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## Chasing the Phantom Ship: Revisiting Interpretations of the Boca Chica No. 2 Shipwreck on the Texas Coast

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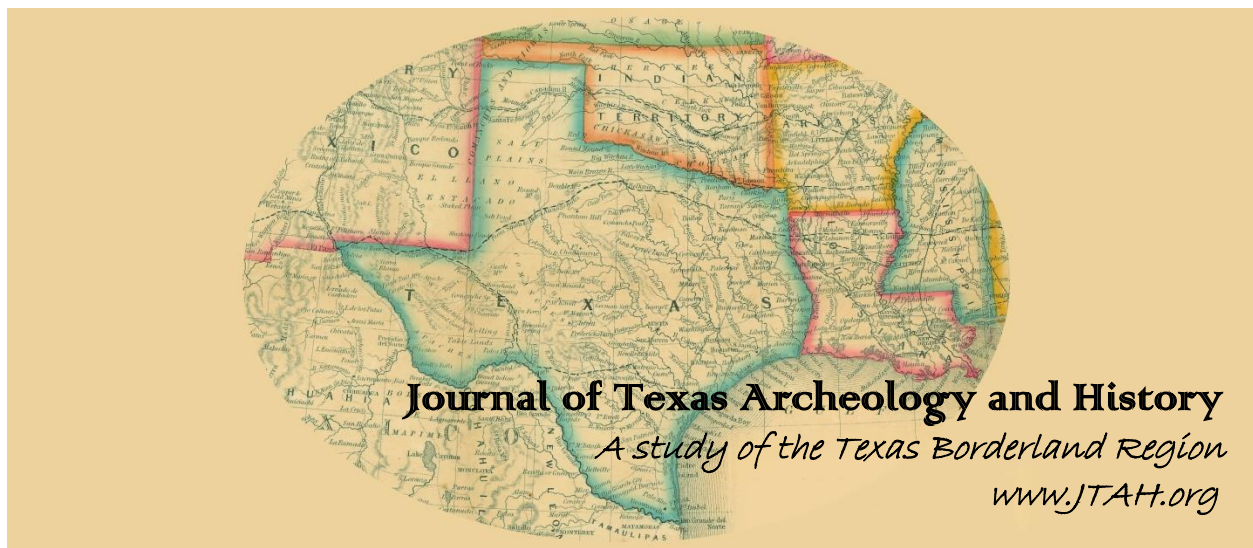
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## Chasing the Phantom Ship: Revisiting Interpretations of the Boca Chica No. 2 Shipwreck on the Texas Coast

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# CHASING THE PHANTOM SHIP: REVISITING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE BOCA CHICA NO. 2 SHIPWRECK ON THE TEXAS COAST

*Amy A. Borgens, Texas Historical Commission  
with contributions by Steven D. Hoyt*

## ABSTRACT

Boca Chica Beach spans the south Texas coast in Cameron County for a distance of roughly 12 kilometers between Brazos Santiago Pass and the mouth of the Rio Grande River at the Texas and Mexican border. More than 165 historic ships have been reported lost along the south Texas coast in this general area and at least four, or portions thereof, have been discovered so far. The most well-known of the shipwreck remains is archeological site 41CF184, nicknamed Boca Chica No. 2, which has gained almost mythological status in the region as it has long been circumstantially linked to the Mexican warship *Moctezuma*; not-so-coincidentally one of the most famous shipwrecks in the region. Is Boca Chica No. 2 the famous warship, once believed to be a “phantom” because it so often eluded the Texian patrols? Evidence suggests otherwise but the significance of both the historic ship and the archeological site invite reexamination of this unresolved mystery.

## INTRODUCTION

Like other coastal shipwrecks discovered on the beach, site 41CF184, known as Boca Chica No. 2, for years has intrigued archeologists and the public alike. The shipwreck has been known to the Texas Historical Commission (THC) for almost two decades, during which time its periodic exposure on the beach near the mouth of the Rio Grande River (Figure 1) has allowed for semi-regular monitoring and recordation. Artifacts have not been observed and there is a strong likelihood this vessel was heavily salvaged at the time of its loss, including perhaps parts of the ship itself. Local folklore has long suggested this might be the Mexican Navy vessel *Moctezuma* (often also referred to as *Montezuma*, *Bravo*, and *General Bravo*), supposedly sunk by the Texas Navy schooner *Invincible* in April of 1836. This is considered an important milestone in Texas history as Mexico had successfully employed this vessel to both deter Texians from receiving revolutionary supplies and assist in preparations for the Mexican military advance. The local hypothesis that Boca Chica No. 2 is *Moctezuma* has not been supported by any archeological or historical evidence.

A renewed look into the case of *Moctezuma* has only further emphasized the inherent difficulty in conclusively identifying historic shipwrecks with limited evidence and, more specifically, the problems with linking this vessel to site 41CF184. Historical research demonstrates at least three armed sailing vessels called *Montezuma*/*Moctezuma*/*Bravo*/*General Bravo* were used by Mexico between 1825 and 1838 before a fourth steamship of that name (*Montezuma*) was acquired in 1842. The 1830s naval vessel is

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reported to have been lost at both the Brazos Santiago Pass and the mouth of the Rio Grande River. Secondly, Mexican sources may suggest that *Moctezuma* survived the 1836 naval engagement and was still in use the following years. Can new research tease out the answer to this mystery?

