

Commanding Officers
Of
Battleship *Texas*

Albert Weston Grant
12 March 14-10 June 15

As the first CO, taking command at commissioning, Grant was a *Texas* Plank Owner. He began his time in the Navy in sailing ships and ended his career in *Texas*, the most advanced ship of her time. During his lengthy and distinguished career he served in and commanded a wide array of naval vessels, watching the evolution of modern naval warfare and the United States becoming a world naval power. Along the way he was involved with bringing the modern innovation of electricity to naval vessels. He was given command of *Texas* as the Navy wanted its greatest officer to have command of its greatest new ship. Grant was commander when President Wilson sent her to Vera Cruz for her first deployment in the service of her nation. Carrying on the tradition of Grant's great naval family, his great-great grandson is a naval officer today.

John Hood
10 June 15-14 August 16

Hood's career is more remembered as one of the finest instructors at the Naval Academy and in training vessels. Prior to gaining renown as a teacher, he had had more bad luck than good at sea. He was a junior officer serving in USS *Kearsarge* when she ran aground and sank on Rocandar Reef, and was in USS *Maine* when she blew up and sank in Havana Harbor. Later in his career while on the General Board he created a plan to expand Navy to complete 48 battleships by 1925. Though he died in 1919 and did not get to see his plan completed, *West Virginia*, BB48, so his envisioned 48th battleship, was commissioned in 1923, ahead of schedule.

Victor Blue
14 August 16-31 December 18

Blue was CO during WW1, but he and his Navigation Officer ran *Texas* aground on the way to the war zone, delaying her participation. Once in the theatre of operations, under his command she distinguished herself with exemplary service during the war. As a young naval officer, he was a hero of Spanish-American war when he led a reconnaissance group of bluejackets and Marines overland to get the layout of the Spanish fleet and then fought his ship in the resulting battle of Santiago. His son was a naval officer KIA in WW2. A WW2 destroyer was named *Blue* to honor them both.

Nathan C. Twining
31 December 18-17 July 19

A very fine naval officer, his most notable contribution to naval history was his invention of the first working prototype of an anti-aircraft gun in 1911, when aviation was still very new, and certainly before many in the Navy felt aircraft posed any danger to ships.

Frank H. Schofield

17 July 19-17 June 21

While a fine naval officer commanding ships and another hero of Spanish-American war and WW1, his greater contributions include serving as part of President Wilson's team at the Paris Peace Conference, as US naval representative at the Geneva Arms Limitation Conference, and creator of Navy Hydrographic Office (first called the Schofield Board). His time in *Texas* included her first Panama Canal crossing

Edward S. Kellogg

17 June 21-6 July 22

Kellogg commanded USS *Hist* during Spanish-American War, sank several Spanish ships and won special commendation for saving the crew of one of the ships he sank. When he was an instructor at the Naval Academy, he taught future Admirals Nimitz, Halsey and Ingersol. As CO in WW1 of USS *Huntington*, he won the Navy Cross rescuing soldiers and crew of a torpedoed transport. CO of many vessels, among them he commanded *New York*, *Vermont*, *Idaho* and *Texas*; a true battleship commander. After retirement he was the Naval Governor of Samoa.

Andre M. Proctor

6 July 22-22 May 24

Earned commendations in Spanish-American War and later in WW1 transporting thousands of returning soldiers and Marines in USS *America*--a problem plagued ship under everyone but him (sank once, overwhelmed with influenza and even suffered mutiny while under army command).

Ivan C. Wettengel

22 May 24-28 September 25

Served in Spanish-American War, and in many ships after in both Atlantic and Pacific, spent some years as recruiter in Nebraska and Minnesota before becoming navigator in new battleship *Arkansas*, taking President Taft to see the opening of the Panama Canal. Commanded USS *Wisconsin* in WW1 and earned Navy Cross for his search skills against German U-Boats. After the war he was made Naval Governor of Guam. Commanded *Texas* for her first Naval Academy Midshipman's Cruise and took her into dry dock for modernization

Charles Adams Blakely

28 September 25-2 June 26

Served in many ships before earning Distinguished Service Medal in WW1 for escorting transports and damaging a UBoat while commanding USS *O'Brian*. He was in command of *Texas* during dry dock modernization--not romantic but very difficult command. In his 50s, instead of retiring he went to flight school, received his wings and then commanded one of the first aircraft carriers, USS *Lexington*, CV2, then was admiral of the carrier division which included *Yorktown* and *Enterprise*.

