



Texas Navy Association

Historical Article



Have you ever been to Cozumel, Texas?

Well you may have been there and not even realized it. The last voyage of the INVINCIBLE and the BRUTUS was also the last voyage for the first Texas Navy. They were the last of the four ship fleet that wreaked havoc on the coastal towns along the Mexican coast, blockaded Mexican ports and took as prizes ships bound for Mexico delivering goods and munitions of war. They also did not allow merchant ships to leave port with Mexican goods. Among those on board the INVINCIBLE was Secretary of the Navy, S. Rhoads Fisher, who had requested some "time off for personal business" from President Sam Houston.

The other two ships of the first Texas Navy were the INDEPENDENCE that was captured by the Mexican navy off Velasco, and the LIBERTY who fell victim to creditors for her much needed repairs in New Orleans.

The flag shown above is that of the first Texas Navy and was called

the "Hawkins flag" after the first Commodore of the Texas Navy, Charles Hawkins, who was the victim of Smallpox and died in a boarding house on Canal Street in New Orleans. The flag has also been referred to as the "Burnet flag" for David G. Burnet, Interim President of the fledgling Republic.

This is the "Star Spangled Banner" referred to in the reports of acting Commodore Henry Livingston Thompson of the INVINCIBLE and Captain James D. Boylan of the BRUTUS. These two reports reflect the action of the remaining two ships of the first Texas navy on their final voyage in service of the Republic of Texas. Captain Boylan like the area so much he was to later take command of the navy of the State of Yucatan.

Copies of the original are attached from the Archives of the State of Texas in Austin and their file numbers are 401-1309-4 and 401-1309-11. They can be viewed by clicking on the buttons shown.

Had the Congress of the Republic of Texas acted on their flag raising and the proclamation of Captain Thompson..... Cozumel might just be the Southernmost County of what is now The Great State of Texas! Just think of the tourist dollars we are losing!

- Admiral Walter Nass

Report of Commodore Henry L. Thompson on the cruise of *The Invincible* - June 11, 1837 - August 29, 1837

To The Honorable Navy Department
Schooner of War Brutus

I have the honor of making a brief report relative to my cruise in command of the Texian Fleet. I left this place after my return from carrying the Schr Texas down the Matagorda on the 11th June after dispatching a boat from the Brutus in charge of a warrant officer with letters and dispatches from S. Rhoads Fisher Esq. The officer and boat having returned on Board at about 1 o'clock in the morning without any reply from the shore, and my fleet lying at anchor in an open Roadstead and much exposed to the sea, I saw proper to get under way and stand to sea. I proceeded on our cruise off the Balize where we remained two days without success. We then shaped our course for the Campeachy [Campeche] Bank, and for... of a separation of our small fleet Capt. Boylan and myself agreed to make our rendezvous at the Island of Mugerres, where we met and filled up our water. During the time we dispatched our boats to the Island of Cankun [Cancun] where we supplied ourselves with Turtle that benefited us much and saved our little stock of salt provision. Nothing of value was to be obtained. We then bore away of the Island of Cozumel which we found to be one of the most desolate places in all the earth of my travels----We immediately after coming to an anchor went on shore and took possession under a salute of 23 guns, and with a hearty welcome by the inhabitants on the seaboard. We surveyed the Island as well as circumstances would admit and still became more infatuated with its delightful situation and the

salubrious trade wind which blows without cessation. This connected with the beautiful roadstead and anchorage and the richest of soils which produces the finest kind of timber and that of a variety induces me to think, not only think but am well convinced that it will be one of the greatest acquisitions to our beloved country that the Admiral aloft could have bestowed on us. I hoisted the Star spangled Banner at the height of forty five feet with acclamations both from the inhabitants of the island and our small patriotic band, the crews of our two vessels. We then filled our water and made sail on our homeward bound passage. Passed the Island of Mugerres. Fell in with and chased, some of which we could not come up with on account of our dull sailing vessels---which I can with an open heart assure you is not nor never was what they have been cracked up to be, or we would have taken many more valuable prizes. For be assured no exertions on the part of our officers wanting. The course I pursued from thence westerly until we got off Telchac on the Yucatan coast, where we received a rascally reception from a squad of cavalry who rushed from behind the sand hills with their scopeders pistols and cultapes and fired on Judge [Secretary of the Navy] Fisher and Capt. Boylan of the Brutus who went on shore unarmed with the exception of a pair of pistols which Judge Fisher had taken with him and which the Judge had to nobly discharge amongst their cavalry and fortunately hit one of the riders, who fell forward on his horses neck and from that to the ground. Previous to this we had acted with every degree of humanity towards our enemy, but from that time on feelings became excited and I gave an order to this effect---To burn, sink and destroy everything we cam athwart. And then commenced burning their towns, names which at present cannot remember. We then shaped our course for Sisal, which we engaged under many disadvantages on our part---small guns, bad powder, want of shells, port fires, Congreve rockets, small arms &cetera. We stood them a fight of two hours and forty minutes, close under their castle which was mounted with six pieces of cannon, calibers from eighteen to thirty two pounders independently of some guns they had planted behind the bushes which opened a severe fire upon us from a quarter we least expected. I finding nothing was to be gained from the enemy and my vessel lying in

