

# Early Texas Navy Suffered Losses

By **BETTY FLANAGAN**

(First of two articles. The writer resides in Palestine, Texas.)

**PROMINENTLY FEATURED** in the newspapers and on radio and TV recently was a movement sponsored by the Sons of the Republic of Texas to rebury, in the State Cemetery at Austin, three officers of the old Texas Navy.

After having lain in a New Orleans cemetery for more than 100 years, the bodies of Capt. Robert Oliver, Lt. Charles F. Fuller and Midshipman Fielding R. Culp, all of the Texas Marines, were finally brought back to their adopted home. The three officers all died in 1842 and were buried in Girod Cemetery in New Orleans. When it became known that the Girod Cemetery had been condemned to permit widening of a street and other construction, the arrangements for reburial were worked out. It is believed that no living relatives of the three marines remain in Texas.

**THESE EARLY TEXAS** Marines were probably like the majority of early settlers of Texas. They came by sea from New Orleans or Mobile to Galveston, Matagorda Bay or the mouth of the Brazos River. There lumber, wool and cotton from Texas were sent back to New Orleans by sea. Thus when fighting broke out between Texas and Mexico, the General Council of the provisional government of Texas realized the need for a navy to protect supply lines between New Orleans and Texas.

On Nov. 25, 1835, the General Council passed a bill providing for the organization of the Texas Navy and for the purchase of four schooners; the 60-ton William Robbins rechristened the Liberty, the 125-ton Invincible, the 125-ton Independence and the 125-ton Brutus. On March 12, 1836, President David G. Burnet appointed Capt. Charles E. Hawkins, Commodore.

**THIS FIRST TEXAS NAVY** lasted until the middle of 1837, by which time all the ships had been lost. The Liberty during this period convoyed the schooner Flora with the wounded Sam Houston aboard to New Orleans, after the battle of San Jacinto. There detained for repairs the vessel had to be sold because the young Texas Government could not pay the repair bill.

The Brutus and Invincible suffered the same fate while in New York for repairs, but an Englishman, Samuel Swartwout, saved them by paying their expenses. Later while cruising and raiding in the Gulf, to inspire confidence in the men, the two ships found that they were unable to recross the bar and enter Galveston Harbor. The Invincible was attacked by two Mexican ships and destroyed. The Brutus although saved at the time was later lost in a storm.

This practice of raiding and cruising was opposed by Sam Houston, who felt that the only way to defend a coast was to stay close to that coast. The last ship, the Independence, had previously been captured by the Mexican Navy. Thus, between September, 1837, and March, 1839, Texas had no ships at all excepting the receiving ship at Galveston Navy Base, the brig Potomac.