

John Hood  
3 December 1859 – 11 February 1919  
*Texas* Commanding Officer  
10 June 1915 – 14 August 1916

*Texas*' second Commanding Officer was Captain John Hood. Born in Alabama in 1859, John Hood was a naval officer of remarkable promise and talent whose career was plagued with almost as much misfortune as accomplishment. Graduating second in his class from the United States Naval Academy, he returned to the Academy repeatedly during his time in the Navy as an instructor.

After graduation he spent his two years as a graduated midshipman in old Civil War sloops, first a year in the Atlantic aboard USS *Shenandoah* and a year in the Pacific in USS *Wachusett*. Commissioned ensign in 1881, he served in the old warship USS *New Hampshire*, operating as a training ship, and then mighty Civil War veteran USS *Brooklyn* before his first return to the Academy as faculty instead of student. Two years as an instructor at the Naval Academy were followed by one year at sea in USS *Vandalia* and USS *Mohican*, and then back to the Academy. Four more years as instructor in Annapolis were followed by a year as instructor on the training ships USS *Jamestown*, USS *Constellation* and USS *Bancroft*. Still working in training, in 1893 he transported a group of men to the receiving ship USS *Vermont*.

Finally leaving the training of others and returning to the development of his own career, Lt (jg) Hood joined USS *Kearsarge*. Unfortunately, the mighty *Kearsarge*, which had out-gunned and sunk the elusive Confederate Raider *Alabama* 30 years before, met her fate on Roncador Reef in the Caribbean in 1894. Today called Roncador Bank, directly east of Nicaragua, the reef caused the destruction of many ships over the centuries, and in February 1894, with Hood aboard, *Kearsarge* ran aground. While none of the 218 officers and men

onboard was lost, the ship was destroyed and the men endured hunger and thirst as they were stranded on a tiny spit of land for eight days.

After the loss of *Kearsarge*, Hood was transferred to one of the Navy's first all steel ships, the cruiser, USS *Atlanta*. When *Atlanta* was taken out of commission in 1895, Hood returned to shore duty, working at the Branch Hydrographic Office in Baltimore, Maryland and in 1896 returned again as instructor at the Naval Academy. In 1897 he went back to sea, this time in the battleship USS *Maine*. The next year, he was aboard when *Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor, giving President McKinley the excuse he needed to bring the United States into what became known as the Spanish-American War. There was significant loss of life in this second disaster Hood endured, as 266 men died. Most of the officers survived as they were aft and the explosion was forward, but the destruction of a second ship under him is bound to have had an impact on Lt. Hood.

One month after the *Maine* disaster, Hood was transferred to New York where he helped in the fitting out of a former Scottish yacht converted to a warship USS *Hawk*. *Hawk* was Hood's first independent command, and he commanded her admirably. In her finest action during the Spanish American War, *Hawk* attacked and sank the Spanish ship *Alphonso XII*. She also helped to capture four other Spanish ships, earning Hood commendation from the Navy.

Later that year, Hood was back ashore at the Hydrographic Office of the Navy Department in Washington, D.C., and then back to the Naval Academy as instructor again. After two years at the Academy he was promoted lieutenant commander and returned to sea duty as Executive Officer of USS *New Orleans* and then took his second command as CO of USS *Elcano*, protecting American interests in Asia during the Russo-Japanese War.

In 1905 Hood returned to the U.S., and keeping with his onshore teaching responsibilities became head of instruction for the Seventh Lighthouse District, living in Key West, Florida. Two years later he was promoted to commander and took command of the cruiser USS *Tacoma*, CL20, and then in 1909, left *Tacoma* to take command of USS *Severn*. *Tacoma* had been operating in the Caribbean during his time aboard, protecting American interests and “showing the flag,” but commanding *Severn* was more ideal for Hood, as she was used in his time aboard as a training ship to teach Academy students ship drills. In fact, he was soon in charge of handling all the ships used by the Naval Academy.

The following year Hood was promoted to captain and was given command of the battleship *Rhode Island*, BB17. He took command of *Rhode Island* just in time to take her for a review of the fleet by President Taft and then to exercises in the North Atlantic. After a year as CO of *Rhode Island*, he was made commander of USS *Delaware*, BB28. His years as instructor and his experience commanding ships paid off for *Delaware*, when she won the Battle Efficiency Pennant for 1911-1912.

From 1912 until 1915 Captain Hood sat on the General Board of the Navy. In that capacity he did everything from overseeing boards of inquiry to analyzing the development of the U.S. Navy’s global policies. To this end, Captain Hood put together a thoughtful, well-organized and impassioned plea to Congress for a rapid expansion of the United States Navy. His plan called for the completion of forty-eight battleships by 1925 and all necessary support vessels for this powerful fleet. While his plan was not realized in his lifetime, the 48<sup>th</sup> battleship built for the Navy was the *West Virginia*, BB48, completed soon after his death.

During the summer of 1915, Captain Hood was given command of the mighty battleship *Texas*, taking over from Captain Grant. Commander for just over a year, all his skill at

instruction and command paid off as *Texas* continued her reputation as a “well-oiled machine,” winning the Battleship Efficiency Pennant, Gunnery Trophy for the year and the “Red E” for engineering efficiency, all under Hood’s guidance.

Now at the height of his career, Hood left *Texas* to command the Atlantic Reserve Fleet, and then upon his promotion to Rear Admiral, took command of Division Four of the Atlantic Fleet. His flagship was USS *Minnesota*, BB22. Unfortunately, Admiral Hood was not able to relish the position he had finally attained through his hard work and abilities. Less than two weeks after taking command of the division, his health suddenly gave out. He was relieved of his command, transferred to the Naval Hospital in Washington, D.C., and then retired from the Navy. His official Navy biography notes the cause of his retirement as “physical disability incident to service,” perhaps the result of long-standing injuries from his experiences on *Kearsarge* and *Maine*. Sadly, whatever the causes, the results were ultimately catastrophic and in 1919, at 60 years of age, Admiral Hood died. Appropriate for his extraordinary impact on so many midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy, Admiral John Hood was buried in the Naval Academy Cemetery.