



The Cruiser Houston: Peacetime Icon, Wartime Martyr

By Jim Saye

When the heavy cruiser CA-30 was launched in 1929, she was not the first ship, nor the last, to boast the name "Houston." It was a name derived from her proud sponsoring city, and from a man of legendary achievements. Sam Houston, born in Virginia, was elected governor of two states—Tennessee and Texas. He was the victorious general at the Battle of San Jacinto, which established the Republic of Texas, and altered the history of the U.S. and Mexico. If ever a ship carried a proud name, it was the cruiser *Houston*.

Late in the twentieth century, a nationally acclaimed professional football team from another Texas city, the Dallas Cowboys, was popularly known as "America's Team." In like manner, the cruiser *Houston* caught the public favor in the 1930s and became "America's Ship." She carried this unique esteem, this special charisma, throughout her career. And at the end, like Crockett and Bowie, the cruiser *Houston* guaranteed herself a place in history.

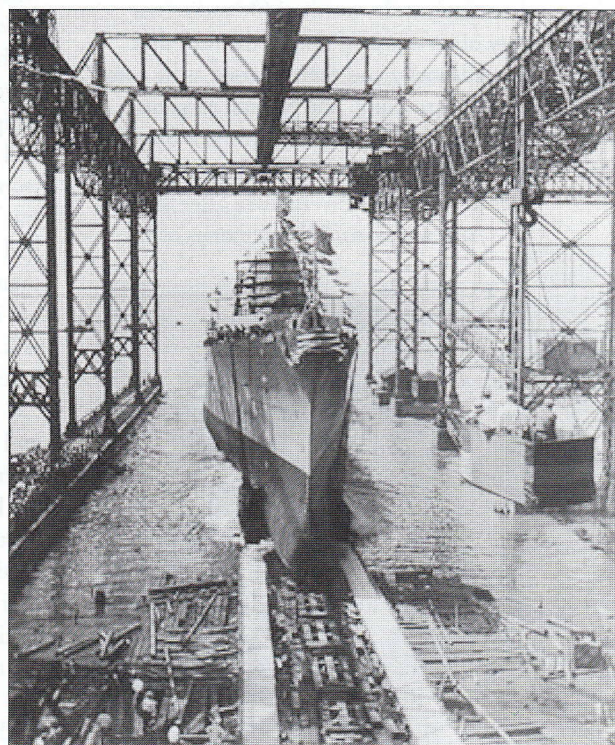
BACK TO THE BEGINNING

World War I, "the war to end all wars," officially came to an end on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, November 11, 1918. The victorious League of Nations promised a new world of everlasting peace. Treaties bound the nations to restrictions on the size of armies and navies—treaties that were easily and frequently circumvented.

In the U.S., the "Roaring Twenties" were carefree, with little thought for military forces. No sensible politician would think of proposing increased funds for the neglected military.

Still, there were a few far-sighted statesmen who knew that the preservation of liberty required eternal vigilance. This was especially notable in the Navy, where the concept of a two-ocean defense force obviously demanded a large modern fleet.

In 1925, Congress was persuaded by the arguments of the Navy and authorized funds for the construction of eight new



The USS Houston (CA-30) was launched on September 7, 1929 in Newport News, VA. She earned the nicknames "The Rambler" for her far-ranging travels during peacetime, and "The Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast" for her ability to evade the Japanese during the early months of the war. Gift of William A. Bernrieder.

cruisers.¹ Traditionally, cruisers are named for cities, just as battleships are named for states. When the new cruisers were authorized, a fierce contest began among cities across the nation who wanted to put their name on a powerful new ship that would travel over the seven seas.

Even before construction was started, six of the cruisers were named by the Secretary of the Navy. These were *Pensacola*,

Chicago, *Chester*, *Northampton*, *Louisville*, and *Salt Lake City*. Eighty cities vied for naming rights to the two remaining cruisers. Houston, a young city filled with patriotism and a swelling civic pride, joined the contest.²

