



The Empire Of  
Texas  
And  
The Star Of India

By Rodger Olsen

Sample Chapters

## Down At The Docks

(the enemy fleet has be sighted off the coast of Florida, heading for Texas)

At the Corpus Christi docks, the crews of a dozen coastal boats stood on the dock and resisted the urge to duck for cover as they were told to make a trip upriver. “Move fast. Sail if you can, row if you have to, drag if you have to, but move fast. Your destination is the new warehouse ten miles up the Nueces. You can’t miss it on the north bank and they will have men out to signal you. Now move out before we lose any more boats.”

It was a grueling fifteen mile trip. They were all able to sail the five miles to the river mouth, but then it was rowing and towing the rest of the way. The explosions behind them kept them working full speed and they arrived at the warehouse too exhausted to climb out of their boats. A captain they had never seen before was waiting on the dock. “I imagine that you are a little tired after your trip. As soon as you get your breath, you will find beer and sandwiches inside.”

Amazing the rejuvenating power of the magic word “beer”. Within a few minutes they were all filing into the warehouse where a long table held platters of sandwiches, bowls of fruit, and steins of beer. The amazing thing, though, was the boat on a display stand between the table and the warehouse wall. It was a full sized coastal boat on stands, tilted toward the table.

The captain was smiling. “Gentlemen, get your sandwiches and come around the boat. I’m going to show you how to kill a big ship with small boat – and never have to row or tow again.”

One sailor gestured with this beer stein, “What the Hell is that thing? Its got wheels on it and a chimney. Ain’t no boat.”

The captain was still smiling. “Gentlemen, this is what all of your boats will look like tomorrow. Those wheels are paddle wheels. The chimney is for an engine like one of those your kids got for Christmas, only this one burns coke and turns the paddle wheels. She carries two main weapons. That tube thing up front is a rocket launcher. The rockets don’t carry a lot of weight, but they have a heavy charge of powder or incendiary. That cute looking gun mounted on the center platform is a rapid fire seventy five millimeter cannon. It’s belt fed with explosive rounds and capable of putting nice holes in wooden ships. In those crates over there, we have conversion kits for all of your boats.”

One crewman stepped forward with a grim look on his face. He was fingering the cross on the chain around his neck. “Captain, with all due respect, this isn’t right. This is black magic and we got no business messing with it.”

The Captain never stopped smiling, “Sailor, what’s your name?”  
“Harrison, sir.”

“Harrison, this thing is no more magic than that pistol on your hip and you don’t seem to mind using that. Now if it scares you too much, you can wait in the guard shack while the real men complete their work. On the way to battle, we can drop you off in town so you can explain to your kid that you were too scared to defend him. Corporal, escort Seaman Harrison to the guard room. He has a weak stomach. Anyone else?”

The crews for these boats had been deliberately picked from atheists, nonconformists, troublemakers and other men of good quality. There were no more objections among the other fifty nine men. Apparently Harrison was either a mistake or a last minute replacement.

The Captain continued, “When you finish your meals, beach your boats and start moving the crates out. Each of you will have a new crew member that will help with the installation and then man the engines during your run. Each crew will do its own conversion but you may have to team with the crew next to you to move some of the heavier pieces into place. Work carefully, but remember that every hour we are here, more people are dying. When you get the rest of the rig installed, you’ll need to pull your boat up to the dock where the cranes will lower the boiler into the hold. If you finish your rig, try to help the others.”

On four other river banks in Texas, other crews were working on their boats. In the other warehouses, six other seamen refused to participate. Two of them tried to attack the sample boats with axes and had to be restrained. One man ran up and down the beach screaming “Blasphemy! Blasphemy!” until someone patiently cold cocked him and handcuffed him to a pipe far enough from the beach to muffle his panicky screams. There were no other problems.

