of our technology team and know he will do a great job working with our Technology Chair Admiral Jim Tyson.



**S**outh Shore Harbour has blocked off rooms for \$99/room for the night of the event. Invitations have been printed and will be mailed soon to all current members of the TNA. Book a table and bring guests who may be interested in joining the TNA.

## Mark Your Calendar

### *November Member Meeting*

When: 1 p.m. on Saturday November 3, 2012

Where: Texas General Land Office  
1700 N. Congress Ave.  
Austin, TX 78701-1495

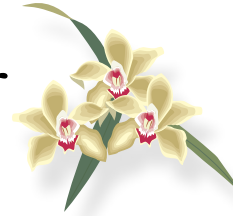
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### *December Member Meeting*

When: 1 p.m. on Saturday December 15, 2012  
(Same day as the Christmas Party)

Where: Texas Corinthian Yacht Club  
104 Park Cir, Kemah, TX 77565

*In Memory Of*



Admiral Caryl Weiss

*Fair Winds and Following Seas!*



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