CAMPAIGN FOR HOUSTON

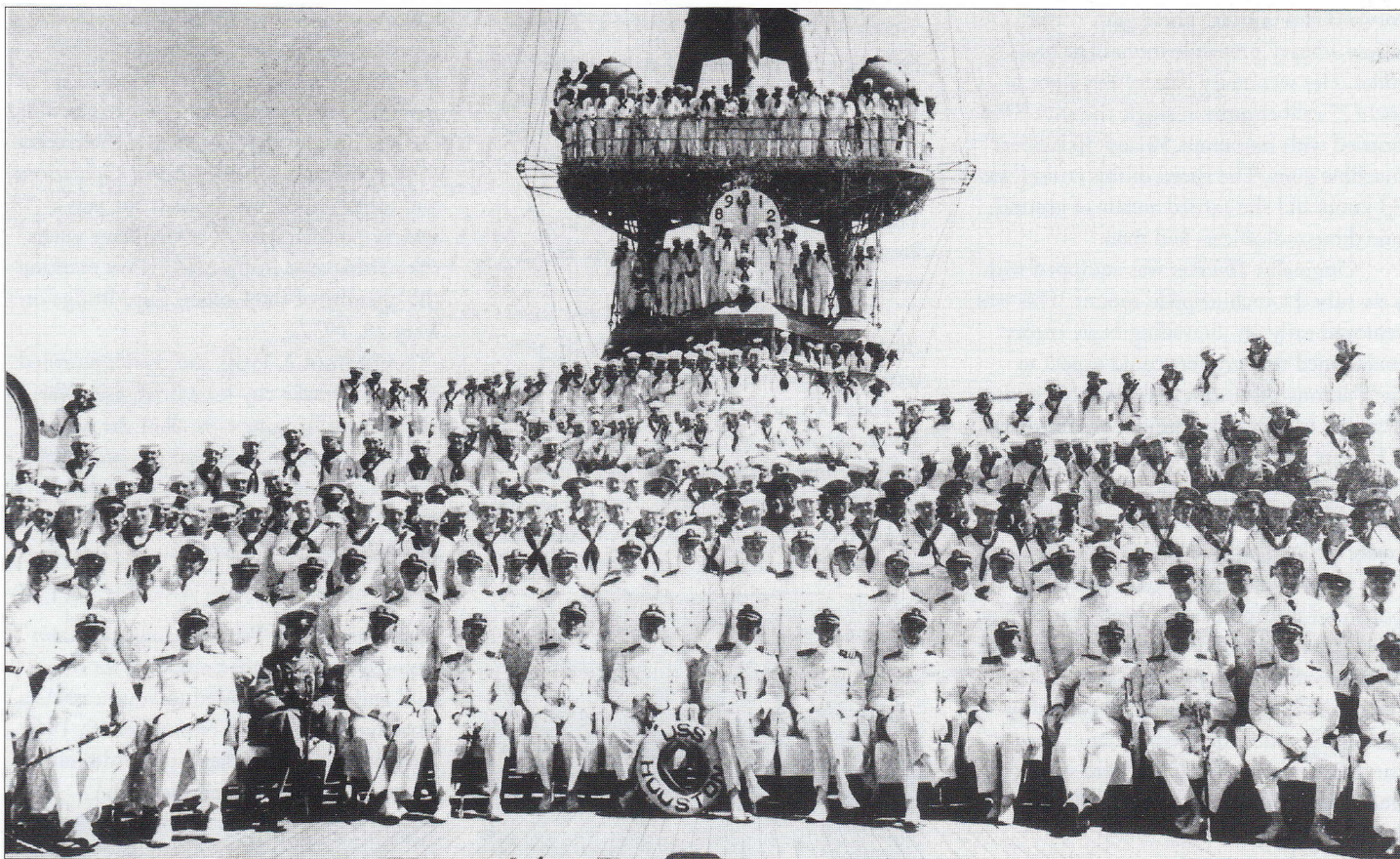
In early 1927, the contest for naming rights for the last two cruisers heated up. In Houston, a youthful aide to Mayor Oscar Holcombe and an officer in the Naval Reserve, William A. Bernrieder, took the lead in organizing for the city's campaign.

A committee involving all segments of the city, was formed to take bold action to persuade the Navy to name a cruiser *Houston*. Among the prominent citizens active in this project were Col. Thomas Ball, chairman of the committee; Mayor Oscar Holcombe; City Councilman H. Halverton; Dr. Oberholzer, Superintendent of Schools; Ike Ashburn, Chamber of Commerce; C. B. Gillespie, editor of the *Houston Chronicle*; General Maurice Hirsch; and William Bernrieder.³

Over a period of nine months, the citizens rallied enthusiastically behind this effort. School children drafted and mailed hundreds of letters. It was reported that the passageway outside the office of Navy Secretary Curtis D. Wilbur was clogged with mailbags packed with letters from Houston school children. People from all over Texas gave their support. Telegrams from prominent people flooded Washington. Legislatures of the states of Virginia, birthplace of Sam Houston, and Tennessee, where Houston had been governor, passed

resolutions supporting the city of Houston. Bernrieder worked diligently to keep the enthusiasm high.

