

Nathan Crook Twining  
17 January 1869 – 4 July 1924  
Captain of *Texas*  
31 December 1918 – 17 July 1919

Nathan Crook Twining was born in the scenic and historic Wisconsin town of Boscobel in 1869. After completing his studies at the Naval Academy in 1889 and his preliminary sea-duty, Twining was commissioned in 1891, serving two years aboard the cruiser USS *Chicago*, CA14. *Chicago* was Flagship of the Squadron of Evolution, which was the first organized group of ships of the modern Navy to fly the flag of the United States.

From *Chicago* he next served in USS *Kearsarge* and then USS *Newark*. *Kearsarge* was the aging sloop famous for her sinking of the Confederate raider CSS *Alabama* at the end of the Civil War. Luckily for Twining, he had already left her before her destruction on a reef off South America in 1894. Aboard *Newark*, young Twining was able to be a part of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of Columbus' discovery of the New World, which included naval reviews along the coast of Spain. *Newark* was America's first modern cruiser, and so was later designated as C1. After leaving *Newark*, he next served in USS *Concord*, PG3, gaining experience and increasing his responsibilities as an up-and-coming naval officer, before hitching a ride on the marine research vessel USS *Albatross* to return home in 1894.

For the next two years, he was stationed on shore at Hartford, Connecticut as Assistant Inspector of Ordnance, where he learned the principles of what would soon become his greatest accomplishment. Before that, however, Twining returned to sea aboard USS *Iowa*, BB4. His time in *Iowa* was particularly significant as it was during the Spanish-American war. As one of America's first battleships, she played a significant role in the war. As part of the initial blockade of Spain's ports in Cuba, she participated in the bombardment of San Juan, Puerto Rico

and then, acting on intelligence gathered by future *Texas* CO Victor Blue, *Iowa* fired the first shots to begin the Battle of Santiago de Cuba. Pounding Spanish ships *Maria Teresa* and *Oquendo* with her 12-inch guns, she drove them burning onto the beach. She then helped sink *Pluton* and destroy *Furor* and *Viscaya*. After such excellent work during the battle, *Iowa* took the defeated Spanish Admiral Pascual Cervera on board. This wartime experience was excellent training for Lieutenant Twining.

After the war, Twining transferred to USS *Philadelphia*, C4. *Philadelphia* operated on the Pacific Station and so had not participated in the Spanish-American War. She had been quite busy in the Pacific, even participating in Hawaii's less than popular transfer of ownership to the United States. During Twining's time aboard, she served as Rear Admiral Albert Kautz's flagship for the Pacific Station. Leaving her in 1900, Twining spent the next two years at the Navy Yard in Washington before returning to sea in USS *Rainbow*, AS7, serving as that ship's Navigator. In *Rainbow*, Twining saw action in the Philippine Campaign. Next he served aboard the battleship USS *Kentucky*, BB6, until her return from the Pacific to the United States for repairs in the fall, 1904. Returning to shore duty, Twining again worked in the Bureau of Ordinance where he worked for three more years.

In 1907, Twining returned to sea aboard another USS *Kearsarge*. In honor of the *Kearsarge* lost in 1894, the name was used for a new battleship, BB5, the only U.S. battleship not named for a state. Battleship *Kearsarge* steamed around the world as part of President Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet. The Great White Fleet was a mighty fleet of ships Roosevelt sent on a two year tour of the world, visiting nations and showing off the power of the United States Navy. Twining served as Executive Officer of *Kearsarge* for these two years, and then briefly transferred as Executive Officer in USS *Michigan*, BB27.

Back on shore first at the Navy Yard in Boston, he then transferred once more to Hartford, now as Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance. It was during these years at Ordnance that Twining, now Rear Admiral, made a remarkable contribution to modern naval warfare.

In 1911, aviation was still in its infancy. Even over a decade later, despite the great strides aviation and aerial combat made during World War One, the naval establishment of the 1920s refused to believe that little airplanes posed a threat to might warships. Fewer back in 1911 believed it. Admiral Twining, however, saw very early the potential dangers of aircraft for ships. While Chief of Ordnance, Twining developed the prototype of the first anti-aircraft weapon. Based upon a naval one-pounder, Twining's gun could elevate to 85 degrees and send a projectile to 18,000 feet, higher than any dirigible or airplane could even fly at that time. His design became the basis for the Navy's 3-inch anti-aircraft gun, and variations of anti-aircraft weapons were used in World War One and would bristle from the decks of naval vessels throughout the world by the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Twining also worked on the development of the first workable aerial torpedo, though the patent for it was given to his contemporary at the Bureau of Ordnance Bradley Fiske.

Twining returned to sea in 1914 as commander of USS *Tacoma*, C18. Cruiser *Tacoma* was Twining's first independent command, and under his direction she participated in President Woodrow Wilson's actions in Mexico, firing on Veracruz. When he left *Tacoma*, Twining went to the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. After finishing the course as a student, Twining remained for another year as an instructor.

When the United States entered World War One in the spring of 1917, Twining returned to sea, now as Squadron Commander of Squadron 2, Patrol Force of the Atlantic Fleet. In this

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<sup>1</sup> There is a fascinating description of Twining's work in the magazine *Popular Mechanics*.. "New American Aerial Weapons," *Popular Mechanics*, December 1911, pg. 776.

position, he had responsibility for protecting American convoys on their hazardous trips across the U-Boat infested North Atlantic. Following that duty, he became Chief of Staff to Vice Admiral William Sims, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in the European Theatre. This assignment included his serving as a member of the Inter-Allied Naval Committee. Twining received numerous commendations for his service during the war, including the Distinguished Service Medal.

Soon after the war was over, Twining took command of USS *Texas* when Captain Victor Blue left her after her own excellent war service. Under Twining, *Texas* maintained her reputation for efficiency and fine gunnery, and proudly continued her service in the Navy in the post-war period. Already there was discussion of naval reduction and her fate was seemingly unsure as she was beginning to show her age in the rapidly-advancing technology of those years. After only a little over six months as her captain, Twining left *Texas*. Command of *Texas* was Twining's last command, and he retired as an Admiral from the Navy in 1923. In 1924, Admiral Twining died and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.