fifteen feet water, thought it best to weigh anchor and get to sea to save our vessels and men. We rec'd no damage from their shot, but directed ours in as well as we knew how and be assured that few of ours was wasted. The old Commandant and his house smelt a little of the devil and gave up his ship hoisted his jib and wore around. But the hot shot which we fired was merely cold shot warmed and did not have the desired effect or we could have burned the whole town which consisted in [of] about one hundred houses. I from thence took my departure westward over the banks and close along the enemies coast and from thence to the Isle of Alacrans, where we captured the Mexican Schooner Abispa having the Schooner Telegrapho in company and sent them both into Matagorda Aug. 8th. While lying in the Alacrans, at daylight in the morning, saw a suspicious sail standing in for the land. I made signal to the Brutus to get under weigh and chase, in the afternoon the Brutus returned bringing in the vessel, which proved to be the British Schooner Eliza Russel, Capt. Russel from Liverpool bound to Sisal, & from documents found in possession of the Captain found that nearly half her cargo was Mexican property shipped by a Mexican house in London and consigned on account and risk of J. G. Guteriss of Yucatan. From the tenor of the documents I felt it my duty to order her to Texas to have this Mexican property condemned. From the Alacrans I proceeded down along the Mexican Coast, touching at Sisal, Campechy [Campeche], Laguna and the intermediate ports of the coast. On the morning of the 12th Aug. off Tobasco fell in with the captured Mexican Packet Schr Correro [Correro de Tobasco] from Vera Cruz. Anchored off Chiltupec [Chiltepeque] and landed all our prisoners. The commandant on shore was polite and supplied [us] with some water and fruit. From thence shaped our course to Vera Cruz but adverse winds delayed our progress much. On 17th the Brutus captured the Mexican Schr Correo formerly the war Schr comd by Capt Thompson---manned her and sent her away. Off Tampico chased several vessels, some we boarded, some we could not catch. On the morning of the 25th run close into the Rio Grande--boarded two vessels but they were neutrals---from thence proceeded along to Galveston---26th came off the Bar and laid by for the night---27th at 8 am I ordered the Brutus into port and [to]

take the Correo [Correro de Tobasco] in with her---it was done. I remained at anchor outside---near noon th mast head look our reported three vessels standing in---judging from their appearance that they were Mexican I immediately got under weigh and beat up for them with all my guns and men prepared fir close action---the cannon will charged with round, grape, cannister and chain shot. I used every means to bring them to close engagement, when they tried to avoid it and to get the weather gage of me and to get me between the two Brigs. My only means of bringing them to action was to bring my little vessel in stays on the opposite tack---this brought them to range right ahead. I made all sail and closed with them as much as possible, but they at the same time kept their luff from me and I at length got within grape and canister distance and gave them one broadside from the larboard battery. They seemed to frighten them away---the leeward Brig being a little astern my only method was to up helm and wear round---this relieved my starboard guns then under water, but equally well charged with all sorts of shot, and which we equally as well directed, and the shot they received immediately put them to flight, for they hauled their wind that they might get close to each other, which they did, and then opened their fire at me, though to little effect, their shot flew over and under us in every direction, but not a man was hurt or spar of ours cut away while our long tom spoke the Texan Language and almost every shot told well, and with a small assistance rendered to me the same two Brigs of war would have been ours. But my having no aid could get no manly play from them---I to save my little vessel hauled for the Bar with a hope of enticing them into shoal water, where I could have managed them better. They smelt the rat and as cowards sneaked off, we giving them the parting shot, which helped to clear the quarter deck. But what has distressed me much is that I should be so unfortunate as to lose my vessel on the Bar although she never was the vessel she was cracked up to be. We have now lying in this harbor the Brig Pheonix [Fenix] Prizes of the Tom Toby which we have examined and find her to be a well built vessel and will bear a battery of fifteen guns. A pivot twenty four pounder will be highly recommendable with fourteen side guns medium eighteen pounders. The little Schr [Correo de Tobasco] will certainly be very