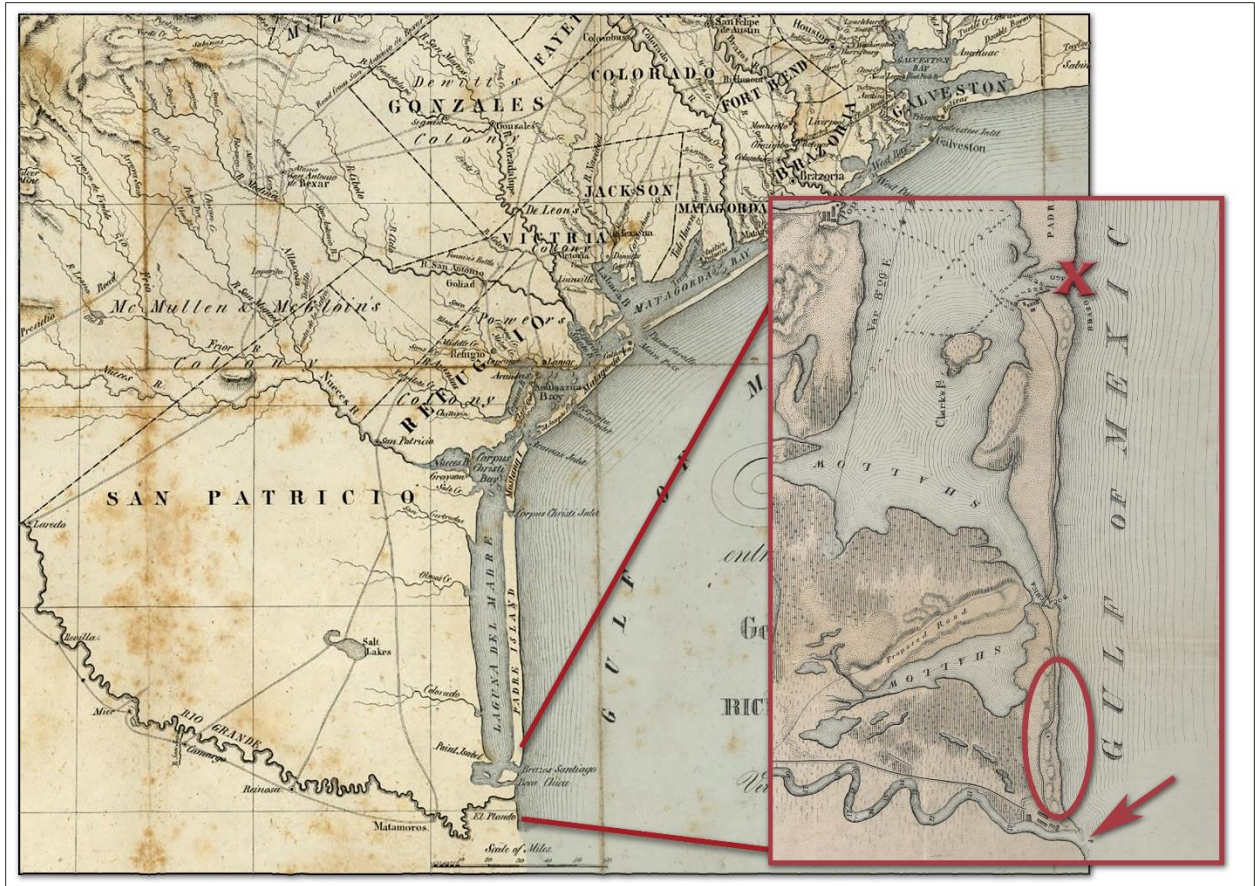


Figure 1. Color-modified maps from 1839 (Hunt and Randel 1841) with 1847 inset detail (Webster et al. 1847) showing Brazos Santiago Pass (X), the mouth of the Rio Grande River (arrow) and approximate location of 41CF184 (circle) (image by author, 2017).

## THE DISCOVERY

Randy Blankenship of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) reported the archeological site to former State Marine Archeologist Steve Hoyt of the THC in 1999. It had become exposed following a storm and damaged by a Cameron County beach cleaning crew (Hoyt 1999a:1). Hoyt contacted the County Engineer’s Office and requested a halt to work activities and visited the site in May 1999 (Figure 2). Portions of the bow and stern were exposed and Hoyt observed 29 frames on the port side, some doubled. The observed frames were not evenly spaced with gaps of as large as 3.3 m (10 ½ ft) as many were missing. Hoyt suggested that the framing gaps could be due to natural erosion beneath the sand line but speculated that this was likely caused by heavy equipment damage (Hoyt 1999a:3). A detached hanging knee and ceiling plank were previously recovered by TPWD and reviewed by Hoyt. The knee was recorded as having a broken, incomplete vertical height of 33.0 cm (13

in) and a horizontal length of 68.6 cm (27 in). The ceiling plank had an incomplete length of 2.9 m (9.5 ft) with a thickness of 3.8 cm (1.5 in) (Hoyt 1999a:4; Hoyt 1999b:6).



Figure 2. Site 41CF184 in 1999 (photo by Steve Hoyt, 1999).

Historic and prehistoric archeological sites such as this on state public lands are protected by Texas state law. Incidentally it was the unsanctioned recovery of artifacts from a 16th-century shipwreck off Padre Island that led to the enactment of the Antiquities Code of Texas in 1969 (Arnold and Weddle 1978:xiii–xiv). Texas thereby became one of the first states to create legislation that specifically protects historic shipwrecks. Boca Chica No. 2 was designated a State Antiquities Landmark in 2004, the highest protective status for a historic site that is issued by the state.

The THC, with help from its volunteer group (the marine stewards) and local citizens, have monitored the wreck since 1999 and have documented its migration from the dunes into the intertidal area. This has greatly accelerated the degradation of the hull timbers. The combined destructive forces of the wave action, wood consumption by the “shipworm” *Teredo navalis*, and injuries to the wreck through beach cleaning activities, vandalism, and looting have all contributed to the rapid decline of this important site.

Field observations and additional examination of the 1999 photography show that when site 41CF184 was first discovered, it still retained outer hull planks and internal ceiling planking, had two of its hanging knees (these support the deck beams; Figure 3), the sternpost, and gunwale stanchions projecting above the natural termination of the frames – all of which indicate that hull structure was once preserved at or above the deck level. Most of the hanging knees were missing, in addition to all of the deck beams, deck planking, and all superstructure and attributes typically situated atop the deck. The absence of these timbers could be due to environmental processes, but often beached wrecks could

be salvaged not just for their cargo but also their robust timbers—especially in areas that were sparsely inhabited or lacked local abundant timber resources. Even in spite of its incomplete condition, site 41CF184 at its time of discovery constitutes one of the most complete and well-preserved shipwrecks ever discovered in Texas.



Figure 3. Detail of site 41CF184 showing exposed ceiling planking at the bow, hawse timbers, framing, starboard outer hull planking, a hanging knee, and the bowsprit step. (Photo by Steve Hoyt, 1999).

## THE SHIP

More extensive examination of 41CF184 occurred in 2002, at which point the vessel had again been uncovered. Steve Hoyt visited the shipwreck in May, almost three years to the day after his original introduction to the site. At this time Hoyt more extensively recorded many basic diagnostic attributes. He suggested the length overall (LOA) was 22.0 m (72.2 ft) with a maximum beam of 7.7 m (25.3 ft). He mapped the transom in detail and determined the width across the expanse of ceiling/deck planking measured 4.7 m (15.5 ft). The octagonal main mast measured 43.2 x 44.5 cm (17 in x 17.5 in) flat-to-flat. The chainplate on the port side was visible at this time. Hoyt recognized that ceiling planking observed at the bow in 1999 was missing (Hoyt 2002a:1–2). Previously in 1999, Hoyt recorded molded and sided dimensions of the futtocks as 15.2 x 15.2 cm (6 x 6 in) (Hoyt 1999a:3).

Later in August 2002, the THC's marine stewards mapped the exposed timbers using trilateration (Figure 4). This work was largely undertaken by Andrew Hall, Gary McKee, Tom Oertling, John Luce, and Doug Nowell (Hall et al. 2002; Hoyt 2002b; Oertling 2002). This investigation determined 41CF184 was 21.9 m (72 ft) in preserved hull length with a hypothesized complete LBP (length between perpendiculars) of 24.1 m (79 ft) (Oertling 2002:3). A reexamination of the 1999 photography indicates that the hull was at or above the deck level, which is the point that LBP—the length from the fore part of the stem to the after part of the stern—was calculated for enrollment and registration for floating vessels (Lyman 1945:226); it is suggested in this article that the enrollment/registration length of 41CF184 likely did not exceed 22.9 m (75 ft) and was probably fairly close to the measured LBP of the hull.



Figure 4. THC marine stewards mapping site 41CF184: (a) creating mapping datum points; (b) uncovering the stern (photos by Bill Pierson, 2002).

The maximum breadth, calculated using the measured half width of 3.5 m (11.5 ft) was 7.0 m (23 ft) (Oertling 2002:3). The vessel was both treenail and iron fastened (Oertling 2002:2). In 2002 the mainmast and bowsprit step (also bitt or knighthead) were the only internal central features exposed and an unsuccessful attempt was made to excavate and locate the foremast. Oertling focused on two attributes to help indicate an age for the shipwreck: the rake of the mainmast 5 degree aft and the semi-circular arrangement and pronounced rake of the hawse (bow) frames. Collectively these suggested to Oertling (2002:3) a 1790–1840 build date. A wood sample taken of a futtock (number P30) indicated it was oak (Oertling 2002:3).