In early September, Bernrieder received notice that Navy Secretary Wilbur had scheduled a stop in Houston during a railroad journey. "We hastily summoned a delegation of the committee, city officials and civic leaders to meet the secretary at Union Station," remembered Bernrieder.



Crew of the USS Houston

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

"He was traveling on the Sunset Limited with his wife and Naval aide."

On Wednesday, September 7, 1927, a large crowd waited in eager anticipation for the arrival of the Navy Secretary. There was a loud cheer when he stepped down from the train and began shaking hands. Secretary Wilbur paused when he came to Mayor Holcombe, and announced to the mayor and to the assembled crowd that one of the new cruisers would be the *Houston*. Applause shook the station.

"We celebrated, the whole town celebrated. The newspapers carried the story on the front pages the next day. We all felt it

was a hard-fought victory," said Bernrieder.⁴

CRUISER HOUSTON GOES TO SEA

Designated CA-30, the *Houston* was built in Virginia at Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co. at a cost of \$17 million. By September 1929, she was ready to go in the water. William Bernrieder scrambled to contact governors of many states, government officials, and newspapers throughout the nation to spread awareness of the launching and draw national attention to this event.

A large group of Houstonians traveled to Newport News to attend the launching on Saturday, September 7, 1929. Among the official delegation were Texas Governor Dan Moody; Congressman Daniel Garrett; Col. Thomas H. Ball, chairman of the naming committee; Col. R. C. Kuldell, president of the Houston Chamber of Commerce; Rear Admiral A. W. Marshall, Commandant, Eighth Naval District; Col. R. W. Humphreys, Collector of Customs in Galveston; William B. Bates, School Board; W. E. Monteith, Mayor of Houston; and William Bernrieder, aide to the mayor.

Also in the official party were several

young ladies. Miss Elisabeth Holcombe was the sponsor of the cruiser *Houston*. She was the daughter of Mayor Oscar Holcombe. Miss Mary Ellen Bute was the Maid of Honor. Miss Charlotte Williams, the great-granddaughter of General Sam Houston, was an honored member of the official party.

Music for the occasion was by the United States Navy Band under the direction of Charles Benter. Music included "The Star Spangled Banner," "Anchors Aweigh," "Stars and Stripes Forever," "Texas Our Texas," "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You," and a march, "U.S. Cruiser *Houston*," composed by Charles Benter for this special occasion.⁵

As the official sponsor, Elisabeth Holcombe christened the cruiser *Houston*. It was reported that she also broke a bottle of water from Buffalo Bayou on the ship's bow. After fitting out and sea trials, the *Houston* was commissioned on June 17, 1930.⁶

The cruiser *Houston* had a displacement of 9,050 tons. She was 600 feet long, with a beam width of 66 feet. Her main battery was nine 8-inch guns in three turrets, two

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: During the Korean War, Jim Saye (LtJG, USNR) served two years at sea. The captain noted in his service record, "Saye has a flare (sic) for writing." This "flare" carried him through a four-decade career in advertising, and now spurs his passion for writing.

forward and one aft. These guns could throw a heavy projectile more than fifteen miles. Her secondary battery was eight 5-inch/25 caliber guns in single mounts. She bristled with numerous 50 and 30 caliber machine guns. The speed of this cruiser was 33 knots and she carried a crew of around one thousand officers and men.

Originally, *Houston* was equipped with a six-tube 21-inch torpedo mount. This was removed early on. Prevailing Navy theory maintained that cruisers could expect to fight at long distances, with their big guns. Torpedo tubes were mounted on destroyers, PT boats, and other small craft for striking crippling blows at very close range. Removal of the torpedo weapon was to prove very costly in the final analysis.⁷

The *Houston* had two aircraft catapults and four pontoon-rigged planes. The bulky pontoons were necessary to float the planes as they took position alongside, under the crane to be lifted aboard ship. In the air, the pontoons reduced air speed to the point where the planes were sitting ducks for fighter craft, such as the agile Japanese "Zero."

PEACE-TIME SERVICE, 1930-1941

Shakedown cruises in the Atlantic occupied *Houston* for several months after commissioning. Then she made her first visit to Houston, on Navy Day, October 27, 1930. At the time, she was the largest ship to navigate up the winding ship channel to the Port of Houston. More than 250,000 visitors went aboard the *Houston* while she was docked in her namesake city. Houstonians presented the ship a \$15,000 silver service for the wardroom during this visit. Then the ship steamed to Hampton Roads and the Norfolk Naval Base to assume duties with the Atlantic Fleet.

On January 10, 1931, *Houston* was reassigned to the Pacific Fleet and departed to transit the Panama Canal, pause briefly in the Hawaiian Islands, and reach Manila. On arrival in Manila, *Houston* became the flagship of the Asiatic Station. She participated in training exercises for the next year.