serviceable to the Navy, her sailing fast and of light draft of water will enable us to reconnoiter the enemies positions---she mounted with a pivot nine pounder will be sufficient for her. The Brutus & Tom Toby will make us a formidable Navy which will be able to defend our coast and prevent the enemies' intercepting our commerce. The Phoenix and Brutus are both in want of rudders though there is a possibility of getting the Brutus' rudder unshipped, although it is extremely difficult to get the iron work done---several of my crew have deserted and stolen one of my boats. Some of them for fear of being kept in the service have left under pressure of having nothing to eat---of which we have plenty for some time. Should [the] Government see proper to fit out the Brig Phoenix a man of war it will actually be necessary to examine her bottom as she has been ashore on the bar, and thumped her rudder off, and no doubt has injured her copper if not her bottom---be that as it may the coast ought to have vessels that will carry their guns above the water---which was not the case of the Invincible, for one side or the other in carrying sail was always under water and rendered the lee guns entirely useless. The Schr Brutus is leaky and wants sails and rigging a well to be hove out. The prize Schr Correo requires some sails and rigging. The particular dates of circumstances that occurred during our cruise is entirely out of my power to give, as all my papers have been washed to pieces by the sea breaking over the wreck, and I am equally barely strapped of clothing.

Most respectfully

Your obedient Servant

(Signed) H. L. Thompson Commanding Texas Navy

PRESS ? TO VIEW ORIGINAL DOCUMENT

Report of Captain James D. Boylan on the cruise of The

Schooner Brutus - June 10, 1837 - August 29, 1837

To the Honbl [Honorable] Secty [Secretary] of the Navy

Galveston, Sept 1st, 1837

Report of the cruise & [and] transactions of the Texian Schooner of War Brutus. Saturday June 10th 1837 pursuant to orders received I got under weigh & [and] stood out to sea in company with the Invincible. After having conveyed the Texian Schr. [Schooner] Texas to Matagorda bar, returned again to Galveston Bar. Sent a boat on shore which returned at midnight. We immediately got under weigh & [and] stood to the East. Cruising near the mouth of the Mississippi in hopes to fall in with some of the Mexican vessels but not succeeding stood for the coast of Mexico, on the 1st July parted company with the Invincible having previously agreed to rendezvous at the Island of Mugerres. Cruised some days near Cape Antonio on the coast of Cuba but nothing appearing run for the Isle of Mugerres. On the 7th made the Island of Cantey & [and] Mugerres on the 8th anchored in company with the Invincible in a few days completed [?] & [and] watering the vessels made several excursions to the neighboring Islands & [and] main land found abundance of Turtle in pens & [and] help[ed] our selves caught some small perogues of but little account destroyed some liberated all the prisoners. On the 12th stood out to sea again & [and] run down to the Island of Cozamel [Cozumel]. On the 13th anchored the vessels on the S. W. point of the Island. Landed with our boats. Planted the single Star Banner of our Country in the soil of this delightful Island. The Inhabitants were but few but expressed their good feelings for us at the same time swearing allegiance to our cause. We made such surveys and remarks as our limited time would admit of. The anchorage are indeed safe & [and] commodious for any number of vessels. The soil is delightfull [delightful]. The climate salubrious. The forest abound[s] in the finest Kinds of Timber, [?], Mahogany, & [and] Spanish Cedar and abundance of fruits of various kinds. There is also [an] abundance of water. On the whole I think it is a most desirable acquisition to our Government and I would

respectfully recommend it to the consideration of our Congress. On the 16th of July started again for the Mexican Coast. On the 17th anchored on the west side of the Island of Cantey. Found domestic animals but no inhabitants although there were recent marks of people having been in the houses. Found many pens full of turtles. Took a fresh supply on board. Sent our boats on an expedition to a Town said to be near Cape Catoche. Next day they returned unable to find the place. Brought a canoe with them having on board nearly or perhaps all the saints in the Calendar with some female toggery & [and] a whole host of Virgins alas they were all composed of [?] 19th sailed again for the coast of Yucatan. 21st landed at Silar but did not find any thing of consequence. From thence stood down to Leuckwe? I sent Lieut[.] Wright on shore to take the town. This he soon accomplished. The Alcaldia making a formal surrender of the town to the Texian Government. 22d Captured Schooner Union of Sisal loaded with log wood. Chased several vessels but they were all neutral. Captured a number of Perogues some having valuable property on board. On the 24th anchored off the Town of Chiblonia. Here I accompanied Judge Fisher. Landed on the breach unarmed. In a few Minuetes [minutes] discovered a squad of Cavalry within one hundred yards of us. We lost no time in reaching the boat. We soon had her afloat again & [and] ready for action. As they approached the Judge drew a pistol and shot one of them. We exchanged a fire from pistols in all. They discharged all their arms. Amongst them were two large pieces that were placed on the Ground and deliberate aim taken at us. But one however came within twenty yards of us. Returned on board again. Manned & [and] armed two boats. Went on shore and burned two towns. After gig was absent two days which caused me to think that something had happened to her. She however returned this evening from Sisal bringing intelligence that there was a Spanish vessel there. We stood down & [and] found the Vessel. She was a Spanish merchant schooner then without cargo. This day we captured two Mexican schooners the Adventure & [and] Telegraph of Campeache [Campeche]. We then anchored abreast of Sisal in company with the Invincible & [and] our prizes. On the 26th Capt. Thompson sent a canoe on shore with a letter demanding of the Commandant a sum of money to prevent