In addition to mapping the wreck, THC staff Bill Pierson conducted a magnetometer survey of the beach at the wreck site (Figure 5). Only a portion could be surveyed due to the surf and this showed the locations of the iron fittings and fasteners within the largely wood fastened-hull (Hoyt 2002a:3).

Additional excavation and mapping of the shipwreck was planned for June 2006, through a joint collaboration between the Texas Historical Commission and the PAST Foundation. Unfortunately by



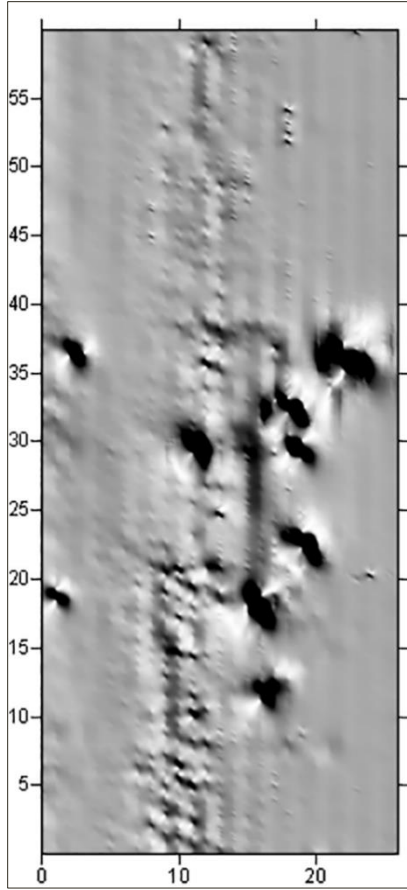


Figure 5. Magnetometer Map (Bill Pierson, 2002).

the time the project was coming to fruition, the beach had dramatically eroded and Boca Chica No. 2 was in the intertidal area and surf zone. The PAST mapping project never commenced (Andrew Hall, personal communication 2017).

In 2016, the THC acquired the foremast that had been collected from the archeological site in 2010. The report of its removal had been shared by archeologist Mark Willis. He had been informed that it was removed so that it could be carved into a bird. The THC later learned that the prospective wood artisan recognized the foremast from the wreck so it was retrieved and stored in a local bait shop before it again changed hands. Upon learning the bait shop was closing, local resident Keith Reynolds asked if he could have the foremast. In an effort to find the true owner of the artifact, Reynolds contacted Bill Turner, then-president of the Texas Navy Association, who then contacted the THC (Borgens 2016a:2). In January 2016, Turner and the author visited Reynolds in Brownsville and collected the foremast. Currently this is the only portion of the shipwreck curated by the THC.

The remaining foremast represents the stump, essentially the bottom of the mast, where it would have been mortised into the keelson. It is believed to weigh more than 200 lbs. and even though it is heavily *Teredo*-damaged, the lower 38 to 50 cm (15.0–19.7 in) still retains its original surface. The mast was octagonal in shape, like the mainmast, with a distance between flats of 46.6 cm (18.3 in) at the base; the octagon planes are irregular and range in width from 12.8 to 21.2 cm (5.0 to 8.3 in). An iron band 9.2 cm high and 2.7 cm (3.6 and 1.1 in) thick was at the base of the mast. The overall preserved height of the foremast is 144.7 cm (4.8 ft) including the 129.8 cm (4.3 in) mast and 14.9 cm (5.9 in) heel tenon (Borgens and Cabading 2016). The height of this artifact suggests that the preserved depth to the bottom of the keel was approximately 2.1 m (7 ft) or greater when the wreck was exposed in 2002, as this would have been attached to the keelson which overlies the frames and keel. By this time most of the frames were no longer preserved to their natural termination as evident in the 1999 photography. Wood sample analysis conducted by Macrobotanical Analysis for the THC in 2016 determined the foremast was fashioned from *baldcyprus*, a timber predominantly local to southern U.S. coastal states (Steffy 1994:257; Bush 2016). Masts could become easily damaged and were replaceable, therefore the origin of the wood only conclusively shows the origin of the mast itself, which may or may not represent where the ship was built.

An important consideration for deducing the age and potential function of a historic vessel is the presence of copper sheathing. So far over the years there has been no evidence of copper sheathing on site 41CF184 or the cupreous and copper fasteners associated with sheathed vessels. Copper sheathing

emerged in the 1760s as a military technology for sheathing and protecting submerged naval hulls from *Teredo* damage and fouling. Britain was the leader in developing this technology, being the first to copper sheath a ship, HMS *Alarm*, in 1761, and with more than 20 ships sheathed by 1777 (Staniforth 1985:23–24). France and the United States sheathed their first naval vessels *Le Gorée* and *Alliance* in 1767 and 1781, respectively (Boudriot 1986:241; Steffy 1994:175). Adoption of copper sheathing as hull protection was gradual due to the galvanic corrosion of the underlying iron fasteners. Once a successful “composition” cupreous fastener type was developed in the late 1780s, coppering became more widespread. By 1812 it was considered common practice in the construction of British vessels (Staniforth 1985:25; Pering 1812:36).

The use of copper sheathing for the United States Navy occurred later, with it only becoming a regular practice in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Though the U.S. had manufactured its own copper since 1815, it was unable to produce the requisite quantities and in 1850 it was still importing this commodity from Britain—enough to sheath 600 vessels (Kauffman 1968:117; Ronnberg 1980:125). By 1832 a new alloy copper sheathing (60 percent copper to 40 percent zinc) was patented by G. F. Muntz, though its use only began to supersede that of regular copper by the mid-nineteenth century (Staniforth 1985:23, 27). Copper sheathing technology gradually diffused to use on merchant and recreational vessels but during the early to mid-nineteenth century this still added a considerable expense to vessel construction and maintenance. Vessels advertised in the newspapers for charter promoted coppering such as the copper fastened and coppered *Mexicano* (New Orleans Bee [NOB] 1836a) as it alluded to a finer quality and better-maintained vessel.

As a general rule of thumb, the appearance of copper sheathing typically indicates a late eighteenth-century to late nineteenth-century use or manufacturing date for a shipwreck. On late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century wrecks this can suggest naval use, as this was before it adopted for large-scale commercial use. Additionally, Muntz metal is typically used to theorize pre or post mid-nineteenth century dates. The lack of sheathing can also indicate pre-1780s dates as well but this needs to be coupled with other evidence as less costly constructed ships were frequently not coppered. The absence of sheathing on 41CF184 suggests a non-naval vessel of perhaps more humble origins.

### **Photographic Monitoring**

Much of what has been learned about the shipwreck, aside from site mapping in 2002, is known from photographic monitoring (Figure 6). Prior to 2010, the THC files for 41CF184 contained images from 1999, 2002–2006, 2008, and 2009. In 2016 Kay Polt of the Power Squadron, donated additional photography she had taken in 2002, 2003, and 2005. Later in 2017, Harlingen resident Rebecca Lozano provided the earliest photos the THC now has on file, dating to the mid-1990s (Figure 7). The THC visited the location of 41CF184 in 2010 and 2016 and the shipwreck was not visible, therefore it could not be photo-documented (Borgens 2016a:4).