When fighting broke out between Japan and China in 1932, *Houston* led the U.S. military to Shanghai. She landed Navy and Marine Corps rifle platoons to protect American lives and property. She remained in this troubled area until relieved by the cruiser *Augusta* in November 1933.⁸

"SHOWBOAT" OF THE FLEET

Following her two years of duty on the Asiatic Station, *Houston* crossed the Pacific to base in San Francisco. Here she gained a reputation for "spit and polish" and exemplary seamanship in training maneuvers. The Navy singled out *Houston* to carry President Franklin D. Roosevelt on an extended voyage.

In the 1930s, presidents did not have Air Force One for lengthy trips. FDR, paralyzed from the waist down by polio, faced obvious difficulties in traveling on any of the aircraft available at the time. The fast, powerful, impressive *Houston* was admirably suited for presidential travel. An elevator was installed to lift FDR in his wheelchair from stateroom to quarterdeck or bridge.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt, shown here with a Marine guard, made four voyages on the USS Houston. The ship was fitted with special elevators and handrails to accommodate the president's disability.

Courtesy Special Collections, Archives Division, Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy

Fresh paint and polished brightwork greeted FDR when he boarded *Houston* at Annapolis, Maryland on July 1, 1934. Covering almost 12,000 miles, FDR's first voyage in the cruiser *Houston* steamed down the east coast, meandered through the Caribbean, made the transit through the Panama Canal, sped through the open Pacific to Honolulu, and ended in Portland, Oregon. FDR gloried in the Navy traditions and the careful attention to his needs.

One of FDR's well-known eccentricities was his habit of reading mystery novels until all hours of the night. As a rule, he would consume two or three paperbacks each night. So, *Houston* was well stocked with mystery novels. Every time she made port, a sailor was assigned to seek out a bookseller and buy a fresh stock.

FDR cruised on *Houston* whenever the opportunity arose. In 1935, 1938, and 1939 he commandeered *Houston* for

lengthy cruises. From this high-profile exposure, the cruiser became the "poster child" for the Navy. She was featured in newsreels, newspapers, and magazines when she was hosting the president, the secretary of the Navy, the Chief of Naval Operations, and other important persons. She was a very impressive symbol of the Navy when she participated in the celebration marking the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge on May 28, 1937.

On April 7, 1939, the cruiser returned to her namesake city for a brief visit. War clouds were hanging over all of the world, but the people of Texas and the people of the United States felt secure, protected by two great oceans and a Navy with mighty warships such as *Houston*.

FLAGSHIP OF THE ASIATIC FLEET

Back through the Panama Canal, *Houston* steamed to a west coast shipyard for overhaul and was then posted to Southeast Asia. Arriving in Manila on November 19, 1940, *Houston* became the flagship of Admiral Thomas C. Hart. Captain Jesse B.



Captain Albert H. Rooks commanded the USS Houston during the Battle of Sunda Strait. He was awarded several medals posthumously, including the Congressional Medal of Honor and the Netherlands' Cross of the Bronze Lion.

Gift of USS Houston Survivors Association

Oldendorf was the skipper of the *Houston* at this time.

Ensign W. G. Winslow was transferred to the cruiser on August 25, 1941. He was one of five officers who flew the scout/observation seaplanes carried on the cruiser. In later years, Winslow attained the rank of

Continued on page 53

Cruiser *Houston*

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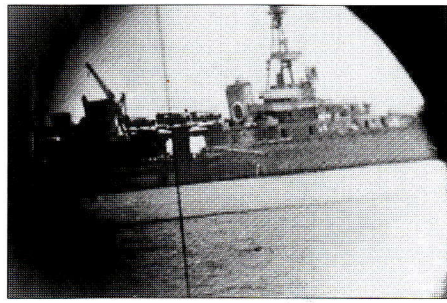
captain. He wrote an important book in 1984 about the cruiser.

Captain Albert H. Rooks arrived on August 30, 1941, to relieve Captain Oldendorf. In October, *Houston* went into the shipyard at Cavite for emergency repairs and installation of four new anti-aircraft guns. The ship took on a capacity load of fuel and ammunition. On November 28, Admiral Hart moved his flag ashore and ordered Captain Rooks to take *Houston* to sea as quickly as possible. Then the admiral dispersed his small fleet to makeshift ports in remote locations among the chain of Philippine Islands. *Houston* was dispatched to Iloilo on the south coast of Panay Island.⁹

DAY OF INFAMY— WAR STRIKES AMERICA

Sunday, December 7, 1941. The Japanese sneak attack on the U.S. Pacific fleet, peacefully anchored in the bosom of the great Pearl Harbor, crippled America's strength in the Pacific. Swiftly, the Empire of Japan moved to exploit its success. Guam fell. A tiny force of Marines on Wake Island held out until December 23. Hong Kong surrendered on December 25. Manila was captured after a few days on January 2, 1942. The invincible British fortress of Singapore surrendered on February 15.