his destroying the town. They however did not send off any answer. On the morning of the 27th hauled close into the town with the flag of truce still flying. 7 A.M. the castle bearing South those miscreants fired a shot at our vessel. We took no notice of it for some time until we got close in then anchored. Previous to our firing we hauled down the White flag [?] at our top [?] Mast-head then [the] national standard. It being nearly calm got our boats a head androwed? towed in. All this time the enemy kept up a fire from some heavy pieces of cannon. We occasionally returned the compliment. On approaching as near the shore as we could with safety being then in 13 ft. water the castle bearing SSW anchor[e]d with a spring on the cable and opened fire from our starboard broad side and pivot gun. The Invincible was nearer the beach and kept up a heavy and incessant fire upon the town. No sooner had we commenced our fire than the enemy ascertaining with precision our position then they opened a heavy very heavy fire from the Castle the round fort and large Gun on the beach [?] minding that we had all to loose [lose] and but little to gain as we had more than one thousand men to contend with thought it most prudent to shift our quarters further out. On this day every officer and man on board done his duty undauntedly and cheerfully. Fired two broad sides shot---but finding through the bad quality of our powder that they did not reach the fort---got under weigh again. We burned the Schooner Adventure here as she was a dull sailor from this place. After landing all our prisoners forty in number stood up for the Alcaranes Islands. On the 31st anchored inside. The Invincible found the Schooner Abispa with a cargo on board. 1st August a vessel hove in sight. I went in chase of her but unfortunately she sailed too fast for us. Returned again along the coast and anchored in the port. On the morning of the 3 of August saw a strange sail to windward. Immediately got under weigh and stood out in chase. She carried all sail from us. At 10 A.M. I succeeded in getting [getting] along side of her. Found her to be the British Schooner Eliza Russel from Liverpool bound for Sisal with cargo of merchandise the greater part appertaining to a Mexican merchant in Merida and by a letter directed to him found that it was not insured but at the sole risk of said merchant. I put an officer and crew on board and took her into

Alacranes for the decision of Capt. Thompson who immediately sent her to Galveston for Adjudication. Sunday the 6th I went on shore and searched the Islands. Found many articles of various descriptions buried in the sand which we took on board and after hoisting our flag on shore and taking possession in the name of the Government sailed again on our cruise of these islands. I would say much more but at another time. On the East [?] we found the wreck of a British vessel [Little Penn] and left her undisturbed she not having either mast rigging sails anchors or cable. Run again into Campeachy [Campeche] bay. Got a canoe alongside and put all our prisoners in her five in number and some belonging to the Invincible and sent them on shore much gratified. Stood down along the coast for Laguna. Stayed there one day but not finding anything proceeded along. On morning of the 12th off Tobasco Bar fell in with and captured the Mexican packet Schooner Correo [Correo de Tobasco] from Vera Cruse for Tobasco. In overhauling all the letters found from the authorities stating that the Mexican squadron were all in Vera Cruse and that the Independence[,] the Texas and the Bravo were to sail to [?]. We cruised there three days in the tract along the land endeavoring to intercept them in case they came out but they did not. Stood into a small place called Chiltipec [Chiltepeque] to land our prisoners and obtain water but as the boats approached the shore the officers discover'd a body of troops on the beach. They immediately returned on board next morning at daylight. Hoisted our white flag put all the prisoners in the boat and sent them on shore. Amongst them was an old lady the mother in law of Mr. Sara a very respectable merchant in Tobasco. She at first was much alarmed but after she had been with us a few minutes she became entirely reconciled. The Commandant of this place behaved to us in a gentlemanly way received our flag wrote a very complimentary letter to Capt. Thompson for his kindness and humanity to his countrymen that were prisoners to us, he order'd his soldiers to fill our water and also sent fruit and other little articles on board. From this point we cruised along in the neighborhood of Vera Cruse but adverse winds retarded our progress much. On the 17th fell in with and captured the Mexican Schooner Rafaelita Capt. [?] formerly the Correo [Correo de Mejico] that Thompson commanded on the