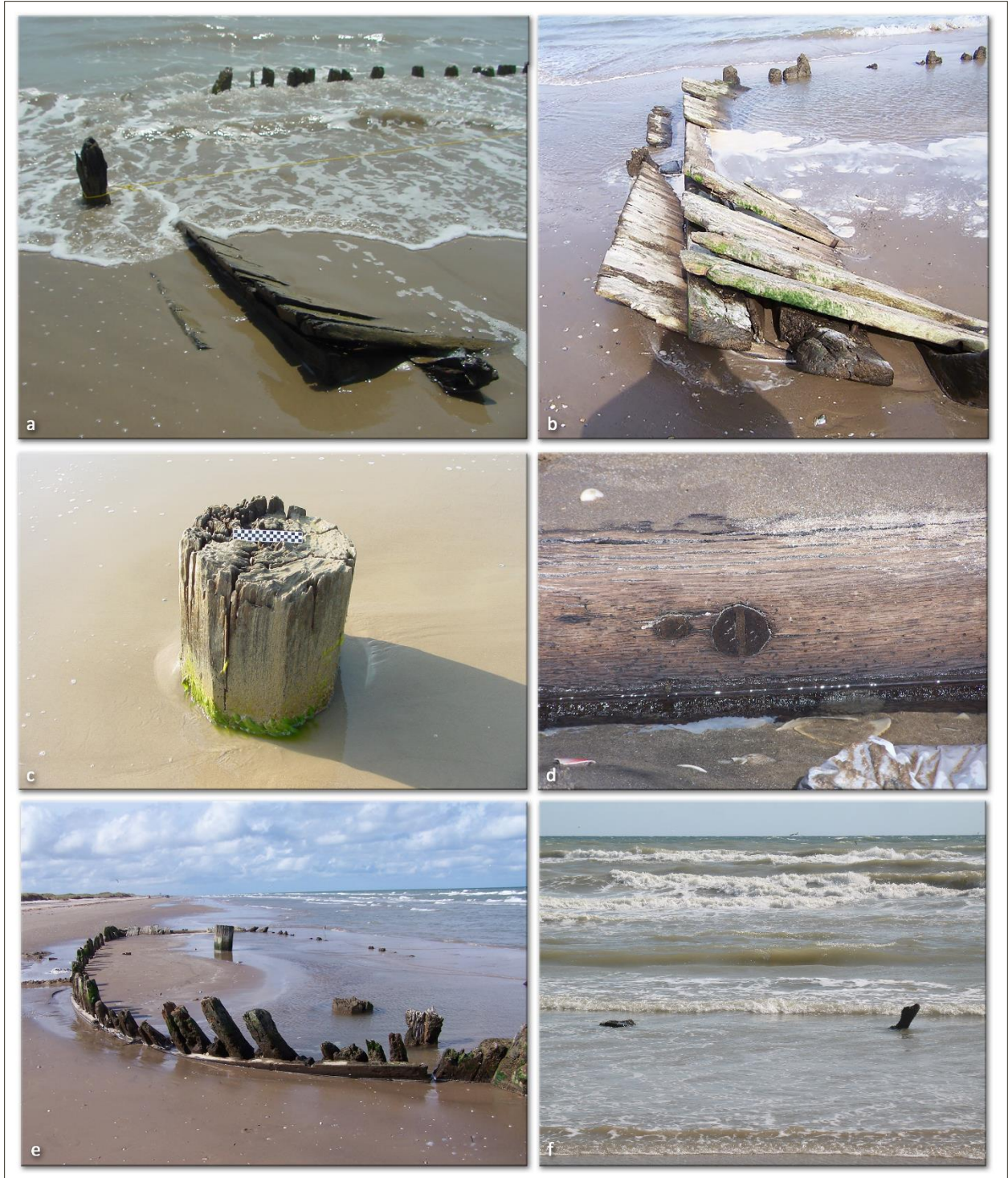


Figure 6. Details of 41CF184 since 1999: (a) transom in 2002 (photo by Steve Hoyt, 2002); (b) transom in 2005 showing more exposure, timber loss, and details of fashion pieces and outer planking (photo by Kay Polt, 2005); (c) the octagonal mainmast in 2002 (photo by Steve Hoyt, 2002); (d) Treenail with wedge (photo by Kay Polt, 2005); (e) Overall site from September 2005 showing both masts, bowsprit step, outer hull planking, and (far right) stem (photo by Kay Polt, 2005); (f) only the stem and foremast are visible in October 2009 demonstrating substantial loss and rapid degradation of remaining timbers (photo by Jeff Durst, 2009).

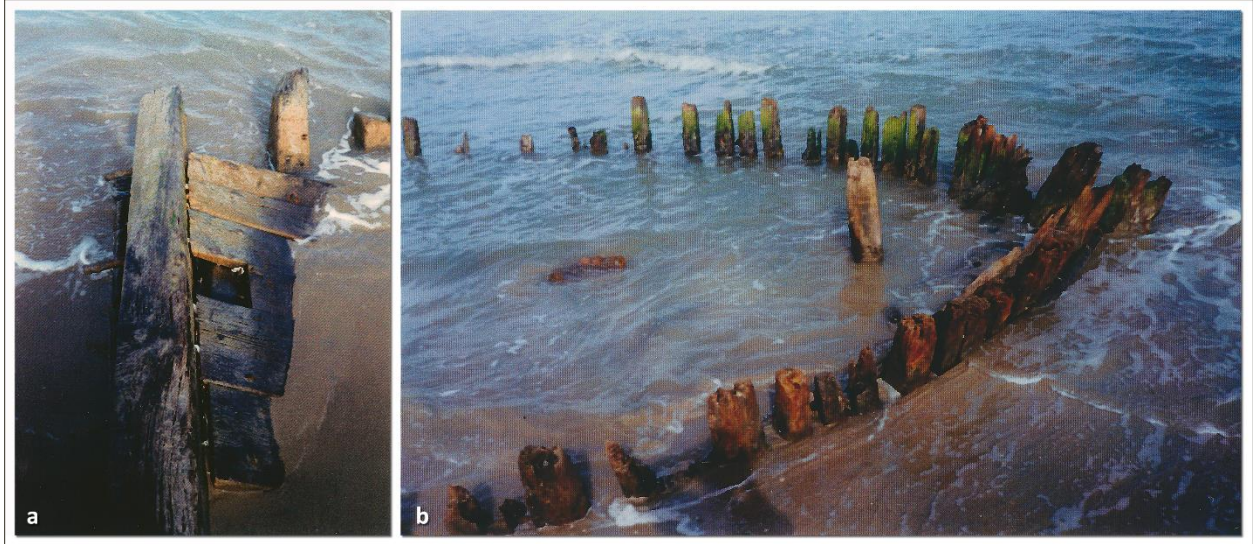


Figure 7. Early details of 41CF184: (a) port transom and (b) bow with foremast and bowsprit step visible (photos by Rebecca Lozano, ca. 1995).

The Polt images were used to illustrate an online-article for the Texas Navy Association that proposed *Montezuma* as the identification of 41CF184 (Drake 2005) – this article is no longer hosted online. The THC photos from 1999 and May 2002 along with the Polt images from September 2005 provide some of the best imagery of the shipwreck when the majority of the upper buried attributes were visible. A series of photographs taken by Hoyt in 2002 captured the run of all the port and starboard frames from the vantage point of the centerline. Lozano’s photos from ca. 1995 are the first on file that show the exposed foremast – this feature was often buried under sediment. Polt’s 2005 images show important framing details and provide the best documentation of one of the treenails. This demonstrates that the treenail ends were finished with a wedge bisecting the circumference of the tip.

