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## U. S. NAVAL SHIPS NAMED AUSTIN

H. M. "Red" Austin

Three ships of the United States Navy have been named Austin.

**The first *Austin*** was a sloop-of-war, constructed in 1839 at Baltimore, MD by Schott and Whitney for the Texas Navy and commissioned 5 January 1840 at Galveston, Republic of Texas, Captain Edwin W. Moore commanding.

The *Austin* stopped at New Orleans for provisions and stores and in late July she set sail in company with the *San Bernard* for the Yucatan peninsula where another revolt had broken out against the central government in Mexico City. When the negotiations between Texas commissioner James Treat and the Mexican government failed completely, the *Austin* spent her time cruising around the Gulf coast of Mexico and the Yucatan, gathering intelligence and investigating ports and suitable anchorages.

She was named after Stephen F. Austin and served as flagship of the Texas Navy until 1845, when Texas became a state of the United States and the Texas Navy was dissolved. Along with other ships of the republic's Navy, the sloop was moved to Pensacola Navy Yard where she served as a receiving ship until she was broken up in 1848. The *Austin* was a wooden sloop, 600 tons, with a beam of 31 feet and a length of 125 feet. The hull at the waterline was 12 feet 6 inches. Her armament was sixteen 24-pounders and four 18-pounders and she was manned by 174 officers and crewmen.

**The second USS *Austin* (DE-15)** was laid down on 14 March, 1942 at Mare Island, Navy Yard as a ship that was intended for the British, but was taken over by the U. S. Navy and commissioned 13 February 1943, with Lt. Comdr. H. G. Claudius USNR in command. She was a destroyer escort, displacing 1140 tons, with a length of 289 ½ feet, breadth of 35 feet and a draft of 9 feet, 11 inches. Speed was 20 knots and her crew was 199 men. Armament was six 40 mm automatic guns and five 20 mm and three 3-inch guns and several depth charge anti-submarine weapons. The ship was named for Chief Carpenter's Mate, John Arnold Austin, an Alabama Navy man who was killed while trying to help his fellow shipmates during the

Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December, 1941. The ship named in his honor served during World War II and was decommissioned in 1945.

The *Austin* was assigned to Escort Division 14 with a home port in San Diego, and plied the cold waters of the North Pacific, escorting ships between Alaskan ports, conducting patrols, performing weather ship duties and serving as a homing point for aircraft.

**The third USS *Austin* (LPD-4)** was named for the city of Austin, Texas and the hull number denotes that it was an amphibious warship, built to combine the functions of several amphibious ships – the troop transport, attack cargo ship, helicopter carrier and dock landing ship. The USS *Austin* was capable of carrying over 900 combat-ready Marines and about 2500 tons of heavy equipment by helicopter, launching two at a time from the large landing platform on the after part of the ship.

This ship also honors Stephen Fuller Austin, after whom the Texas city was named. He served as a leader in the settling of Texas and played an active role in freeing Texas from Mexico and establishing the Republic of Texas. The USS *Austin* was commissioned 6 February 1965 and was christened by Lynda Byrd Johnson, the daughter of the 36th President of the United States, representing the city of Austin, Texas. Lucy Baines Johnson was her lady in waiting.

**Ed. notes:** The USS *Austin* (LPD-4), which was involved in the nation's space program as the recovery ship for Apollo 12 and part of the recovery for Apollo 13 and 14, was decommissioned 27 September 2006, ending more than 41 years of Naval service.

Harris "Red" Austin, Chief Cryptologic Technician USN (Retired) and Naval Historian, died 20 Jan 1999 in Fredericksburg, MD. He is buried next to his early Austin ancestor, Anthony Austin, in the Old Center Cemetery, Suffield, CT.