The farm had prepared the kits well. Nothing had to cut or fitted and everything was clearly marked. It was a bolt in job and by nightfall, all of the boats were converted and the boilers fired up for the first time. The crews practiced until it was too dark to see and then moved inside to be trained on operation and maintenance of the new engines and cannon.

Back at Corpus Christi, nightfall brought a halt in the shelling. All day long, the shells from the boats had fallen at the western edge of town, furthest from the shore. When the shelling let up, the garrison commander walked the ruined city walls inspecting the damage. As deeper night fell, a glow was apparent on the western horizon.

His aid pointed to it, “What do you think that is?”

The commander stared at the glow for a moment, “It’s an army. A big army that wants us to know that it’s there. Get some scouts out to see just how big it is.”

The commander was still up at midnight when the first scouts returned and reported, “It’s big, alright. About five thousand men and horses. Nice man we talked to said that they landed two days ago in an empty area near Kingsville. They’ve been moving fast since then, just taking time for gathering slaves and killing people. He complained that

they haven't even been given time to loot properly. After the bastard told us about the slaves, he broke his neck getting off his horse. He did say that they were told that tomorrow would be a big payday."

In Austin, the word went out on the telegraph to move all of the troops south of Corpus Christi up to defend it. Even with the rail cars, the additional two thousand men would not be in place until the next evening. The invaders did not wait that long.

Back at Austin, more people had gathered into the command center. The old emperor was pacing. "The worst part about that damned telegraph is that you know where the war is and you're still too far away to help. The rest of that fleet has to be out there somewhere. I don't believe that they came all this way with five thousand men and a dozen ships. They leapfrogged the coast in Florida, and they're going to do the same here. Corpus Christi is a diversion."

The younger emperor looked up from the message he was reading. "We all agree with you. The message went out this afternoon to evacuate all of the women and children near the coast. Unfortunately there are only nine telegraph stations on the coast so it will take about twenty four hours for everyone to get the message."

At the same time that Corpus Christi was being shelled, a dusty rider fell off an exhausted horse in front of the sheriff's office in Brownsville. When the deputies picked him up and he got his breath, he gasped out "Bayview. Foreigners attacking. Lots of them. They need help."

Sheriff Garrett didn't wait for more. "Scott, get the posse bell ringing. Harry, get out to the ranger station. Tell them we need everyone. We'll ride in an hour." Within twenty minutes, two hundred mounted rangers showed up in full gear. They were wearing the new armored coats and fifteen were carrying one of the new sub machine guns. Within the hour all five hundred twenty seven able bodied men in Brownsville were saddled up and in front of the sheriff's office. The sheriff had one of those voices that you could hear over a waterfall. "Anyone short of ammo fill your bags from the boxes over there. Take plenty of ammo, this isn't a bank robber. These are soldiers we're going after. Everyone needs to be armed long and short. See the deputy if you need a better pistol, the rangers brought spare rifles in the wagon over there. Don't be shy." As they moved out, Garrett assumed his other title of Colonel of the Home Guard.

It was only twenty miles to Bayview, less than a two hour ride for men in a hurry. It was a small town with not more than two thousand inhabitants. Today it was a funeral pyre. The smoke could be seen more than a mile from the town. The Brazilians must have surprised the inhabitants. There were bodies on both sides of the main street, but no one alive. In one place, it looked as if some of the town's men had surrendered and then been executed. The slaughter was worse in the

town square, littered with the bodies of the very old and very young. Garret kneeled at the bodies of two small children, shot and left to die. On a sidewalk bench an older couple had died arm in arm. "I understand killing the men, but why did they kill these people?"

His sergeant said "They were too old or too young to make good slaves. They didn't want to bother carrying them back to Brazil."

Garrett shook his head, "Damned animals!"

Scattered among the bodies were a several yellow uniformed corpses. Nearby one of them showed signs of life. Garrett shouted out, "Get the Padre up here. Padre, he speaks something like Spanish, ask him where they took the prisoners."