In 2016, the author augmented the 2002 Andrew Hall site map by adding the transom recorded by Hoyt in 2002 and then interpolating the position of the remaining frame ends, the outer hull planks, bow ceiling planking, and the foremast from photography (Figure 8). The spacing between the sets of double frames, as deduced from photography, was approximately 15.2 cm (6.0 in) (Borgens 2016b:18).

### Comparative New Orleans Vessel Statistics

In 2006, the author created a database version of volume 1 (1804–1820) of the New Orleans Registers and Enrollments (Survey of Federal Archives in Louisiana 1941) which can be used to statistically analyze comparative vessel sizes for watercraft that may have frequented this important historic Gulf port during the early 19th century. This data has been used in other studies, notably the Mardi Gras Shipwreck project wherein averages were generated for vessel sizes (Ford et al. 2008, Ford et al. 2010; Horrell and Borgens 2017). Based on this data, the average length and maximum beam for all schooners in volume 1 was 18.2 x 5.4 m (59.6 x 17.7 ft) and 23.3 x 6.9 m (76.3 x 22.8 ft) for brigs (Borgens 2008:58, Table 4.2). The size of the hull of 41CF184 therefore closely corresponds to the average merchant brig registered and enrolled at New Orleans between 1804 and 1820.

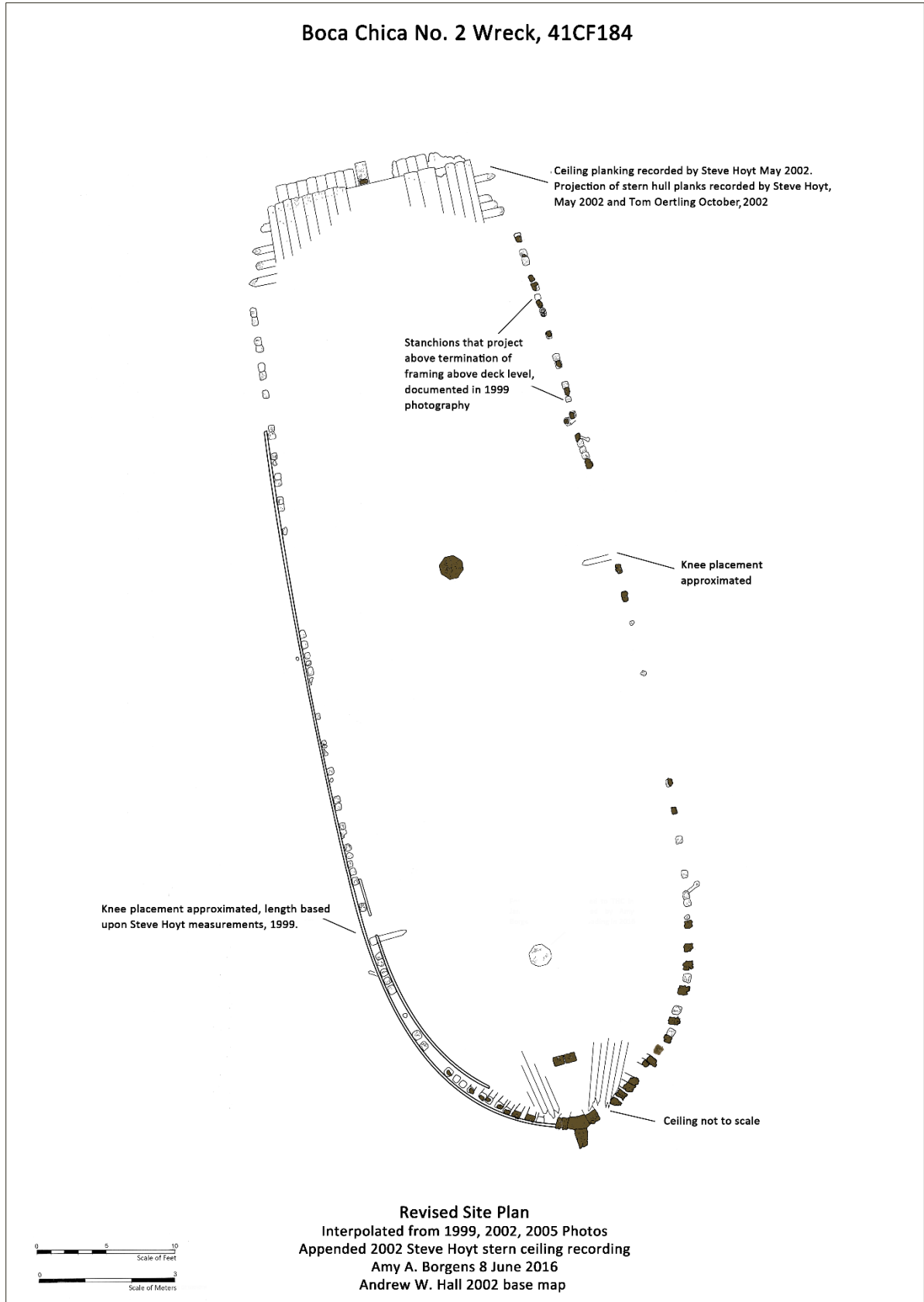


Figure 8. Revised site plan. Timbers depicted in the 2002 map are highlighted (Borgens and Hall, 2016).

Almost half the 924 entries in volume 1 were two-masted vessels; such data was missing for 9% of the watercraft. Using the preserved hull LBP of (21.9 m 72 ft) and an approximated hypothetical preserved LBP of 22.9 m (75 ft), two-masted New Orleans entries ranging in length from 21.9–22.9 m (72–75 ft) from volume 1 were compared (n=29): 14 were schooners, 14 were brigs, and there was a single snow. All but two vessels in these categories were listed as having a single deck—these exceptions both being brigs. The two-masted sailing vessels in this size range all had a square stern. The average for sailing vessels in this range specifically is 22.3 x 6.6 m (73.3 x 21.7 ft). The tonnages for vessels of this length are quite variable, ranging from 44 to 169 tons displacement, with an average of 127.9. The depth of hold ranged from 1.2–3.0 m (4 to 10 ft) with an average of 2.8 m (9.1 ft). Based on the New Orleans data for 1804–1820 and more specifically for the 21.9–22.9 m (72–75 ft) size range, 41CF184 conforms equally to a single-decked, two-masted merchant brig or schooner. The type of rigging more than the hull shape was typically the distinguishing factor between a brig and a schooner.

The length-to-beam ratio for the preserved hull of 41CF184 is 3.1:1; the adjusted length-to-beam ratio for the 22.9 m (75 ft) length is 3.4:1. The length-to-beam ratio for the average registered and enrolled merchant schooner is 3.4:1 and brig is 3.3:1. The average for two-masted sailing vessels in general for the 21.9–22.9 m (72–75 ft) range is 3.4. By comparison the length to beam ratio for the 83-ft. schooners of the Texas Navy (*San Antonio*, *San Bernard*, and *San Jacinto*) launched in 1839 was 3.9:1; the 110-ft. brigs *Archer* and *Wharton* were also 3.9 (Dawson and Williams 1839). Essentially, armed warships are typically longer for their beam than are merchant vessels.