Zeno E. Briggs

2 June 26-4 January 28

Served in and commanded a great many ships from Spanish-American War through WW1. He earned commendation for keeping transport ship USS *America* clean from flu. CO of *Texas* when she returned to sea after modernization, and retired. He came out of retirement for WW2, then retired again. He lived to be 96 years old.

J. R. DeFrees

4 January 28-9 July 29

Born two weeks before Colonel Custer died at the Little Big Horn, DeFrees saw great advances in naval technology during his time in the Navy. He served in USS *Vesuvius*, an experimental ship using 'dynamite pneumatic guns.' When that idea failed she became an experimental torpedo ship and he spent much of the rest of his career as a torpedo expert. Commanded transport ships in WW1, earning the Navy Cross. CO of *Texas* when she was Flagship of the Navy and when Lindbergh visited ship. Lost son in WW2 on bridge of submarine USS *Sculpin*.

Adolphus Andrews

9 July 29-13 May 31

Went to the University of Texas before transferring to the Naval Academy. He was a plank owner of the second USS *Maine*, replacement ship for the *Maine* lost in Havana the year before. He served in Secretary of the Navy and presidential yachts. In that capacity, he knew Secretary of the Navy and later President Theodore Roosevelt, Admiral Dewey, President Taft and countless royals and dignitaries leading to rapid promotion. In WW1 he was youngest Captain in the Navy. Between the world wars he was CO of the presidential yacht and carried Presidents Harding and Coolidge. He was CO of *Texas* when she was a flagship and took her first trip to Pearl Harbor. In WW2, as Vice Admiral, he organized the Atlantic fleet to combat UBoats and is credited with ending Germany's threat to America's coastline.

Julius C. Townsend

13 May 31-17 June 33

Medal of honor winner for action leading bluejackets at Veracruz in 1914. He commanded a Naval Air Station in WWI, and won the Navy Cross in the 2nd Nicaragua campaign. He commanded *Texas* when she was Flagship of Battleship Division One. He died while still in the Navy as commander of Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1938.

Lamar E. Leahy

17 June 33-15 April 35

Early in his career he was Aide and Fleet Lieutenant to Rear Admiral Harper, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, where he met the Emperor of Japan and the Prince Regent of China. In WWI he commanded the Astor family yacht which had been converted to a Navy vessel, USS *Noma*. He won the Navy Cross and the British OBE for his fight against German UBoats. He was personally commended by President Hoover while Commander of a destroyer squadron, when he was sent by Hoover on a special mission to Venezuela to present the gift of a statue of Henry Clay. After retirement he was Director of the International Hydrographic Bureau of Monte Carlo. He was recalled from retirement for World War II when he served as President of the

General Court-Martial Board.

S. A. Taffinder

15 April 35-21 November 36

The only *Texas* CO to have served in *Texas* before as a junior officer. As part of her original crew he was plank owner of the ship he later commanded. As a Lieutenant in WW1, he served in the animal transport ship USS *El Occidente*. Later he commanded the tanker USS *Safelo*, carrying petroleum out of Texas ports in the 1930s before taking over as CO of *Texas*. He retired as an admiral.

Fred F. Rogers

21 November 36-1 June 38

He was Assistant Naval Attaché to Japan before WW1, and was the first American naval officer assigned to study Japan and Japanese language--his work was the basis for all naval intelligence on Japan. He was later the Naval Attaché until US/Japanese relations got so bad he left that post and took command of *Texas* when she was Flagship of the Training Division.