Texian Coast in the first part of the war. Saturday 18th saw four strange sails. Gave chase. Some went one way and some another. I gave chase to a Brig and after a few hours came alongside of her but unfortunately she was a French Vessel in ballast. I then stood after our little prizes at 9 p.m. came up with them and laid too for the Invincible. At day light the small Correo was not to be seen neither the Invincible. I then stood in for Tampico and remained twenty four hours in the bay. Found one English Schooner at anchor. On the afternoon of the 21st. whilst standing to the North with the Correo saw two sails to leeward immediately chased and on nearer approach found one was the Invincible in chase of the other. I carried all sail in pursuit of her and at sunset came up with her at the bar of Tampico. She however proved to be an American Schooner from new York bound in to Tampico. Next morning saw another lofty sail. Went in chase of her. At 10 A.M. came alongside of her but she was a French and Capt. Thompson did not wish to take her in. I put my Mexican prisoners on board of her and sent them to Tampico, Not finding any thing that would be profitable we again made sail for Matamoras. Found two American vessels at anchor outside. They informed us that the Honorable William H. Wharton had escaped bondage. The sea becoming very rough rendered it impracticable for us to land or I verily believe we should have taken the Brazos de Santiago. We being run very short of water made sail at 6 p.m. on the 25th took our departure from that place for Texas. Nothing material occurred on the passage. At 5 p.m. on the 26th passed Velasco and at 9 anchored at Galveston Bar in 5 fathom water. 27th of August at 7 am [A.M.] saw two sails in the offing. I immediately got under weigh and stood out for them. Found [one] was the Invincible and the other an American Brig bound in. Capt. Thompson ordered me to send my boat on board. I done so. And she returned with the Honorable [Honorable] S. Rhoads Fisher. At the same time he ordered me into port and to take the Correo with me. At 10 came to anchor of the Navy Yard furl'd sail squared Yards. At 12 two suspicious Vessels came off the bar chasing the Sam Houston into port. At 1 Col Thurston came on board and stated that the vessels were Mexican. I immediately sent my boats to all the vessels in the harbour and obtained a number of volunteers and

some water. I also return my warmest thanks to the Honorable S. Rhoads Fisher to Col. Thurston and Graham Capt. Hoyt and many other Gentlemen who kindly and promptly volunteer'd their services on board the Brutus not forgetting my own officers and little crew. Got under weigh and stood down the harbour but unfortunately the water being low the vessel got aground. The Steam Boat (Branch T. Archer) Capt. Ross with his usual promptness came along side and endeavour'd to extricate us from our disagreeable situation. Too much praise cannot be given Capt. Ross for his prompt assistance on our trying occasion. In the act of doing so the hawser unfortunately passed across the stern slightly touching the rudder instantly carried it away as it proved verry [very] rotten. Immediately ordered all the men armed to go on board the Steamer and endeavour to board one of the enemy vessels who were then in action with our brave little Invincible. As soon as the Mexicans discover'd us they hauled there wind and stood off to sea. The Invincible unfortunately lost her rudder and got on shore inside the bar. We used our exertions to save her but all proved ineffectual as she could no[t] stand any kind of thumping. She soon went under. After the loss of the Invincible I returned on board my vessel and after considerable exertion got her once more afloat and her towed up to the Navy Yard and mored [moored] in safety. I would respectfully recommend to the notice of the Honorable Secretary of the Navy the following officers for their bravery on various occasion and also for their general gentlemanly deportment during the cruise. Lieut. Francis B. Wright, James G. Hurd, Doctor Frances L. Chrisman, Purser Norman Hurd, Midshipman E. P. Crosby, D. H. [?] Robert Foster the boatswain and gunner have also behaved themselves to my satisfaction and with much credit to themselves. I fear I have to regret the loss of the gunner Mr. Dearing also my clerk Mr. Reed and four others who

were in the little Correo.

I have the honour to remain Sir Very respectfully

Your Obt Servant

[Signed] J. D. Boylan Comd Sch of War Brutus

I find it a very difficult piece of work to get our rudder unshipped as it is woodlock'd 6 feet below water.