



USS TEXAS escorted into Galveston by Elissa.

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USS TEXAS (SSN 775) -- Joins the Fleet.

"Man our ship-- bring her to life."

So ordered our First Lady, Laura Bush.

By R. B. "Buddy" Wellborn,
Captain, US Navy SS (retired).
Galveston, Texas. September 9, 2006.

It was an electrifying moment, when the ship's crew responded to her order with, "Aye, aye, Ma'am!"

As you watched 134 young sailors-- and, magnificent doesn't even come close--double-time to her order, the spirit, and the pride, rushed into your veins like it was coming from a fire-hose sized I-V. This was the moment that this submarine warship became the fourth United States Ship TEXAS—Captain John J. Litherland, United States Navy, Commanding.

This ship is exactly what John Paul Jones was describing in a letter to le Ray de Chaumont in November 1778, when he wrote, "I wish to have no Connection with any Ship that does not sail fast, for I intend to go in harm's way."

TEXAS is a fighting lady in every sense of the word as epitomized by her Jack, "DON'T TREAD ON ME." Doubtless to her crew, she is a mother to all in her, whose very lives depend on her sustenance.

Many of the ceremonious speakers spoke to her merit and future tasking. I wasn't sure if they really knew what was inside her that made her "smell" so good. So, for comparison to other outer hull stuffed thin-skinned sausage-shaped commodities, she's \$155 per pound, that is, \$2.7-billion displacing some 7800 dwt, dead-weight (long) tons.

But, our Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Mullins, knew, and as is his way he spoke to and about them-- the Crew. Knowing that the Navy is sailors, at sea, in ships, outfitted and supported by their countrymen, he touched us all with his sage remarks.

For the record, it was Saturday morning on the Texas Gulf Coast in early September, well into the Hurricane season. It was a comfortable 78 degrees with only a light breeze coming in off the Bay that barely fluttered the hoisted flags. The skies were overcast with threatening rain clouds. In other words, it was just another "Gray Navy-day."

At the moment the commissioning pennant broke, right on cue, two Navy F/A-18s rolled in hot, and low-- at about 200 feet. I saw them coming. I saw the wake-plumes they were leaving behind on the Bay. I knew what they were going to do. I'd seen them do it a thousand times, on other fields, on other days, a long-long time ago, in a place far-far away. VICTORY ROLL! Then full throttle for a "Smokey Joe" pull up. The roar rocked you to your soul. Some ten-thousand guests cheered-- you had to be dead not to feel the surge. Oh yeah, it was "Good Morning TEXAS-- Welcome to the Fleet."

Assessing the lethality of this warship requires knowledgeable imagination, because you can't see much looking at her from the outside. She is 377 feet in length and 34 feet in the beam. The exposed "deck" is really just the upper part of her cylindrical hull with a free-flooding fairwater-structure called a "Sail" wrapped around her retractable masts to fair the flow of water. Her upper rudder is exposed and marked to show that she draws 32 feet aft. That's it-- except she's painted black.

My guest commented to me in a whisper that the black paint makes her look even more foreboding, especially if she is as lethal as they say. I learnedly responded, "Because the Sea is black at night;" and then added with an impish smile, "Submariners do some of their best work in the dark." She smiled.

It was-- a great Navy day. ■