R. R. M. Emmet

1 June 38-31 May 40

Emmet was a track star at the Naval Academy. His first ship was in USS *Connecticut* as part of Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet tour of the world. His initial field of studies was torpedoes. He was a plank owner of USS *Arizona*. In WW1, he was a gunnery officer on special assignment in an experiment to arm civilian transports before us entry, and then in USS *Maine* as gunnery officer when the U.S. joined war. Later he was made XO of USS *Canonicus* and lead minelaying operations winning the Navy Cross. Later instructor at Naval Academy and on Midshipmen cruises. CO of *Texas* when she did midshipman cruise, got first radar and as Flagship of the Atlantic Squadron and as part of FDR's patrol system. He remained on board after he finished his time as CO to serve as Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commander of the Atlantic Squadron. When he left *Texas* he was named Commander, Transports, Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet, which was important later in operation TORCH. After TORCH he became Commander Training Center, Great Lakes and given the antiquated rank of Commodore. He retired as Rear Admiral in 1946.

C. N. Hinkamp

31 May 40-2 August 41

Hinkamp was an early submariner and commanded three submarines in a row while still an ensign when submarines were new to U.S. Navy. He was division commander of minesweepers in WWI earning the Navy Cross. (Interestingly, his wife sponsored the launch of USS *Maddox* of later Gulf of Tonkin fame). In the 1920s he was CO of destroyers USS *Simpson* and then USS *McCormick* as part of the tough Asiatic Fleet. In the 1930s he commanded battleship USS *Wyoming*, training Marines in amphibious landings. He was CO of *Texas* for her fourth and final Midshipman's cruise and as part of FDR's patrol system when tailed by U203. While he was CO radar was installed, AA guns mounted, birdbath removed, 3rd anchor removed and the walkway on front of Navigation Bridge was added.

L. W. Comstock

2 August 41-28 September 42

He had a long and distinguished naval career including winning the Navy Cross and special commendations in WW1 and in the Asiatic Fleet in the 1920s. He was a plank owner and Navigator of the carrier USS *Lexington*, CV2, and then CO of numerous ships before taking command of *Texas* in August 1941. He commanded her as she continued her Atlantic patrols, crisscrossing the Atlantic 39,000 miles while covering transports once the US was in war. She escorted Marine transports heading to Guadalcanal. She then went into dry dock for more modifications including removing all but six of her 5-inch guns in preparation for the north Africa landings. Shortly before heading out for operation TORCH Comstock had a heart attack. He never returned to sea and was given the quiet duty of Commander, Armguard Advance Base Depot, Gulfport, Mississippi. He retired in 1943 because of ill health, but still lived to be 90.

William Hennigar

28 September 42-3 Oct 42, 14 October 42-17 October 42

Commander Hennigar was XO of *Texas* under Captain Comstock, taking temporary command when Comstock had his heart attack. Younger than most *Texas* COs he had been Engineering Officer on transport ships carrying Marines throughout Asia and the Caribbean in the 1920s and 1930s. As CO of destroyer USS *Badger* in 1938, he rescued evacuees from the Spanish Civil War. He was then named CO of destroyer *Babbitt*, teamed with his former ship *Badger* on escort duty. He joined *Texas* as XO under Captains Hinkamp and then Comstock. He was temporary CO of *Texas* for 6 days when Comstock left, back to XO under Captain Wild (Comstock's replacement), then after Wild's 12 days, Hennigar again assumed temporary command, this time for 4 days, for a total of 10 days as CO all while she was in port. He returned to XO again to a third captain, the more successful CO Pfaff. He left *Texas* in Dec 43 for shore duty in the Navy department. Sadly and ironically, the man who briefly commanded *Texas* twice due to ill health of regular COs, died suddenly in 1945, aged only 43.

Laurence Wild

3 October 42-14 October 42

Wild was CO of *Texas* only 12 days, but he had a very interesting life and career before. As member of the class of '13 at the Naval Academy, he was a consensus All-American basketball player. He then coached the team the year after his graduation and the team was undefeated with him as head coach. The next year he began his naval career and by 1923 Lt Wild was Squadron Communication Officer in USS *Delphy*, in the lead of Destroyer Squadron 11 as it sped south along the California coast at 20+ knots. Going too fast in the darkness, the entire squadron plowed into rocks at Point Pedernales, wrecking seven ships with heavy loss of life in the worst peacetime accident in U.S. Naval History. Though cleared of fault at the inquiry, and court martial, he was the one relaying all the messages and orders and speaking to the ships as they were destroyed. Later he was naval governor of Samoa as Japan inched closer and closer and he had to deal with constant bickering with the military commander, civilian authority, and the U.S. government, all giving him unremitting pressure. He left Samoa, and then took command of *Texas* as she was preparing for TORCH. Perhaps the pressure was too much, perhaps he struggled with "survivor's guilt," but soon after he became CO, he suffered a nervous breakdown and left *Texas* after one two weeks. After some time in a naval hospital, he retired within a year.