The Padre kneeled by the wounded invader. The invader's arm had been shattered by a bullet, but his soon to be fatal wound was a gut shot. The padre took his bible from the pocket of his buckskin coat and kissed it. He spoke to the invader, "Son, you are going to die soon. You cannot meet God with this on your conscience. Tell us where they took the people so we can rescue them."

The invader groaned and glared at the priest. The padre leaned forward again, apparently oblivious the fact that his one knee was pressing hard on the invaders wounded arm. "Son, you must confess for the good of your soul." The invader screamed twice and then blurted out, "Vista, Laguna Vista. Get off my damned arm!"

"Son, do they have prisoners with them?"

The invader looked wolfish, "Yes, father. Good looking women. You need one old man?"

The priest looked sympathetically at the wounded man and accidentally leaned on his wounded arm one last time. "My son, you have earned absolution. Do you wish to be cured of your pain? Good. Here is my derringer. It has one bullet. Do what you must."

Garrett swung up on his horse. While they were examining the town, forty more men from outlying ranches caught up with the column. "They're headed back to Laguna Vista. Their boats must be there. Let's go get our people back."

He lead the column west out of town, trying to be professional, trying not to let the anger he felt show in his eyes.

The invaders, well over five hundred of them, were there with their captives. There were horses tethered between the beach and the tree line, still yoked to wagons. The wagons had padded benches about the size to hold ten men on each side. Apparently the yellowbellies had learned something from their raid on Florida. Most were lounging on the beach and some of them were holding down screaming women. They seemed to have about two hundred captives roped and chained together, mostly women. They seemed to be waiting for something, probably the return of their ships. There was no cover in the tenth of a mile between the tree line and the beach, just scrub brush. Garrett called over the

ranger captain for a conference. There was nothing fancy to be done. They decided on a simple plan. The Posse would form a long line in the woods and then charge from a position behind the Brazilian wagons. The Rangers would form a second column and come out of the tree line near the beach where they could move faster. They would depend on the slight cover of the Brazilian wagons and the sloth of the invaders to let them close.

They mounted up abreast, scattered inside the tree line. Garret took his pistol in his left hand and his saber in his right. Raising the saber over his head, he gave the order never before given in Texas, "No Quarter! Charge the bastards." They burst out of the forest in a long line and galloped for the beach. The invaders jumped up as they heard the charge coming. The rangers came out of the tree line near the shore and charged up the beach, hitting them on their flank. The fire from the invaders was sporadic but deadly. The sten guns immediately took out the first ten men in the Ranger column and several horses and men from the posse.

When the prisoners heard the horses, they began to kick at their captors and bite the ones close enough. They pulled on their ropes and upset some of the invaders. Most of The invaders couldn't decide whether to hold on to their captives or look at the Rangers. The confusion was fatal. Some prisoners managed to land hard kicks to the privates of the invaders and several ended up with invader guns in their hands. One woman threw her ropes around the throat of her captor and climbed on his back to strangle him. Then the horses were among them. The invaders soon realized that the Texans were not interested in prisoners, and only one side would leave the battlefield alive. Even mercenaries fight hard for their own lives. During the battle Garret thought several times about how much more satisfying the saber was when dispatching animals.

When the battle ended, two hundred fifty two Texans, including Garrett, the ranger captain, and the Padre were dead but there were no breathing Brazilians in sight and not one Texan had been taken into slavery.

The ranger lieutenant took command. "There is still work to be done. I know that you have all suffered greatly, but their friends are still alive. We need to get them too. Everyone help clean this beach up. Take our wounded and dead to the tree line. Prop up the yellowbellies."

There were loud protests and cries of "You can't be serious."

He stood his ground. "Do you want to do this again next year? Or do you want to avenge your dead today?"