The Allies were reduced to out-numbered, out-gunned rear guard tactics. General Douglas MacArthur retreated to Bataan and Corregidor. The overall strategy was to hold the line where possible, for as long as possible, buying time for the



This photo was taken through the sight of an Allied gun, just days before the Battle of Sunda Strait. It is the last known photo taken of the USS Houston before its sinking on March 1, 1942.

Gift of Betty Batchelor Miles

industrial might of arsenal America to train and arm a new fighting force to roll back the invaders.

On the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, *Houston* was rushing preparations to get under way, out of the restricting harbor at Iloilo, when a message was received ordering the ship to await the arrival of Rear Admiral William A. Glassford, Jr., Commander of Task Force Five. Waiting was anxious. Lookouts scanned the sky for Japanese bombers. Finally, late in the afternoon, a PBY flying boat brought in the admiral and his staff. They were hastily transferred to the *Houston*, and she wasted no time in speeding out to the relative safety of the open sea.

Lookouts reported anti-aircraft bursts over Iloilo, then a ship on fire in the harbor. This Japanese air raid was directed at the *Houston*, but missed her by about an hour. Still, Radio Tokyo reported that night that the heavy cruiser *Houston* had been sunk in Iloilo Harbor.

During the remainder of December and most of January, *Houston* operated from

Darwin, Australia, and Surabaya, on the northeast coast of Java. This duty consisted mainly of convoying tankers and troopships, offering protection from enemy submarines and aircraft.

BATTLE STATIONS! THE FLORES SEA

Since December 10, when Japanese aircraft sank the vaunted British battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battle cruiser *HMS Repulse*, Allied naval power in Southeast Asia was not a significant threat to Japan. Yet when most of the remaining vessels were combined into a strike force under the command of Rear Admiral Karel Doorman of the Dutch Navy, they represented a serious potential for disrupting Japanese invasion strategy.

Admiral Doorman was under orders to attack the enemy. On February 4, 1942, he gathered a strike force and set out to engage a Japanese invasion fleet. Steaming near Bali in the Flores Sea, the Allied ships were attacked by waves of Mitsubishi bombers. When the bombs began to fall, the ships maneuvered independently, sending up a wall of anti-aircraft fire. The light cruiser *USS Marblehead* was hit by two bombs and disabled. *Houston*, seeking to shield *Marblehead*, was hit on the after turret. The three-gun turret was blown apart and engulfed by fire. Forty-eight sailors were killed.

The strike force limped into Tjilatjap harbor in Java. Once again Tokyo Radio announced that the cruiser *Houston* had been sunk. So many reports told of the sinking of this ship that the *Houston* gained the nickname—“The Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast.”¹⁰

Touring *Houston*'s History

Visit the two USS *Houston* memorials in downtown...

Starting at Allen's Landing at the north end of downtown on Buffalo Bayou, tour participants will alternate between riding the Metro light rail and walking up the rejuvenated Main Street. They will see particular places of interest along Main Street and in the heart of downtown. Featured on the tour are stops at the two USS *Houston* memorials in downtown. The first is located outside the Reliant Energy building on Main Street, once the site of the Loews movie house, where in May 1942, 1,000 men volunteered to enlist as the crew for the replacement USS *Houston*, which had been sunk in March of that year. The second memorial, located on the grounds of Houston's Heritage Society, commemorates the sailors lost on the original USS *Houston*. Topping the monument is the original ship's bell, which was recovered from the wreckage after World War II.

For more information or to schedule a tour, call 713-864-3875, or email Andrew Grocock at anelgro@earthlink.net.



On Memorial Day 1942, nearly 150,000 Houstonians filled Main Street downtown to watch as 1,000 "Houston Volunteers" were sworn into duty in the U.S. Navy.

Courtesy Houston Photographic and Architectural Foundation Trust

THE BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA

Beginning about February 15, *Houston* came under air attack almost daily. Tokyo reported again that she had been sunk. Damaged and battle-weary, "The Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast" continued to carry out her assigned missions.

