

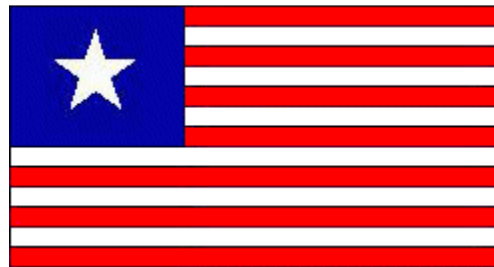
## A Brief History of the Texas Navy Flag

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Without the outbreak of hostilities that led to the Texas Revolution in October 1835, the provisional government of Texas, the General Council, sanctioned the creation of a navy for Texas. In a bill passed on November 25, 1835 the Council authorized the purchase of four schooners and the formal organization of maritime defense. It would be the job of the incipient navy to keep open the lines of supply between New Orleans and Galveston and to harass the enemy at sea.

These first four ships of the Texas Navy were purchased in January 1836 and, in March, placed under the command of Commodore Charles E. Hawkins. The navy distinguished itself throughout the revolution and played a deciding role in securing Texas independence. Following the Battle of San Jacinto, the Texas Navy was constituted as a permanent, albeit controversial wing of the Republic of Texas War Department.



*Flag of the Texas Navy, as adopted April 9, 1836.*

As the newly minted government of Texas got down to the business of forging a new country, it soon became clear that nations require symbols to distinguish themselves and to solidify their collective identity. These include a great seal of state, a national flag, and, quite often, a maritime flag. The flag of the Texas Navy is one of the key features of Republic-era iconography.

The first flag of the Texas Navy was adopted via executive order issued by President David G. Burnet on April 9, 1836, while his government was headquartered at Harrisburg. Burnet's order called for a flag that is: **“union blue, star central, thirteen stripes prolonged, alternate red and white.”** This flag, however, was not a new design. Examples of it are seen on letterhead for the firm McKinney, Williams and Company dating to as early as 1834. Established by Thomas F. McKinney and Samuel M. Williams, this firm opened up maritime trade in Texas to international markets. It appears that the flag adopted for use by the Texas Navy was the standard flown on McKinney and William's ships, several of which, including the famous steamer *Yellowstone*, were utilized during the Texas Revolution.

The initial design for the Texas Navy flag was indeed very clever and would have no doubt served the twin interests of both McKinney, Williams and Company and Texan naval commanders. Upon the high seas, peering through a handheld telescope, the first flag of the Texas Navy is virtually indistinguishable from that of the United States national standard, flown on all U.S. Navy ships. As such, potential enemies would be discouraged from attacking a vessel backed by the full force of the American military, rather than that of the rising Lone Star Republic.

Following the successful conclusion of the revolution, the Congress of the Republic of Texas formally adopted the aforementioned Texas Navy flag as the official standard for maritime military service. This act was passed on December 10, 1836 and also ratified a national standard - a single gold star on an azure background. Both of these flags, however, only saw service until 1839.



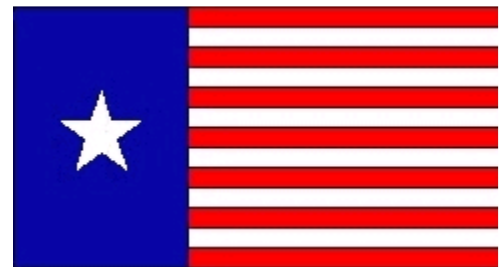
*First flag of the Texas Navy as seen on Republic of Texas \$50.00 currency.*

On January 25, 1839 the Congress of the Republic of Texas revisited the question of national symbolism. They abolished the use of the previous national and maritime standards and adopted a new national flag for Texas. Today, we know this flag as the “Lone Star” flag that still flies over our state. The original act of Congress reads as follows:

**“Be it further enacted, That from and after the passage of this act, the national flag of Texas shall consist of a blue perpendicular strip of the width of one third of the whole length of the flag, with a white star of five points in the centre thereof, and two horizontal stripes of equal breadth, the upper stripe white, the lower red, of the length of two thirds of the whole length of the flag; any thing in the act to which this is an amendment to the contrary not withstanding.”**

Following the adoption of the “Lone Star” flag as the national flag of the Republic of Texas, the ordinance calling for a maritime flag was repealed. The national standard then became the official flag of the Texas Navy. It served this duty until the Republic of Texas joined the United States on February 19, 1846 and the Texas Navy was formally abolished.

However, the story of the Texas Navy flag does not end with the death of the navy itself. In 1958, Texas Governor Price Daniel re-activated the Texas Navy with the purpose of “assuring the survival of Texas’ naval history, boundaries, water resources, and for the civil defense of Texas.” Further, in 1973, the Texas Legislature authorized the charter of the Texas Navy Association, Inc., as the official body to oversee the operation of the Texas Navy. In order to preserve Texas’ maritime history, the Texas Navy Association, Inc. has adopted the original first flag of the Texas Navy as its symbol, appearing on association letterhead, Web site, and in other formats.



*Ceremonial flag of the Texas Navy Association.*

Unfortunately, the use of this flag in a symbolic manner poses a problem. The first flag of the Texas Navy is very close in appearance to the modern flag of the African nation of Liberia. As such, current and former United States military personnel are expressly forbidden from saluting the flag of another sovereign nation. Therefore, the Texas Navy Board of Directors has adopted a modified version of the Texas Navy flag for use as a ceremonial tool. Through this flag the symbolic heritage of the Republic of Texas Navy lives on.