

SRT to Honor Republic of Texas Navy Veterans on Texian Navy Day—Sept. 15

On Saturday, September 15, 2007, The Sons of the Republic of Texas (SRT) will observe Texian Navy Day by conducting a solemn ceremony to honor the veterans of the Republic of Texas Navy who are buried at the Texas State Cemetery. Three of those men will be honored specifically—Captain Robert Oliver, Lieutenant Charles F. Fuller, and Midshipman Fielding R. Culp. The Honorable Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office and Governor Perry's representative to the Texas Navy Association Board of Directors, will be the keynote speaker. The Texas Navy Association will also participate in the ceremony, and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas will be recognized for their past work in spearheading the re-interment of the three Texas Navy veterans back in 1955. The ceremony will be at 11:00 a.m. at the Texas State Cemetery.

It is especially appropriate that the SRT celebrate Texian Navy Day 2007 at the Texas State Cemetery. After being observed for years on an ad hoc basis by gubernatorial proclamation, the third Saturday in September was designated by the legislature in 2005 (TEX. GOV. CODE § 662.051) as Texian Navy Day, which shall be regularly observed by appropriate ceremonies and activities. The last time the SRT honored the three Texas Navy veterans was January 1955, when their bodies were re-interred from the Girod Street Cemetery in New Orleans.

About the keynote speaker



The Honorable Jerry Patterson is Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office, elected to that position in 2002 and re-elected in 2006.

Born in Houston on November 15, 1946, Jerry Patterson has dedicated his life to public service. Graduating from Texas A&M, Class of 1969 and receiving his commission in the United States Marine Corps, Commissioner Patterson volunteered for duty in Vietnam in 1972 and was later designated as a Naval Flight Officer and served in Marine fighter squadrons until his retirement from the Marine Corps Reserve as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1993.

Five consecutive generations of Commissioner Patterson's family have served our nation in time of war. Commissioner Patterson is a life member of VFW, American Legion and Vietnam Veterans of America.

As state senator for District 11 (Harris, Galveston, and Brazoria Counties), Commissioner Patterson's major legislative successes include passage of the historic concealed handgun law, a constitutional amendment allowing home equity lending, the state coastal management plan, and the creation of the Texas State Veterans Home Program. A tireless advocate for his fellow veterans, he chaired the first Veterans Affairs committee in the Texas Senate and hosted the first POW/MIA day at the Texas Capitol.

Commissioner Patterson and his wife Jennifer reside in Austin. Commissioner Patterson has four children, Samantha and Cole, twins born in 2004, Emily, and Travis. His daughter Emily is an attorney working in Kosovo for an agency funded by the U.S. State Department. His son Travis is a graduate of Texas A&M, where he was commissioned as a Marine Lieutenant. He recently returned from duty in Iraq as a U.S. Marine attack helicopter pilot.

In recognition of his efforts to preserve Texas history, Commissioner Patterson was formally approved by the general membership of the SRT as an honorary member at the 2007 annual meeting. He will be inducted at the 2008 annual meeting in Nacogdoches.

The long journey to Texas

The Catholic Diocese of New Orleans operated the original cemeteries of New Orleans. Being a port city, Protestants moved into New Orleans over time, particularly after the Louisiana Purchase making New Orleans a U.S. possession. The Episcopal cathedral chapter, Christ Church, purchased a parcel of land at Girod and Liberty Streets in the Faubourg Ste. Marie neighborhood, the original “American” section of the city. The cemetery flourished as the final resting place of many of the New Orleans’ former leaders, but the chapter failed to allocate funds for perpetual care of tombs and graves, relying on current-year income to maintain existing structures. By the 1920s, the Girod Street cemetery’s new interments declined to the point where the chapter had insufficient funds to maintain the property. By the 1930s, many sections of the cemetery fell into serious disrepair, and families began to remove remains from their tombs and re-inter them in other cemeteries. By the 1950s, grave robbers had looted many of the aboveground crypts (required for all burials due to New Orleans’ geography), the homeless took up residency in many of the empty crypts, and prostitutes conducted their trade amid the ruins. The cemetery was condemned by the city on July 30, 1953, and the cemetery was deconsecrated by Rt. Rev. Girault M. Jones, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana in January 1957 when a mass removal and re-internment of remains took place either in Hope Mausoleum or in a mass grave in Providence Memorial Park. The land eventually became the parking garage for the New Orleans Center shopping mall, located next to the Louisiana Superdome.

After the condemnation, Mrs. Henry R. Wofford, Sr. of San Antonio, a past president general (1949-1951) of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, heard of the three Texans buried there in 1842, as did SRT Past President General Louis W. Kemp, KSJ (1947-1949). They contacted President General James S. Maverick, KSJ (1954-1955) and started the process leading up to the re-interment of the three Texas Navy veterans at the Texas State Cemetery on January 15, 1955, with full military honors. The *Dallas News* recorded the completion of this work in its Sunday, January 16, 1955, edition:

“To the sound of taps and the crack of gunshot from a military firing party, the remains of three officers of the Texas Navy were given a final resting place in the State Cemetery Saturday. The bodies of Capt. Robert Oliver of the Texas Marines and Lt. Charles F. Fuller and Midshipman Fielding R. Culp were reburied here after having lain in a New Orleans,

La., cemetery for over a hundred years. The Sons of the Republic of Texas sponsored the move, and conducted the ceremony.”

Directions to Republic Hill at the Texas State Cemetery

The Texas State Cemetery is located at 909 Navasota Street, six blocks east of Interstate 35 via 7th Street. To reach the Republic Hill section of the cemetery, turn north on Navasota Street and park as close as possible to the intersection of 7th and Navasota Streets. The Republic Hill gate is located just north of 7th Street. The ceremony will be just inside the Republic Hill gate.

For those with limited mobility who cannot use the steps at the Republic Hill gate, there will be limited access to Republic Hill by vehicle through the main entry gate. A limited number of chairs will be provided for those unable to stand during the ceremony.

Further information

Further information about the 1955 ceremony and the events leading up to it may be found in the January 3, 1955, issue of *The Texian*, now available on the SRT website; also, biographies of the three Texas Navy veterans may be found at the same location, <http://www.srttexas.org/texas%20navy.html>.

You will not want to miss this momentous tribute to those three men and the entire Republic of Texas Navy. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend. For additional information, contact SRT Texas Navy Committee Chairman David Hanover, dhanover@suddenlink.net.