Roy Pfaff

17 October 42-10 March 44

Roy Pfaff had a distinguished career in the Navy before *Texas*. He had served in destroyers, cruisers, battleships, support vessels, specializing as engineering officer and instructor. He had served in WW1 and in the Asiatic fleet. He was ordnance officer in navy buildup to WW2 and given command of *Texas* because he could be made quickly available during all the turmoil over previous captains and preparation for TORCH. He took command and immediately took her to North Africa. Standing off Port Lyautey she poured 14-inch and 5-inch shells in to support troop landings. When out of range he sent *Texas* observation plane with depth charges to drop on German tanks. After battle Pfaff steamed as fast as possible to take young *Texas* correspondent Walter Cronkite home to be first to report the operation. In 1943, *Texas* was part of naval protection for FDR at the Casablanca conference. Resuming convoy escort duty next, *Texas* covered 40,000 miles and earned Pfaff the Legion of Merit. He left *Texas* in March 1944, and retired in 1947.

Charles Adams Baker

10 March 44-17 August 45

Captain Baker was the most successful and probably the most beloved of *Texas*' COs. Wealthy aristocrat from Virginia, excelled at everything he ever did, from star 2nd baseman at the Naval Academy to service in destroyers, cruisers and battleships. Interspersed with sea duty were his equally impressive shore postings, which included being responsible for treaty enforcement after WW1 though only a lieutenant, to Assistant Naval Attaché in London at the beginning of WW2. He was personal friends with FDR and Churchill and even had an affair with actress Carole Lombard. One of his officers said that he was, "the finest officer, the finest navigator I ever served under." Under his command, *Texas* won four of her five battle stars at Southern France, Normandy, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. He kept her fighting through the brutal battle at Cherbourg where he was slammed to the deck when the German shell destroyed the Navigation Bridge. He was so loved and admired and such a part of *Texas* lore that he was given command again for one day in 1948 to hand her over to the state of Texas.

Gerald L. Schetky

17 August 45-3 July 46

He was a distinguished Naval officer with a proud navy family. Another excellent athlete at the Academy, he did his midshipman cruise in *Texas* after he had already been commissioned ensign as the Academy did not do the usual cruises during WW1. He served as Aide to Assistant Secretary of the Navy FDR. He earned advanced degrees at the Naval Academy and at Columbia University in mechanical engineering. His career included as destroyer CO and instructor at the Academy. He had a great deal of combat experience before taking over *Texas*, in such actions as the battle of Tassafaronga (off Guadalcanal) as CO in *Northampton*, had his ship sunk by a UBoat when he was CO of *Tasker Bliss* off Casablanca, and continued as CO of two more transport vessels before brief shore duty before taking over *Texas* from Baker at end of war. His greatest contribution to the story of *Texas*, and what his son said he was most proud of was the four Magic Carpet trips w 5000 soldiers and Marines (including the future great Texas high school football coach Cozel Foster). Between the last two trips and in her last active months and her movement back to east coast, including more and more of her equipment being removed for eventual mothballing. He left the ship in July 1946, retired 1949, and died in 1986.

Robert N. Downes

3 July 46-6 March 47

By the time Downes took command of her, *Texas*' guns had long been silent. Unlike so many of the Naval Academy graduates who became COs of *Texas*, Downes was not very athletic and was often teased by his classmates for carrying a few extra pounds. He had experience in battleships as his midshipman's cruise was in USS *Wyoming*, but his first love was aviation. Following graduation and commissioning, Downes returned to the Academy for a year of flight training. As one of the early Navy pilots, he was stationed onboard USS *Saratoga*, CV3. Unfortunately, the Navy did not yet consider aviation particularly important or an officer's primary occupation, so he was soon removed from *Saratoga* and transferred to destroyer USS *Decatur* to begin the more typical course of building officers' careers. Over the next years he served in a variety of ships, including being a plank owner of cruiser USS *Brooklyn*. He had been promoted to Captain shortly after the end of WW2, but as the Navy rapidly reduced in size, he reverted to Commander before taking command of *Texas* in July, 1946. She never moved during his time as CO, sitting at anchor at Hawkins Port, Maryland, while the complicated political and economic struggle was going on with the state of Texas to determine what the Navy was going to do with her. His job was much more difficult than might be imagined. On the one hand, he oversaw her gradual dismantling of important equipment, but at the same time he had to keep her systems running and theoretically capable of returning to duty if called upon. With a skeleton crew, the boilers were kept up, power was maintained and systems were continually checked and rechecked. When he left after eight months, her fate had still not been decided. Downes eventually retired as an admiral, moving back home to his native Delaware and dying in 1985.

