

# The Texas Navy

The **Texas Navy** was the official navy of the [Republic of Texas](#). It was created to protect and defend the coastline of Texas and offer protection for the shipping and trade that was desperately needed for the growing republic.<sup>[1]</sup>

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## Revolutionary Texas Navy



The first ensign of the Republic of Texas adopted via executive order issued by President David G. Burnet on April 9, 1836<sup>[2]</sup>

Under the command of Commodore [Charles Edward Hawkins](#)<sup>[3]</sup> they helped win independence by preventing a Mexican blockade of the [Texas](#) coast, seizing dozens of Mexican fishing vessels and sending their cargoes on to the [Texas volunteer army](#). During the [Texas Revolution](#), government officials in [Washington-on-the-Brazos](#), decided to establish an official navy. In January 1836, agents purchased four [schooners](#): *[Invincible](#)*, *[Brutus](#)*, *[Independence](#)*, and *[Liberty](#)*.<sup>[4]</sup> According to [Teddy Roosevelt](#), the Texas Navy succeeded in preventing reinforcements and provisions at their naval base at [Matamoros](#) from reaching General [Santa Anna](#)'s forces then occupying Texas. This forced Santa Anna to disperse his large army, to forage for food and supplies. This in turn is what led to his [defeat at San Jacinto](#) by General [Sam Houston](#), as he was outnumbered.

By the October 1837, all of the ships had been lost at sea, sunk by the [Mexican Navy](#), run aground, captured, or sold, and replacements were being procured.

# Texas Navy of the Republic



The National Flag of Texas served as the official flag of the Texas Navy from January 25, 1839 until the Republic of Texas joined the United States on February 19, 1846 and the Texas Navy was formally abolished<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1839, in response to Mexico's continued refusal to acknowledge the independence of the Republic of Texas, the Texas Congress acquired six new vessels and placed them under the command of [Commodore Edwin Moore](#), a lieutenant in the United States Navy, who left for the opportunity to lead the Texas Navy. The six vessels were known as the second Texas Navy.<sup>[3]</sup> For three years the Texas Navy raided the Mexican coast and kept the Mexican fleet focused on defending its own coastline. In the [Naval Battle of Campeche](#) on 16 May 1843 the Texas Navy sloop-of-war [Austin](#) and brig [Wharton](#), supported by ships from the rebellious Mexican State of [Yucatan](#) (then the [Republic of Yucatán](#)), engaged Mexican naval vessels, including the steamships [Montezuma](#) and [Guadalupe](#). This battle is believed to be unique, marking the only occasion in which a sailing warship engaged and fought a war steamer to a draw.<sup>[5]</sup> The battle, which raged over several days, was a tactical draw, but a strategic victory for the Texan Navy, which forced the Mexicans to lift their blockade of Campeche and assured security in the meantime for the rebels in Yucatan. Other ships of the Texas Navy at the time included the [brigs](#) [Potomac](#) and [Archer](#), the [schooners](#) [San Jacinto](#), [San Antonio](#) and the [San Bernard](#), and the [Zavala](#), the first steamship-of-war in North America.<sup>[4]</sup>

When Texas joined the [United States](#) in 1846, the Texas Navy was merged into the [United States Navy](#).

## Texas Navy 1958



The ceremonial flag of the Texas Navy Association

In 1958 Governor Price Daniel reactivated the Texas Navy with headquarters in Houston. They held Annual Admiral Balls at the [Houston Yacht Club](#) and the Governor would review the fleet each year at the [San Jacinto Monument](#). The fleet consisted of every conceivable type of vessel from luxury cruisers to canoes. Officers were selected on their merits and commissioned by the Governor as Admirals in the Texas Navy.

