

## TEXIAN NAVY DAY

The third Saturday in September of each year is Texian Navy Day. Texans are encouraged to fly their Texas flags and observe the day in remembrance of the Texian Navy and the courage displayed by those at sea who played a vital role in securing and maintaining the independence of Texas.

The Texian Navy was mostly forgotten for more than one hundred years. In 1954, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (D.R.T.) designated a day to honor the Texian Navy and on the motion by members from Nacogdoches, D.R.T. leaders took the idea for state recognition to Governor Alan Shivers. In 1955, Governor Shivers proclaimed September 3 as Texian Navy Day. Governors since have proclaimed recognition of a Texian Navy Day or Texian Navy Week, and on June 27, 2005, Governor Rick Perry signed Senate Bill 318 making permanent recognition of the Texian Navy part of the Texas Government code. The bill, entitled "An Act relating to creating a day in remembrance of the Texian Navy," was sponsored by Senator Todd Staples and State Representative Chuck Hopson. It states, "the third Saturday in September of each year is Texian Navy Day in remembrance of the Texian Navy;" and also, "that Texian Navy Day shall be regularly observed by appropriate ceremonies and activities." Why is Texian Navy Day important? Historians have only recently begun to adequately study and write about Texas naval activities, but a bit of Texas history can help to explain its importance.

Three Texas Navies have served Texans since 1835: the first was established on November 25, 1835; the second in 1839; and the third, a commemorative organization, in 1958. Though the fleets were very small and the time of service very short, the

contributions made by the Texas Navy to the freedom and protection of Texans should not be overlooked.

In the fight for independence, the first naval engagement of the Texas Revolution occurred in September 1835 near Velasco. A Texian privateer, the *San Felipe*, met the Mexican war schooner, the *Correo*, resulting in Texian victory and the unconditional surrender of the Mexican ship. Shortly thereafter, the First Texas Navy was commissioned which consisted of four ships that were quickly acquired in January 1836: *the Liberty, the Independence, the Brutus, and the Invincible*. Headquartered at Galveston, the First Texas Navy protected the coastline and prevented the Mexican Army from landing soldiers and supplies on Texas soil. The Texas Navy also provided much needed munitions to Sam Houston and the Texas Army from Mexican vessels they captured. The impact of denying re-supply to Santa Anna certainly contributed to the Texan victory at San Jacinto. Following Texas' independence on April 21, 1836, the navy continued until mid-1837, by which time all four ships had been lost: one was sold, one was captured, and two were wrecked.

Because Mexico had refused to recognize Texas' independence, Texans were constantly fearful of invasion. The Republic of Texas Congress realized the need for and authorized a larger navy in 1837 with a contract for six new ships to be built in Baltimore. The Second Texas Navy was formally organized in March 1839 when a steamship, the *Zavala*, was commissioned. The six new ships arrived to join the *Zavala* between June 1839 and April 1840: *the San Jacinto, the San Antonio, the San Bernard, the Wharton, the Austin, and the Archer*. The Second Texas Navy patrolled the Gulf of Mexico for three years, protecting the Texas coastline and dominating the Mexican naval

fleet. However, the Republic of Texas lacked the funds to maintain the navy. Sailors endured many hardships, including starvation, disease, and lack of pay. Once the fears of another Mexican invasion had subsided, the Texas Congress passed an act in January 1843 authorizing the sale of the navy. The citizens of Galveston were so enraged that they attended the auction and forcibly prevented any bids from being submitted. Thus, the Texan Navy remained with the Republic of Texas until it was transferred into the United States Navy after annexation. Though officers in the Texan Navy also wanted to transfer, U.S. naval officers were opposed. The Second Texan Navy ended when the last claims of surviving Texan naval officers were settled in 1857.

The Third Texas Navy was established on April 21, 1958 by Governor Price Daniel. In ceremonies held at San Jacinto on the Battleship Texas, he proclaimed the reactivation of the Texas Navy as a patriotic organization and an arm of the civil defense of the State of Texas. In 1972, the Texas Navy was chartered as a non-profit organization, and in 1973, the Texas Navy, Inc. was formed by an act of the Texas Legislature as the official state unit to conduct affairs of the Texas Navy. Now known as the Texas Navy Association, the organization is devoted to preserving Texas naval history and promoting an appreciation of the heroic achievements of the Texas Navies.

*(Space reserved for information about local ceremonies or activities for the current year in your area.)*

Texian Navy Day is one of twelve Texas Honor Days designated by The Daughters of the Republic of Texas. The D.R.T. is the oldest women's patriotic organization in Texas and is dedicated to the preservation and education of Texas

history. For more information on Texian Navy Day, Texas Honor Days, and the work of the D.R.T., please visit the website at [www.drinfo.org](http://www.drinfo.org)

Sources and Links:

The Daughters of the Republic of Texas, Texas Honor Days, [www.drinfo.org](http://www.drinfo.org); Texas Navy, Texas Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qjt02>; Linda Ericson Devereaux, *The Texas Navy (Nacogdoches, 1983)*; Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, <http://www.gthcenter.org>; Stone Fort Chapter History, Stone Fort Chapter, Ancestor Biographies, Daughters of the Republic of Texas, Historical Publications, Inc., Austin, Texas; Samuel Murray Robinson, *A Brief History of the Texas Navies*, (Houston: Sons of the Republic of Texas) <http://www.texasnavy.com/History/TNAHistoricalGeneral.html#>; Texas Navy, Introduction, Texas State Library and Archives, <https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/exhibits/navy/index.html>; Legislative Reference Library of Texas, <http://www.legis.state.tx.us/billlookup/text.aspx?LegSess=79R&Bill=SB318>