James R. Bagshaw, Jr

6 March 47-7 April 47

Bagshaw was CO of *Texas* for only a month while she sat at anchor during her transformation from naval vessel to museum ship. In fact, her final disposition still had not yet been decided. His life and career though were interesting. He was the first *Texas* CO who had been a sailor before becoming an officer. Near the end of WW1, Bagshaw enlisted in the Navy, served his time and returned to civilian life. He decided to stay in the Naval Reserve, though, after he left active duty. He then went to college, got his degree and eventually his commission as a reserve officer. When the FDR and Congress began the "Preparedness" program to build up America's forces heading toward WW2, reservists were called up as part of that preparation. Bagshaw, therefore, then returned to active duty as a officer with a great many years in service, though very little of it on active duty. By the end of the war he was a Captain, and in 1947 was given brief command of the pier-bound *Texas*. Soon after he returned to reserve status, then retired and died in Pennsylvania in 1956. His son James Bagshaw, III was also a naval officer, dying in a helicopter training accident in 1950.

Samuel J. McKee

7 April 47-31 July 47

Unlike Bagshaw, Commander McKee was a graduate of the Naval Academy as most of *Texas*' COs had been. His nickname at the Academy was "Speed" because his classmates claimed he was slow and lazy. Like Downes before him, McKee remained an extra year after graduation in order to train as a naval aviator. He even did his midshipman's cruise in *Wyoming*

as Downes had, but the year before, so was familiar with battleships from the beginning of his career. He also was not able to continue with aviation so served on the usual assortment of naval vessels learning his craft as a naval officer. Most of his time at sea was spent in Latin American waters on several ships, all part of America's roll of trying to maintain peace, stability and humanitarian efforts, not all of which were necessarily considered helpful to many of the people of those Latin American countries. One exception to his time in the Caribbean was his service in USS *Colorado* in the Pacific. While he was in *Colorado*, she participated in the massive search for Amelia Earhart and Fred Noonan after their disappearance in 1937. After some time ashore, McKee was back at sea in USS *Raleigh*. In fact, he was onboard *Raleigh* when she was struck by a torpedo on 7 December at Pearl Harbor. When the war ended, he was one of the first naval officers to arrive at Hiroshima in the aftermath of the atomic bomb's devastation. Like the two CO's before him, when McKee was given command of *Texas* it was to keep her systems going as the Navy continued to remove useful equipment and await her final disposition. After leaving the Navy in 1952, he worked as a technical writer and even worked on the Polaris Missile program. He retired completely in 1968, died in 1980 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Jack Seward

31 July 47-21 April 48

Lieutenant Commander Jack Seward was the last CO before handing the ship to Captain Baker for his one day honorary command. Seward began his naval career enlisting as a seaman a year after the end of WW1. By the 1930s he was a Warrant Officer and Chief Carpenter in the first U.S. aircraft carrier, USS *Langley*, CV1. With the massive buildup of the Navy during WW2, and with his quarter-century service, he was given temporary rank of Lt Commander. When the war ended, his temporary officer rank was made permanent. His one and only ship command was as CO of *Texas* for her last nine months in the Navy. Arrangements were finally made for her transfer to the state of Texas. She was moved to Norfolk Navy Yard for final preparations, then towed to Texas and finally to her last berth where she is today by the San Jacinto Battleground, LaPorte, Texas. Seward retired from the Navy and lived the remainder of his life in Newport News, Virginia, where *Texas* was built so many years before. He died in 1986.