Grudgingly, most agreed. They moved the wounded and as many of the dead as they could into the woods. Then ten rangers stripped Brazilian officers and donned their uniforms. The remaining one hundred fifty surviving rangers sat on the beach with ropes dangling from them as

if they were captives. Most rangers had a Winchester or a sten gun near them. Around them, the unmoving yellowbellies looked to be lounging or sleeping. Two hundred members of the posse remained ready in the tree line. Five women convinced the lieutenant that the scene would not look convincing without female captives and insisted on joined the rangers on the beach. One removed her top to complete the illusion of slavery.

They had less than an hour to wait. A virtual fleet of longboats appeared at the headlands and rowed for the beach. They were accompanied by several clumsy flat bottom boats that were apparently intended to transport the wagons and horses. The yellow clad rangers jumped up and down and fired pistols into the air in mock celebration. Two of them went about kicking the dead as if they were trying to wake the men up for departure. It was perfect.

The longboat commanders were so confident that twenty of them beached almost at once and the laughing crews jumped out onto the beach to congratulate their fellow invaders. Seconds later the rangers opened up with the confiscated sten guns and raked the beach clean. They threw off their fake chains and ropes and charged the boats to make certain that no one escaped. Several of the boats had not yet beached and they rowed back hard to get away. It did most of them no good. The posse had kept all of the long guns. They rode out from the tree line when the shooting started and went to prone firing positions on the beach. As the sailors tried desperately to row away, the Texans calmly held a turkey shoot. They later found out that only one man on each boat was armed with a rifle, the rest carried only sailors knives. Didn't seem to matter much. A slaver is a slaver even when he was dumb enough to bring a knife to a gunfight.

## Chapter 1 Uninvited Guests - Day two

The next morning a rider in a garish yellow uniform and a plumed orange hat showed up below the Corpus Christi city walls. The mayor and the garrison commander rode out to meet him. His offer was simple, "You have seen what we can do to your city. We have been merciful so far and only destroyed your walls and a little of the center. If you do not surrender, we will flatten your city block by block and kill all you, and your families, and even your horses and dogs. You have until noon."

As the Brazilian turned to go, the commander rode around in front of him. "We are honorable men in Texas and I cannot kill you under a flag of truce. However, I believe that I can express our feelings clearly." He reached over the horse's head, grabbed the officer's tunic and threw him to the ground. "Now, as you walk home, remember you are in Texas. You want to live, you leave now." With that, he took the Brazilian's horse and rode back into the city.

Back in Austin, they were trying to figure out where the main invasion fleet was. There had been no news from the fleet and even with overnight reinforcements, only two dozen ships had been sighted at Corpus Christi. They had all slept on cots the night before and the atmosphere was getting stale. The two emperors, Wilson, and Armbruster took the lead, but there were ten other staff members there. Wilson had his tired head in his hand. "Look, the cat is out of the bag. We activated the steam launches yesterday so we might as well let the locomotives into the war. We can send them to Houston. They have to pass through there anyway, wherever the damned fleet is."

The emperor knew that he was making a major decision. One that could live in history as the salvation of Texas or the end of the Adams. He wished his voice did not sound so weary as he voiced it. "The Baron is correct. Signal the Farm: Fully activate phase two. Proceed all assets to Houston. Further orders there. General, would you fill us in on our status."

The general shuffled his papers. "We have now received reports of a dozen small landings by the Brazilians. They have been using wagons to move inland and have been attacking remote towns. So far the local forces have been able to handle the problems. No one has asked for additional help.

"Corpus Christi seems to be the first big battle. The Brazilians landed five thousand men there. Apparently they plan to use the gunboats to force a surrender of the city. We only have twelve steam launches to handle the invaders.

"Baron, you are most familiar with the boats. Do they have a chance against ships of the line?"

Wilson answered, "I think so. They plan to sneak up behind them and blast them in the butts. That is not as trivial as it sounds. The warships are hard to maneuver under sail. Our boats can go upwind or crosswind, keep out of the line of fire of the warships and shoot them in their most vulnerable spots. Remember, even these monster gun boats usually only have a couple of swivel cannon that can fire sternwards. If the launches work as well as we planned, it's at least an even bet."