Receiving information that a major Japanese invasion force was approaching Java, Admiral Doorman gathered his ships and steamed out of the Surabaya harbor, resolved to intercept and engage the enemy fleet. The Allied flotilla steamed in line with Admiral Doorman in his Dutch light cruiser *DeRuyter* in the lead, followed by the British heavy cruiser HMS *Exeter*, then *Houston*, the Australian light cruiser *Perth*, the Dutch light cruiser *Java*, and a screen of nine American, British, and Dutch destroyers.

The Battle of the Java Sea was opened when two Japanese heavy cruisers came over the horizon and began firing broadsides at *Exeter* and *Houston*. These fell

short, and the Allied cruisers held their fire until the two fleets closed. Then the big guns of *Exeter* and *Houston* boomed a response of accurate salvos.

Two Japanese light cruisers and thirteen destroyers joined the battle. In a salvo-to-salvo slugfest, *Houston* damaged one of the enemy heavy cruisers, forcing it to retire from the battle. *Exeter* sustained severe damage and was ordered to return to port. Allied destroyers laid a smokescreen around *Exeter* to protect her. Japanese destroyers laid smokescreens to veil their movements as they maneuvered to launch torpedo attacks. Using their newly-developed "long lance" torpedoes, the Japanese gained the upper hand. The Dutch light cruisers *DeRuyter* and *Java* were blown out of the water by these torpedoes. Admiral Doorman went down with his ship. Before losing contact, the admiral ordered *Perth* and *Houston* to retire from the engagement.

Captain Hector M.L. Waller of the *Perth* was the senior officer present. He

ordered *Perth* and *Houston* to steam north along the north coast of Java. Aerial reconnaissance reported that the Sunda Strait was clear of enemy vessels. This appeared to offer the two Allied ships an escape route to the Indian Ocean, and thence to Australia.¹¹

THE BATTLE OF SUNDA STRAIT

About midnight on February 28, just as it seemed escape was in their hands, *Perth* and *Houston* ran right into a Japanese fleet staging a full-scale invasion of the Island of Java. Some sixty troop transports were screened by an aircraft carrier, seven cruisers, and twenty destroyers. Exchanging gunfire with ships on all sides and frantically dodging torpedoes, *Perth* and *Houston* surged at flank speed into the Sunda Strait. In the darkness and confusion of the melee, *Houston* lost sight of *Perth*. When she was sighted again, it was obvious that *Perth* was dead in the water and sinking.

Houston continued alone, surrounded by enemy destroyers, evading killer torpe-

does by using her speed and maneuverability to maximum advantage. Just after midnight, a torpedo struck the port beam, destroying the after engine room, cutting the cruiser's speed. Then a second torpedo hit the starboard side. Number 2 turret took a direct hit and blew up. Another torpedo exploded in the ship as she lost way and became a stationary target.

With enemy destroyers circling *Houston* and firing at point blank range, Captain Rooks ordered the bugler to sound "abandon ship." As he descended from the signal bridge, Captain Rooks was killed by a shell that exploded nearby. Shells and torpedoes pounded the valiant *Houston* until she sank beneath the sea. Even then, the destroyers and small vessels machine-gunned sailors in the sea.

Of the 1100-man crew of the *Houston*, only 368 survived the sinking. These men were captured by the Japanese and became prisoners of war until their liberation in September 1945. Their treatment was inhumane. They were subjected to torture, disease, and starvation. Seventy-nine died in captivity.

Many of the POWs from the *Houston* were forced to labor on the infamous Burma-Siam railroad. This was the railroad portrayed in the movie *Bridge on the River Kwai*.¹²

MEMORIAL DAY 1942

May of 1942 was a bleak time in America. Gasoline and other necessities were rationed. Nazi submarines lined our east coast, covering the beaches with debris and tar balls from tankers that dared to supply the industrial northeast. There were reports of German submarines in the Gulf. On April 9, American and Filipino forces on the Bataan Peninsula surrendered. Corregidor, "the Gibraltar of the East," fell to the Japanese on May 6. Australians were frantically fortifying a line across the interior for a last ditch stand.

Although the circumstances were unknown, the cruiser *Houston* was undoubtedly lost. City leaders launched a War Bond drive to raise money to pay for the building of another cruiser *Houston*. Under the leadership of oilman Claud B.

Hamill and his wife Marie, this bond drive was unusually successful.

At the same time, a recruiting campaign began to replace the sailors lost when the *Houston* was sunk. All of this patriotic activity reached a climax on Memorial Day, 1942.

Main Street was closed to traffic for several blocks on either side of the Loew's State Theater. A speakers' stand and a large wooden replica of the *Houston* were erected in front of the Loew's and Metropolitan Theaters. Some 150,000 Houstonians filled the street and sidewalks and hung out of the windows of downtown buildings.