In summary, 41CF184 is hypothesized to be a two-masted, wooden-hulled, double framed, and largely wooden-fastened sailing schooner dating from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. It is heavily built and has an overall length to beam ratio of approximately 3.4:1, which is more consistent with the “fatter” cargo carrying merchant vessels and not necessarily typical for the conventional finer, sharper-hulled warships of the time. The lack of sheathing on 41CF184 for this period is again suggestive of mercantile use and not naval purposes.

## EXAMINING MONTEZUMA AS A WRECK CANDIDATE

The belief that 41CF184 is *Montezuma* has long persisted despite evidence to the contrary. This is unfortunately often the case for historic shipwrecks wherein local folklore can sometimes immediately associate an archeological site with the most famous shipwreck in the area. Generally, Texas wrecks are often attributed by local mythology to be either Spanish galleons, Civil War wrecks, or pirate ships belonging to Jean Lafitte. The question therein is, what is currently known about *Montezuma* to suggest it as a candidate for Boca Chica Shipwreck No. 2?

This begins as a tale of four (maybe five) *Moctezumas/Montezumas/Bravos*, all of which appear to have been conflated with one another over the years. Both the author and Steve Hoyt independently developed timelines summarizing the history of *Montezuma* in the Gulf and chronicling the change in the vessels’ names. These timelines have been combined and are included as Table 1.

**Table 1. Timeline Summary of the Various Vessels by the Names of *Ariel*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo*, *Montezuma*, and *Moctezuma***

Date	Event	Names
1824	<i>Bravo</i> was purchased from England in 1824 and was formerly built as a nobleman's yacht named <i>Ariel</i> (Bidwell 1960:331). Bonilla (1946:23) has 1823 as the purchase date.	<i>Ariel</i>
1825 Aug. 6	An index of documents in the English archives relating to Mexico mentions a French letter of August 6, 1825 that provides information on the ships <i>Avend-Prindien</i> and <i>Ariel</i> (Grajales 1969:84). These were two of the three ships purchased through new loans negotiated with English lending houses. <i>Avend-Prindien</i> was renamed <i>Libertad</i> and had been expected to arrive in January but did not arrive in Mexico until September 13 (Bidwell 1960:349). All three vessels arrived in the fall of 1825 as <i>Victoria</i> reached Mexico on August 18, 1825 after stops in New York and Jamaica and <i>Bravo</i> arrived on September 20th (Bidwell 1960:349).	<i>Ariel</i>
1825 Sept.	The ministerio de hacienda (treasury minister) Ignacio Esteva, inspected the navy and commented on the weakened condition of <i>Bravo</i> (Escamilla 2008:245).	<i>Bravo</i>
1825 Oct. 5	One of several vessels ordered to attack Spanish ships sighted off Veracruz including <i>Libertad</i> , brigs <i>Victoria</i> and <i>Bravo</i> , schooners <i>Paploapan</i> , <i>Tampico</i> , and <i>Orizaba</i> , and the sloop <i>Chalco</i> (Bonilla 1946:94).	<i>Bravo</i>
1825 Nov.	<i>Bravo's</i> launch approached the Spanish fortress at San Juan de Ulúa to see how close they could get without detection (Bidwell 1946:370).	<i>Bravo</i>
1826	Another document in the English archives relating to Mexico provides general information on the frigates <i>Libertad</i> , <i>Ariel</i> , and <i>Victoria</i> (Grajales 1969:103). At this juncture <i>Ariel</i> is formally part of the Mexican Navy yet not being referred to as <i>Bravo</i> in this letter.	<i>Ariel</i>
1826 May	New Commodore Porter arrives in Veracruz and witnesses the existing Mexican Navy: small frigate <i>Libertad</i> of 32 guns, mostly carronades; old brig <i>Victoria</i> with 18 18-pounders; <i>Guerrero</i> ; <i>Bravo</i> brig of 14 24-pounder carronades; <i>Herman</i> , hermaphrodite brig of 5 guns; and two small schooners stationed at Campeche (Porter 1875:348,352).	<i>Bravo</i>
1827 Jan.	Listed as a ship in the Mexican Navy (Ward 1828:307-308; Bonilla 1946:109).	
1826 Dec.	<i>Bravo</i> arrives off Key West in December as part of the Mexican fleet's enterprise to capture Spanish prizes off Veracruz (Viele 1999:107).	<i>Bravo</i>
1827 March	Listed as part of the Mexican fleet off of Key West with 18 guns and a crew of 100. Also mentions <i>Libertad</i> 40 guns, 250 men), <i>Victoria</i> (18 guns, 80 men) and a schooner. The crew of this fleet was comprised of 2/3 "Indians" and 1/3 American and English (New Times 1827:2).	
1828	<i>Bravo</i> was part of the navy operating off of Cuba and had captured 13 prizes (Bonilla 1946:102).	<i>Bravo</i>
1828 July 31	The weak force of the Mexican Navy described as it appeared at Veracruz on July 31, 1828: <i>Congress</i> 64 guns, <i>Libertad</i> of 36, <i>Bravo</i> of 18 guns, and two schooners (London Morning Post 1828:3).	<i>Bravo</i>
1832 Sept. 4	Reported from New Orleans that the Mexican Schooner <i>Montezuma</i> of Tampico, Captain Villereal, was captured by <i>Grampus</i> , Captain Tatnall, with 37 soldiers and a crew of 43 (British Traveler and Commercial Law and Gazette 1832:2; Washington National Intelligencer: 1832:3; Niles' Weekly Register 1832:82-83). It was captured off the Tampico River for piracy committed near Matanzas. <i>Montezuma</i> was unlawfully fitted out by Mexican generals as part of an uprising against the Mexican government. It carried a pivot and two other guns (Jones 1878: 39). Villereal was convicted of piracy in U.S. courts and the vessel was not turned over to Mexico as requested.	<i>Montezuma</i>
1833	Schooner <i>Montezuma</i> , captain Don Tomas Marin traveled to Matamoras with troops and in November traveled to New Orleans with troops (Bonilla 1946:118).	<i>Montezuma</i>
1835	By 1835, the navy of 1829 (when Porter left) was reduced to brig <i>Veracruzano</i> and schooner <i>Moctezuma</i> . According to Bonilla, this encouraged the purchases of 1836: <i>Iturbide</i> , <i>Vencedor del Alamo</i> , <i>Libertador</i> , <i>Mexicano</i> , <i>General Bravo</i> , <i>General Cos</i> , and <i>General Urrea</i> (Lerdo de Tejada 1857:5; Bonilla 1946:118). The budget for 1835 was \$826,584 (Bonilla 1946:118).	<i>Moctezuma</i> , <i>General Bravo</i>

**Table 1. Timeline Summary of the Various Vessels by the Names of *Ariel*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo*, *Montezuma*, and *Moctezuma***