The elder emperor looked at this pocket watch. "If they left on time, we should have news in a few hours."

The General continued, "We have a thousand rangers in Corpus Christi and about two thousand posse members. By this afternoon, they will have two thousand more reservists arriving by rail. Unfortunately, we didn't have enough horses ready to transport, so the troops coming will have to fight on foot. If we can handle the ships, they have a good chance to win."

Back at Corpus Christi, they were getting ready to "handle the ships." The boat crews were up at first light, stoking the fires and loading ammunition. Breakfast was hot, well prepared, and strangely tasteless. All minds were on the boats. An hour after dawn they headed down the Nueces for the ocean. The boats were harder to handle than they hoped. The paddlewheels tended to overwhelm the rudder and make the boats hard to turn. They soon learned that the best way to turn was to use the clutches on the paddlewheels. Most boats ended up with two men in the stern. One handled the rudder and the other sat behind the two clutch levers. They could only make five miles an hour on the river and keep the boats under control.

Things were better when they got to the ocean. They didn't have to handle currents and narrow places. They sped up to twelve knots and found the boats easy to handle. The only problem was waves. The paddlewheels were rather small and they found that they would sometimes lift out of the water on a heavy swell. That would slow the boat down or make it fishtail. They headed straight out to sea for a mile and then turned south toward the warships. If all went as planned, the warships would be sitting parallel to the shore readying for a bombardment. They would come in downwind and get a least one shot in. Even if they were seen, it would be hard for the sailing ships to move into or across the wind to attack them.

By the time the warships were in sight, they had learned that the faster they went, the less problem they had with the swell. Most boats were up to fifteen knots. They scattered left and right and made no attempt to keep order. In the lead boat, Seaman First Class Erickson was manning the launcher on the *Suzy III*. The lack of a sail over his head made him feel strangely exposed and his nerves were showing. The noise and speed were nerve-wracking. "Damn this thing moves fast. I keep waiting for us to swamp."

His loader shouted back, “Just keep your eyes on the warships, the captain will keep us afloat.”

The rockets were four foot long versions of the signal flares they were familiar with. These had vanes on the back and were fired by pulling a string that set off a percussion cap. Unfortunately, they had no where near the effective range of a cannon. This would be close in work.

They would have to attack the warships from the stern and hope that their speed would keep them safe from the stern chasers. The plan was to get in close, fire up or sink a ship and then retreat upwind before they got sunk. They were belching smoke like a badly lit campfire and had no hope of escaping detection. If they got abeam of the warships, their smokestacks would make highly visible artillery markers.

The *Suzy III* was the lead boat. There had been no chance to practice with the rockets, but Erickson reasoned that the trajectory of the rocket would be lower than an artillery shell and lowered the launch tube to an almost horizontal position. When they were about four hundred yards out, the Brazilians seemed to realize that the approaching boats were not burning wrecks and opened fire. Fortunately, most of the ships on the north end of the formation were anchored with their sterns facing the approaching boats. With only one gun, the stern chaser, on each ship able to fire at the newcomers, they weren't going to get off many shots before the boats closed. The first rounds from the ships overshot and went wide in every direction. At three hundred yards, a few ships got off rounds that were close enough to make the Texans duck. Looking back, Erickson could see that one boat was dead in the water. It looked as if one round was close enough to swamp the boat and put out the boiler fire. Everyone else was still coming. At two hundred yards, Erickson's gunner opened up with the rapid fire cannon. The first rounds hit high on the stern. The second burst seemed to take out the stern chaser. At about a hundred and fifty yards, Erickson tried to put a rocket into the water line. He misjudged the delay in the launch and the rocket went high over the stern when the boat rose on a swell. He was still staring at it when his loader shouldered him aside to put another incendiary in the launch tube. The second rocket was timed better and went into the center of the stern with a satisfying “whump”. At first there didn't seem to be much damage aside from some broken windows, but then the fire started in a line from the rocket to the waterline. As they closed, the gunner put more rounds into the area hit by the rocket. They were loading the third rocket when the boat made a sharp sliding turn. Erickson would have landed in the water if the loader hadn't gotten one hand on the launcher and another on his crewmate. Lesson two. Fast, nose heavy boats turn very slow and plow into the water, and they don't have brakes. As Erickson looked behind him, he saw that several of the warships were burning. At least two on the other end of the formation were setting sails, apparently preparing to give chase.