A Navy honor guard marched up, as ranks of young Texans formed for a mass swearing-in ceremony. One thousand

sary, and still another USS *Houston*, as long as American ideals are in jeopardy."

Then the "Houston Volunteers," plus 600 additional volunteers who joined too late to be a part of the ceremony, were marched to Union Station where five special trains waited to carry the men to Naval bases.¹³

MAIN STREET MONUMENT

A bronze plaque was set in the sidewalk to commemorate the "Houston Volunteers." It reads: "On this site on May 30, 1942, 1,000 Houston volunteers took the oath of service in the United States Navy and dedicated their lives to avenging the cruiser USS *Houston* and her valiant crew lost in the Battle of the Java Sea."

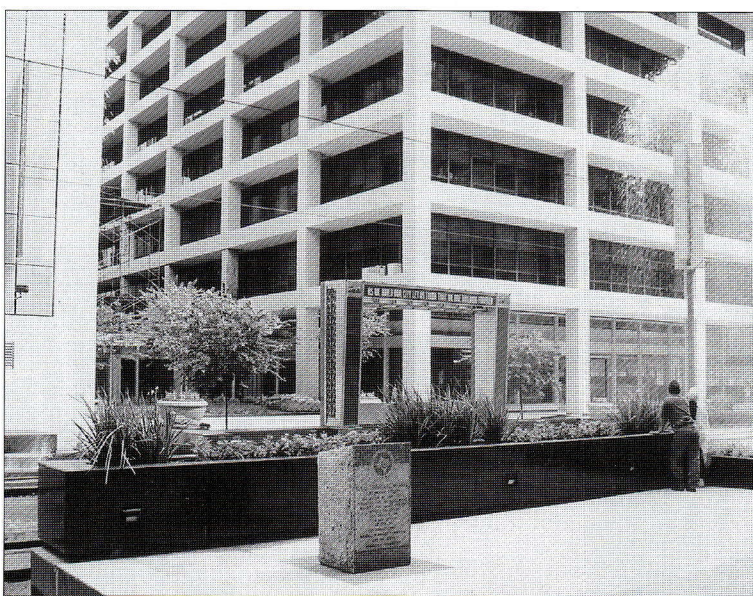
In 1974, this plaque was removed from the sidewalk and mounted on a pink granite pedestal. Its location, at 1000 Main Street, has been designated a Texas Historical Site. This is now adjacent to the Main Street entrance to the Reliant Energy Building, which was built on the block previously occupied by the Lamar Hotel and the Metropolitan and Loew's State Theaters.

Among the dignitaries present at the ceremony to dedicate the monument in 1974 were Gen. Maurice Hirsch, member of the original 1927 cruiser *Houston* committee; William A. Kirkland, Executive Officer of the sec-

ond cruiser *Houston* (CL-81); William A. Bernrieder, member of the original committee; Neal Pickett, wartime mayor of Houston; and Mr. and Mrs. Claud Hamill, who led the campaign to raise funds for the second cruiser *Houston*.¹⁴

ANOTHER CRUISER HOUSTON (CL-81)

The special Houston War Bond campaign led by oilman Claud B. Hamill raised \$85 million. This was enough to fund the building of a second cruiser *Houston*, plus an aircraft carrier, the *San Jacinto*. Built by Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co., the new cruiser *Houston* (CL-81) was launched on June 19, 1943. A group of twenty Houstonians attended the launching,



Main Street Monument to the 1,000 "Houston Volunteers"

young men left their homes and families to serve in the Navy. One of these youths was B. G. "Pappy" Bond, who later became Houston Chief of Police in 1976. Eddie Eichler, who worked for Conoco for 27 years, and Walter R. Stovall, who had a 42-year career with FMC Technologies were among the volunteers.

Admiral William Glassford, who had served in the Philippines when the cruiser *Houston* was flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, gave a brief speech. Then he administered the oath to the 1,000 "Houston Volunteers" and welcomed them into the Navy.

Mayor Neal Pickett spoke and read a stirring telegram from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The President wrote, "...there will be another USS *Houston*, and yet another USS *Houston*, if that should become neces-

including Mayor and Mrs. Otis Massey and Mr. and Mrs. Claud Hamill and son Garrett. Joining them were Secretary of Commerce Jesse Jones, Texas Senator Tom Connally, Texas Governor Coke Stevenson, and various Navy officials.