Date	Event	Names
1835 May 3	Seizure of the American schooner <i>Martha</i> from New Orleans by John Calva, first Lieutenant in charge of Mexican Schooner <i>Montezuma</i> (Washington Globe 1835:2; Forysth 1836).	<i>Montezuma</i>
1835 May 7	Some passengers traveling on the warship <i>Moctezuma</i> in 1835 did not have passports (Tenorio 1835a).	<i>Moctezuma</i>
1835 May 18	Arrival of warship <i>Moctezuma</i> with troops and money (Tenorio 1835b).	<i>Moctezuma</i>
1835 July 5	Letter from Eduardo Gritten to Domingo de Ugartechea stating his belief that an American ship was expressly seeking the national schooner of war <i>Moctezuma</i> (Gritten 1835:204).	<i>Moctezuma</i>
1835 Sept.	The 4-gun <i>Montezuma</i> has an engagement with <i>Ingham</i> . <i>Montezuma</i> has a 50-man crew wherein <i>Ingham</i> has 4 guns and only 24. <i>Ingham</i> ran towards shore and is stated to have commenced the attack (London St. James Chronicle and General Evening Post 1835:4).	<i>Montezuma</i>
1835 Oct. 2-9	<i>Montezuma</i> was at Veracruz fitting out to take on arms and munitions to General Cos, but was not ready in time to sail with the packet—it is suspected these will be landed at Matagorda Bay. There was a temporary embargo at Veracruz from Nov 2-9 [possibly to keep this information secret...] (London Public Ledger 1835:3).	<i>Montezuma</i>
1835 Oct. 28	Report that " <i>Montazuma</i> ," now <i>Bravo</i> , has been ordered to cruise Aransas without troops (Bryan 1835).	<i>Montazuma</i> , <i>Bravo</i>
1835 Oct. 28	A Mexican cruiser is "off of this place" (letter is from Quintana) and has been seen over the previous two days—it fired a shot at Velasco which fell short of shore. Brinkley (ed.) assumes this is <i>Montezuma</i> (McKinney and Williams 1835a).	<i>Montezuma</i>
1835 Nov. 4	<i>Moctezuma</i> fired at Velasco and cannon fire was returned from the shore, at which point <i>Moctezuma</i> retreated. On the 28th volunteers on <i>San Felipe</i> went in pursuit first towards Galveston, then heading towards Matagorda where they found it anchored. <i>San Felipe</i> waited for a smoother sea to commence attack but was instead wrecked on shore. <i>Moctezuma</i> and <i>San Felipe</i> , aground, exchanged fire (Fisher 1836; McKinney 1835a; Powers 2006:80).	<i>Montazuma</i> , <i>Moctezuma</i> , <i>Montezuma</i> <i>Bravo</i>
1835 Nov. 9	McKinney is in Matagorda fitting out another vessel to go after <i>Montezuma</i> ( <i>San Felipe</i> is lost ca. Nov 6). McKinney believes a vessel named <i>Crawford</i> caused the wreck of <i>San Felipe</i> as <i>Montezuma</i> was in Brazos Santiago on the 28th. <i>Veracruzana</i> is also off Matagorda and they want two more commissions (McKinney and Williams 1835b).	<i>Montezuma</i>
1835 Nov. 14	Mentions the schooner <i>Montezuma</i> and " <i>Vera Cruzana</i> " (off Galveston) are cruising in the Gulf. <i>Montezuma</i> was in Brazos Santiago from information received six days ago. Also mentions, perhaps mistakenly that <i>San Felipe</i> was gotten off (McKinney 1835b).	<i>Montezuma</i>
1835 Nov 19	<i>Bravo</i> drives <i>Hannah Elizabeth</i> aground and puts on board a prize crew (Fannin 1835:158-159; Dienst 1909a:184). Another account calls this vessel <i>General Bravo</i> (Tornel 1836). Five Americans taken by force and imprisoned at Brazos Santiago (Smith 1835:173). Mexican authorities argue they were warranted in their actions as <i>Hannah Elizabeth</i> was carrying contraband canon and arms (Guerra 1835:188). <i>William Robbins</i> retakes <i>Hannah Elizabeth</i> and captures its prize crew. The Mexican Lt. says he is of <i>Bravo</i> and not <i>Montezuma</i> . Twelve Mexican crew were captured, one died of exposure and drunkenness (Fisher 1835).	<i>Bravo</i> , <i>General Bravo</i>
1836 Jan 8	Another mention of the Mexican sloop of war <i>Moctezuma</i> as being in the bay of Galveston and that Texas does not have a navy to contest its presence - <i>Invincible</i> is offered by McKinney and Williams. The governor is advised and authorized to issue Thomas F. McKinney a letter of appointment as commander of <i>Invincible</i> as a national vessel of war. Volunteers are requested (Barrett 1836; Telegraph and Register 1836:2).	<i>Moctezuma</i>



**Table 1. Timeline Summary of the Various Vessels by the Names of *Ariel*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo*, *Montezuma*, and *Moctezuma***

Date	Event	Names
1836 April 3	According to a Mexican account from Matamoras, the schooner-of-war <i>Bravo</i> , formerly called <i>Montezuma</i> , commanded by Captain Davis, and schooner <i>Correo Secundo</i> (formerly <i>New Castle</i> , Captain Watkins) were fitting out to transport troops and supplies for Copano. <i>Correo</i> was purchased by Mexico and under the command of Captain Thompson. It was armed with two guns. Lt. Levenue [sic] of cutter <i>Invincible</i> taken prisoner. Pierce's account uses the name <i>Correo de Mexico</i> instead of <i>Correo Secundo</i> , though these are the same vessel (New Albany Gazette 1836:2; Pierce 1917:22). <i>Bravo</i> runs aground and is fired into by <i>Invincible</i> (Hall 1835). Captain Davis of <i>Bravo</i> mentions that his vessel was barely damaged. The Matamoras port official refers to this vessel as <i>General Bravo</i> (Espino 1835). Zimmerman, a crew member on <i>Invincible</i> , claims <i>Montezuma</i> 's starboard side was stove in (Zimmerman 1836).	<i>Montezuma</i> , <i>Bravo</i> , <i>General Bravo</i>
1836 April	According to Dienst, <i>Bravo</i> is one of three Mexican vessels that engaged <i>Independence</i> in a draw (Dienst 1909a:189). This is likely an error as the <i>Bravo</i> naval action of April 1836 involved <i>Invincible</i> (not <i>Independence</i> ) and included two and not three navy vessels.	<i>Segundo Bravo</i>
1836 April 5	General Filisola mentions <i>Segundo Correo</i> and <i>Segundo Bravo</i> are ready to leave Matamoras (Filisola 1849:242).	<i>Segundo Bravo</i>
1836 May 16, 17	On May 16, a letter sent by Filisola to the commander of <i>Segundo Bravo</i> discusses orders forwarded to Matamoras on <i>Segundo Correo</i> . Another letter from Filisola on May 17 mentions <i>Segundo Bravo</i> and <i>Segundo Correo</i> are to pick up food for the army (Filisola 1849:291–292).	<i>Segundo Bravo</i>
1836 June	A summary of governmental expenses for 12 years ending 30 June 1836 mentions both the schooner <i>Moctezuma</i> and the brig <i>Bravo</i> (Mexico Ministerio de Hacienda 1837).	<i>Moctezuma</i> , <i>Bravo</i>
1836 July	According to New Orleans papers of July 1836 <i>Bravo</i> was lost on its way to Veracruz from Matamoras with all on board except Captain Thompson and two marines (Dienst 1909a:139). A different account has the lost vessel as <i>Correo Secundo</i> (London Shipping Gazette 1836:1).	<i>Bravo</i>
1836 July 20	Letter from the office of the Secretary of War and the Navy that mentions a commission for Thompson for <i>Bravo</i> , payment of the vessel's crew, and also supplies to Matamoras. The document lists the armament and crew of the squadron of the time consisting of the brigs <i>Iturbide</i> , <i>Libertador</i> , and <i>Vencedor del Alamo</i> , the brigantine schooner <i>Fama</i> ( <i>General Urrea</i> ), schooner <i>Bravo</i> with a 16 pounder pivot gun and four 9 pounder carronades. <i>Bravo</i> has a crew of 60 with 10 soldiers and a garrison sergeant. This also mentioned two vessels being purchased from the Yucatan: <i>General Terán</i> and the schooner <i>Hidalgo</i> and two 50 horsepower steamboats that are armed each with a 16 pounder (Secretaria de Guerra y Marina 1836).	<i>Bravo</i>
1836 August	"The Mexican Fleet consisting of the brig <i>Fama</i> and the schooner <i>Bravo</i> were at Vera Cruz on the 9th [August 1836]– they were preparing to make a cruise" (Boston Morning Post [BMP] 1836:2)	<i>Bravo</i>
1837 Feb 11	Naval schooner <i>Bravo</i> with the infamous Capt. Thompson arrived at Sisal to take General Toro on board – he was being removed as commander general of Yucatan. Thompson went 10 leagues inland to the capital "Menda" (sic, <a href="#">Mérida</a> ) (BMP 1837a:2).	<i>Bravo</i>
1837 April 12-16	USS <i>Natchez</i> engages <i>General Urea</i> , <i>General Terán</i> , and <i>Bravo</i> at Brazos Santiago in dispute over detained US schooners (Hill 1987:70–71).	<i>Bravo</i>
1837 April 9-17	<i>Bravo</i> "practically blocked" in mouth of Rio Grande during the <i>Natchez</i> engagement—this was likely Brazos Santiago and not at the Rio Grande River (Hill 1987:71).	<i>General Bravo</i>
1837 July 9	Report that Captain Thompson and his lieutenant deserted <i>Bravo</i> and were headed in an open boat northward towards Texas from Mexico (BMP 1837b:2).	<i>General Bravo</i>
1837 Aug.	In Veracruz harbor with <i>General Terán</i> and <i>Independence</i> (Hill 1987:87).	<i>General Bravo</i>

