



TEXAS HEARTBEAT

Belated Recognition of Battle Of Velasco, Texas' Pearl Harbor

By ED KILMAN

Willy-nilly, we seem to have become a recruiting officer for the Texian Navy.

First, an item about the second Texas Navy brought demands for recognition of the first navy. Then a plug for the projected Texian Navy museum on the Battleship Texas brought a plea for support of a competing naval museum at Brazosport.



This thing is getting out of hand. It's bigger than both of our navies. Joe Jenkins suggests, "Let's get up a third Texian Navy." That may be the solution.

Austin's Near-Capture

Mrs Adele Perry Caldwell of Freeport is a great-granddaughter of Stephen F. Austin's sister, Mrs James F. Perry. Austin lived with his sister and Mr Perry at Peach Point, just a few miles from where her great-granddaughter lives, 120 years later.

Mrs Caldwell also is state chairman of Texian Navy Day for the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. In that capacity she is working for the development of a museum near the scene of the battle of Velasco, the first naval engagement of the Texas Revolution. It was fought at the mouth of the Brazos on Sept 2, 1835.

"It was," says Mrs Caldwell, "as decisive a battle for the Republic of Texas as Pearl Harbor was for World War II."

The merchant schooner San Felipe was entering the mouth of the Brazos, bringing Stephen F. Austin and Lorenzo de Zavala from New Orleans. The Mexican gunboat Correo-Mexicano tried to capture the San Felipe.

Thomas F. McKinney, owner of the San Felipe and the small steamer Laura, took over command of the San Felipe and the Laura. He organized a force of riflemen for action against the Correo and other small Mexican vessels. They repulsed the Mexicans and forced their ship against a sand bar. Thus Austin, the father of Texas, and de Zavala, vice president ad interim of the Republic of Texas, were saved from capture by the Mexicans.

Padre Muldoon

There was an earlier naval battle at Velasco, in June, 1832. When Col Bradburn, commander of the Mexican fort at Anahuac, imprisoned W. B. Travis, Patrick Jack, and about 15 other colonists, an expedition was organized at Brazoria to liberate them.

A company led by Capt John Austin started down the Brazos with a boat and a cannon, bound for Anahuac. But Lt Col Ugartechea, in charge of the Mexican fort at Velasco, guarding the river's mouth, refused to let them pass into the sea.

It was here that Padre Michael Muldoon, the colonists' first regular marrying and burying parson, interceded. Father Muldoon, who was under the Mexican Catholic Church, visited Ugartechea in an effort to settle the trouble. The Mexican commander rejected his overtures, boasting that 10,000 riflemen could not dislodge him.

Next day the colonists

sailed their boat past the fort, and the battle ensued. Many were killed and wounded, but the Texans were victorious.

Padre Muldoon also offered himself as a hostage to Bradburn, for the release of the prisoners at Anahuac. John Austin replied that it was not in his power to halt the march of the colonists. But, he added, "you will always have a warm friend and protector . . . in your devoted parishioner, John Austin."

Two Texian Navy Day programs at Freeport have stirred a lively interest in the museum. Plans for a third program, for the first week in September, are in the making.

Mrs Caldwell thinks the Velasco-Freeport area is a more appropriate place for a naval museum than the San Jacinto battleground area, but she says, "More power to Adm Robinson's efforts. All we can get together and save for posterity, the better."

Pumpkin Head Game

From one of Sam Woolford's yarns, K. C. Cates of Velasco thinks he may have gained a clue to the origin of another maritime conflict of sorts.

Mr Cates is an ardent student of Mexican and Texas history. He goes to Mexico periodically to study original sources in the archives. He says:

"Mr Woolford told a variation of one of my favorite stories from Mexico's ancient history. His Indian submerged himself in the water to catch ducks, using a reed to breathe through. Mine baited a place with pumpkins in the Lake of Texcoco, in Mexico. After the ducks learned to eat the pumpkins, he hollowed one out and put his head in it. Standing neck deep in water, he caught the fowls with his hands."