Mrs. C. B. Hamill, the official sponsor of the cruiser, christened the vessel "on behalf of the people of Houston who ensured the perpetuation of a beloved American name in a great fighting ship."¹⁵

Houston was commissioned on December 20, 1943, with Captain W. W. Behrens commanding. After a shakedown cruise, she departed for duty in the Pacific

on April 16, 1944. *Houston* (CL-81) joined Vice Admiral Mitscher's fast carrier task force on May 31. The task force participated in the amphibious assault of the Marianas and the decisive naval battle of the Philippine Sea.

In a subsequent battle off Formosa, *Houston* was struck by two powerful torpedoes. Temporary repairs enabled the ship to return to the U.S. for overhaul in a shipyard. World War II ended while the ship was undergoing extensive repairs. Leaving the yard, *Houston* made a series of "Goodwill Tours" in Europe and the Caribbean.¹⁶

The cruiser *Houston* (CL-81) was decommissioned December 15, 1947, and finally scrapped in March 1959. The next Navy vessel named "Houston" was the nuclear submarine *Houston* (SN-713). Launched on March 21, 1981, this submarine was christened by Barbara Bush, wife of then Vice President George Bush. A Navy pilot in World War II, Bush crashed in the Pacific and was rescued by a submarine.

USS HOUSTON (CA-30) MEMORIAL MONUMENT

A fifteen-foot obelisk of polished red granite stands in Sam Houston Park as a memorial to the cruiser *Houston* (CA-30) and to her



Texans at U.S. Cruiser Houston Launching—Mayor Otis Massey is shown at the microphone speaking at the launching of the new cruiser, Houston, June 19, 1943, at Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Newport News, Virginia. Behind him is Governor Coke Stevenson of Texas, and to the speaker's right is Senator Tom Connally of Texas. Seated on rail is Jesse Jones, Secretary of Commerce. To the left of Mr. Jones are Mr. and Mrs. Claud Hamill and in front of them, their son, Garrett.

(Official U.S. Navy Photo) Courtesy Greater Houston Partnership

crew. The monument is capped with a shiny brass ship's bell. This bell was salvaged from the sunken cruiser by divers in the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java.

Captain Carl V. Ragsdale (USN, RET), Chairman of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) Foundation, led the ceremonies on November 11, 1995, when the memorial was dedicated. Captain Ragsdale introduced distinguished guests, who gave brief comments about the occasion. Houston Mayor Bob Lanier spoke, followed by Vice Admiral David B. Robinson, Commander Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. Next, representatives of the Allies involved in the Battle of the Java Sea were introduced and spoke. They were Consul General Graham A. McHugh of Australia, Consul General Helmut N. Buisman of The Netherlands, and Consul General Peter J. Bacon of the United Kingdom.

Historian and television personality Ron Stone gave the principal address, recounting the heroic World War II service of the cruiser *Houston* in the Battle of the Java Sea and in the Battle of Sunda Strait. Chief Boatswain Mate Otto C. Schwarz, founder of the USS *Houston* Survivors Association, joined Mayor Lanier in unveiling the

impressive monument. This monument was built under the sponsorship of the USS *Houston* (CA-30) Foundation, a project of the Naval Order of the United States, Texas Commandery.¹⁷

Each year the USS *Houston* Survivors Association and the Next Generation hold a ceremony at the monument in memory of the cruiser and her crew. The ceremony is held on or near the anniversary of the ship's sinking, and features speeches from representatives of the four Allied nations who fought together in the Battle of the Java Sea.

In addition to the ceremony at the obelisk held each March, there are a number of other special days throughout the year when it would be appropriate to visit the cruiser *Houston* monuments and perpetuate the memory of those young men who lost their life on this ship. Memorial Day is observed on the last Monday in May. D-Day is Monday, June 6, and Flag Day is on June 14. Independence Day,

July 4, is always a good time to remember those who gave us our nation, and rallied when needed to preserve it.

Victory over Japan, V-J Day is August 15. On this day, one can do well to recall how grim our prospects appeared in the winter of 1941-42. On February 23, 1942, President Roosevelt gave a short Washington's Birthday address over national radio. He said, in part "...Speaking for the United States of America, let me say once and for all to the people of the world: We Americans have been compelled to yield ground, but we will regain it... We are daily increasing our strength. Soon, we and not our enemies, will have the offensive; we, not they, will win the final battles, and we, not they will make the final peace..."¹⁸

And so we did. The formal surrender was signed on September 2, 1945, appropriately on the deck of the battleship *Missouri*, because the war in the Pacific was in large part a "Navy-Marine Corps War."

If you are downtown for the parades on Veterans Day, November 11, pause a moment at the cruiser *Houston* pedestal monument on Main Street in front of the Reliant Energy Building. Remember the one thousand young men who volunteered on that spot in 1942 and the city that so strongly rallied behind them. ★



USS Houston Monument