The Texas Navy, Inc., dba the Texas Navy Association, was formed under the authority of the Texas Secretary of State in 1972. The Association was formed as a non-profit organization devoted to preserving the history of the Texas Navy. The headquarters moved from Houston to Galveston, Texas in 1973. Membership is open to anyone who holds a commission as an Admiral in the Texas Navy from a Governor of the State of Texas.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Denial of land grants for veterans of the Texas Navy

Land promised in advance of military service is called a bounty,<sup>[7]:45</sup> which is a military tradition dating back beyond the Roman Empire, and was a well established tradition in American military history prior to hostilities in Texas during the revolution. The founders of the Republic of Texas attempted to bolster recruitment into the armed forces through the generous inducement of land for military service. The policy in Texas was inconsistent, as not all Texas veterans were treated equally. Veterans of the Texas Navy, due to political rivalries, were excluded from taking part in the land-granting policies, or “unnecessary extravagance”, as it was explained by President Sam Houston at the time of his veto.<sup>[8]</sup>

Texas passed its first bounty act on November 24, 1835, when the general council created a regular army and promised those who served in it for two years 640 acres (2.6 km<sup>2</sup>) of land.<sup>[9]</sup> After the revolution, the Texas government distributed the public lands, especially to veterans. In all, 9,874,262 acres (39,959.72 km<sup>2</sup>) was granted to veterans of the Texas army, or to Confederate soldiers in Texas.<sup>[7]:54</sup> Not one of those nearly 10 million acres (40,000 km<sup>2</sup>) was granted for naval service, despite the importance of naval actions in the Gulf during the revolution. “The fact remains that Texas could not have won her independence and maintained it as she did, without the navy,” said Texas Navy historian Alex Dienst.<sup>[10]</sup>

It has been said that if the United States was Texas’s biological parent, then shipping lanes from New Orleans were the umbilical cord that kept the rebellion alive during its embryonic months.<sup>[11]</sup> Historians point out that the Texas Navy was of vital importance to the war effort with approximately three-fourths of all troops, supplies and cash originating from the ports of New Orleans.<sup>[10]</sup> It was seen as nearly impossible for commerce to go through any other channels into Texas other than by ship due to the impractical nature of crossing Louisiana swamplands, and the “Big Thicket” of East Texas. Navy vessels protected against marauding Mexican warships looking to cut the cord that flowed to Texas through Galveston, keeping the fledgling war effort, and eventually the Republic, alive.

Additionally, military leaders knew the importance of the Texas coast to winning a revolution, or quashing a rebellion. In fact, Mexican General Vicente Filisola remarked, “...the posts of Texas are not sustainable, whilst a maritime force does not co-operate with the operations of the land service.”<sup>[11]</sup> On the other side, Commander James Fannin, in an August 1835 letter, wrote that provisions were scarce for the Mexican army on dry land. He requested naval assistance to the army, asking: “Where is your navy?” He pointed out that if Texas ships could block access to ports, “they [the Mexicans] are ruined.”

Despite the importance of the Texas Navy to the Texas Revolution, politics got in the way of rewarding Navy veterans with bounty land grants when President Sam Houston, against legislative support, denied land grants to navy veterans in 1842.

The battle for bounty lands was a political struggle that culminated six years after the revolution, but had roots that stretched back to 1835. Naval policy was another in a long line of differing views between Sam Houston and Mirabeau Lamar. Lamar preferred an aggressive naval policy that encouraged raids around the Gulf of Mexico to intimidate the enemy. Houston, on the other hand, preferred a more acquiescent naval policy that encouraged ships to stay close to shore, protecting ports for industry and commerce.

These disagreements led to inconsistent policies during the Republic era, as Lamar and Houston traded the presidency back and forth. Robert Potter, a Senator, and the one-time Secretary of the Navy, and Senator James Webb proposed a resolution that would allow bounty land to be granted to navy veterans on November 4, 1841. It was noted in the November 18, 1841 edition of the *San Augustine Red-Lander* that this “Resolution will meet with much opposition in both Houses, and a warm discussion is expected.” After the resolution was passed, it was presented to President Sam Houston, who vetoed the bill on January 6, 1842.<sup>[12]</sup>

In Houston's veto message, the President paid tribute to the “exalted Gallantry and distinguished bravery” of the men who went to sea on behalf of the Republic, but he would “not sanction injudicious and unnecessary extravagance” on their behalf. Houston went on to say, “Generally, the seaman has no interest (except a transitory one) on shore.” He explained that a people who made their living at sea would pay no attention to improving land granted to them. He believed that to give a land grant to a navy veteran would not benefit the country to any degree, explaining that, “The harpies that are generally found in sea-ports, and to whom seamen usually become indebted, are those only who would profit by the bounty and munificence of the Government.”