Twenty minutes later the eleven surviving boats were rendezvoused about two miles from the warships. The commander of the flotilla was speaking through a megaphone. "The turn was a bad idea. When we slow down to make the turn, we're good targets. They can't hit us when we're close to them, so this time we go all the way through, no stops. The big waddlers are the most important ones to hit. Be ready to swivel the launchers when you go by, that's one of our advantages, they can't aim their big guns. Gunners, your job is to keep the small arms fire off of us. Now stoke up all the speed you can and we go again."

The boats turned clumsily and lined up like stock cars waiting for the signal. Then the commander blew his steam whistle and they were off. This time they took more fire earlier and one boat, the *Sweet Matilda*, dissolved into firewood from a direct hit from a stern chaser. The rest kept going. All Erickson could see were the ships growing larger. At two hundred yards, he started firing the rockets. The first ship they approached was already ablaze but he put one more onto its deck. Then he swayed back as the steersman put them within ten feet of the side of the monster. The gunner raised his gun to rake the gun ports as they passed. They were along side the next one before he could get his wits together for another shot. He waved frantically for the crew to duck as he swiveled the launcher around and fired a rocket almost over their rear deck. At twenty feet, it was hard to miss. The rocket turned out to be an explosive charge placed right at the waterline on the bow of the ship. On both sides, he could hear small arms firing and rockets whooshing as the other boats did their work. One time he heard his rocket hit a ship at the same time as another one took it from the far side. It wasn't all one sided. The big ships had swivel guns and small arms they could use. Ahead of him, he could see one of the Texas boats aflame and drifting. He kept thinking that they had to be through soon. The line of ships just kept going on. Then they reached the ships that had set their sails and cut their anchors. Two of them had managed slow turns and were almost broadside to the Texans. Erickson's gunner poured fire into the wheelhouse of the closest one. Then the warship let loose a broadside that made the water explode twenty yards behind them. The ships couldn't depress their guns far enough to hit the Texans. At least not yet. If they were still operating as the Texans moved away, there would be a lot of dead Texans. Erickson fired rockets at the gun deck as fast as the loader could get them ready. It didn't matter what they were, explosive or incendiary, they just had to destroy that deck. A glance showed that the other warship that had turned was taking a lot of fire from the other boats. Then they were past the Brazilian formation. Eight boats out of ammo, out of rockets, with crew bleeding from small arms fire, moved away as fast as they could. They took two more salvos from one of the ships that had turned and one more boat exploded into splinters. Behind them, the Brazilian fleet was in flames. The one ship that Erickson had made the lucky bow hit on was sinking at the bow, the

rest just burned. Erickson looked back at his own boat to see that the steersman manning the clutches had taken a hit and been replaced by the engineer. Everyone else seemed unscathed.

It seemed doubtful that the Brazilians would be shelling Corpus Christi that day. The boats returned to the city docks to the cheers of the garrison. The crews all smiled and waved thanks, but inside, the commander was anxious to tell Austin what they had learned about tactics.

In Austin, the news caused every man in the command center to stand up and cheer. The Corpus Christi fleet had been reinforced overnight and the Texan boats had disabled at least fifteen ships. They immediately sent messages to the other boat crews describing the tactics used by the first boats. "Go in fast and close. Remember you can fire to the side. Keep moving through. Incendiaries most effective. Remember the Alamo and don't do it again."