Houston further explained that it was traditional that the sailor receives his pay, and also receives prize money for capturing enemy vessels. “The sailor has his bounty and prize money as incentives to enlistment and continuance in the service; none expect more,” he said. “If moreover, a fleet be in the vicinity of a land army, its co-operation is always supposed, and it accordingly participates in the spoils of victory. If, on the other hand, the victory be achieved by the fleet, the reverse is the case; the Naval corps alone enjoy the entire reward of success.”

Houston also claimed that “the sailors who would have claims are either dead or scattered to the winds of heaven.” However, army veterans and their heirs were eligible to receive bounty land whether they lived or died. Houston continued, “If bounty land were granted, the few who survived would deem it valueless, because not one of them would be willing to penetrate the wilderness in quest of a place to locate it, some hundreds of miles beyond the frontiers; and rather than make the attempt, they would be willing to sell it for a trifle.”

Infuriated by the complete disdain that the “Navy hating” President of the Republic had shown, Robert Potter re-introduced a joint resolution on January 25, 1842 that would hopefully pass over the President’s veto, authorizing the Secretary of War and Navy to issue certificates of bounty land to the officers, seamen, and marines of the Navy.<sup>[13]</sup> Despite Potter’s reputation as a good steward of public land and his continual support of the navy, his arguments fell upon deaf ears as he continued to push the issue, to no success.<sup>[14]</sup> The issue was tabled as President Houston ran

out the clock on the bounty land for navy veterans' bill, and the issue would never be broached again.

## References

1. [Jump up](#) ^ [Garrison, 1910](#) p.1
2. ^ [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Spain, Jr., Charles A. (February 1992). "[Flags and Seals of Texas](#)". *South Texas Law Review* **33** (1): 215–259. Retrieved 2013-03-03.
3. ^ [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> [Texas Navy Association - Historical - People](#)
4. ^ [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> [Texas Navy Association - Historical - Ships](#)
5. [Jump up](#) ^ [http://www.texasnavy.com/History/Articles/Commodore\\_Moore\\_and\\_the\\_Battle\\_of\\_Campeche.pdf](http://www.texasnavy.com/History/Articles/Commodore_Moore_and_the_Battle_of_Campeche.pdf)
6. [Jump up](#) ^ [Texas Navy Association - Historical - General Information](#)
7. ^ [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Miller, Thomas Lloyd. 1972. *The Public Lands of Texas: 1519-1970*. Texas A&M University Press.
8. [Jump up](#) ^ Harkins, James. 2011. *The Denial of a Sailors Bounty*. *Saving Texas History Newsletter*. Pp. 4–5. Archives and Records, Texas General Land Office
9. [Jump up](#) ^ Gammels Laws, I, 925. The amount of land given in bounty land grants changed over the years; however, it was eventually settled that 320 acres would be given for every three months of military service, up to 1280 acres, or the equivalent of one year in service.
10. ^ [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Dienst, Alex. 2007. *The Texas Navy*. Fireship Press.
11. ^ [Jump up to:](#) <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Jordan, Jonathan W. 2006. *Lone Star Navy: Texas, The Fight for the Gulf of Mexico, and the Shaping of the American West*. Potomac Books, Inc. Washington DC.
12. [Jump up](#) ^ Smither, Harriet (Editor). *Journals of the Sixth Congress of the Republic of Texas, 1841-1842*, Volume 1. November 3, 1841. Page 6.
13. [Jump up](#) ^ Smither, Harriet (Editor). *Journals of the Sixth Congress of the Republic of Texas, 1841-1842*, Volume 1. January 7, 1842. Page 210.
14. [Jump up](#) ^ Fischer, Ernest C. 2006. *Robert Potter: Founder of the Texas Navy*. Pelican Publishing.

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