**Table 1. Timeline Summary of the Various Vessels by the Names of *Ariel*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo*, *Montezuma*, and *Moctezuma***

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Names</b>
1838 Aug 28	<i>General Bravo</i> is part of a flotilla that arrives at Campeche that also includes <i>Fama</i> and <i>Vencedor del Alamo</i> (Bonilla 1946:118).	<i>General Bravo</i>
1842 April	Being built by Greens and Wigrams in England. A heavy-timbered wooden vessel with 1111 tons displacement, mounting one Paixhan 68-pounder, two long 32's, four 32-pounder carronades, and a small 9-pounder (Hill 1987:172–173).	<i>Moctezuma</i>
1843 April 30	Battle with <i>Austin</i> and <i>Wharton</i> off Campeche. Commander and twenty crew members of <i>Moctezuma</i> killed. The Mexican fleet withdrew (Hill 1987:183–188).	<i>Moctezuma</i>
1843 May 16	Second engagement with <i>Austin</i> and <i>Wharton</i> . Mexican fleet defeated (Jordan 2006:263–261).	<i>Moctezuma</i>
1846	Repossessed by England for failure of payment (Scheina 1969:262).	<i>Moctezuma</i>

\*yellow indicates row where more than vessel is mentioned.

### The First *Bravo* (1825–ca. 1835)

The first documentation of a Mexican naval vessel of this name occurs in the mid-1820s. It was one of three vessels purchased from England in 1824, soon after Mexico's independence (Bonilla 1946:82; Bidwell 1960:331). It was originally the 322 27/94 brig-rigged yacht *Ariel*, built on the Thames River in 1824 and registered in London to the Earl of Harborough (Bidwell 1960:331; von Mach, personal communication 2017; von Mach, personal communication 2018). It likely arrived in Mexico in the fall of 1825, in close proximity to the delivery of *Victoria* in August and *Avend Prindien* (renamed *Libertad*) in September (Bonilla 1960:349). In 1825, *Aerial*, renamed *Bravo*, was one of several naval vessels protecting San Juan De Ulúa, an island fortification off Veracruz (Bonilla 1946:98). In 1826, U.S. Captain David Porter abandoned his commission in the U.S. Navy to serve as the Commodore for the Mexican Navy. This brig was part of the Mexican fleet when he took command.

In his memoir, Commodore Porter's son David Dixon Porter, a midshipman in the Mexican Navy, recollected *Bravo* as having 14 24-pounder carronades when first inspected by his father at Veracruz in 1825 (Porter 1875:352; Long 2014:265). Other accounts list 18 guns, which seems to be the most consistently described armament, and 20 carronades (New Times 1827:2; Bidwell 1946:444; Bonilla 1946:98). In late December 1826, Porter relocated his Mexican fleet to the Florida Keys as a staging area and temporary headquarters for his planned offensive to capture Spanish vessels off Cuba. *Libertad*, *Victoria*, and *Bravo* soon began seizing prizes and in retaliation Spanish forces blockaded the Mexican fleet at Key West. Porter's vessels were successful in dodging the blockading vessels and ultimately captured 21 prizes while stationed in the area (Ward 1828:307–308; Bonilla 1946:102; Viele 1999:105–106). The Mexican Navy's activities at Key West challenged U.S. neutrality and interfered with regional trade between the U.S. and Cuba. When President John Quincy Adams signed a bill prohibiting prizes from entering Key West (and thus selling their goods) Porter's principal means of paying his crews was quelled. After a tenure of five months in the keys, Porter's fleet traveled to New Orleans to collect the newly acquired Mexican brig *Guerrero* and to solicit crew before returning to Veracruz (Viele 1999:114–115).

### The Armed Mexican Transport *Montezuma* (1832)

While the brig *Bravo* was still in use, a schooner of the name *Montezuma* entered the scene. In early August 1832, under the command of Captain Pedro Villareal, the armed schooner *Montezuma* detained and robbed the U.S. schooner *William A. Turner* near Matanzas, Cuba. (British Traveler and Commercial and Law Gazette 1832:2; Niles Weekly Register 1832:82–83). It was armed with 3 cannon, one of which was a heavy pivot gun (Jones 1878:39). Later in October, the U.S. schooner-of-war *Grampus* captured *Montezuma* off Tampico in retaliation for its action against *William A. Turner*. When it was captured, *Montezuma* was being used as a troop transport and carried 40 soldiers in addition to a crew of 36. It was adjudicated at New Orleans (Washington National Intelligencer 1832:3; Jones 1878:39–41).

The U.S. government learned that the vessel was not an official Mexican naval schooner but instead had been unlawfully outfitted as an armed vessel by military officers, including Santa Anna, as part of an uprising against the Mexican government. Mexico requested the vessel be turned over to their consul. This was denied in October 1832, on the grounds that it was not an official vessel of the Mexican government and had engaged

in an act of piracy (Livingston 1832; Montoya 1832). On October 1, 1832 it was condemned by the U.S District Court and sold; it was renamed *Annette* and registered the following month at New Orleans under new owner Alexander Baron and master Henry L. Thompson, later Commodore of the Texas Navy. According to its registration, *Annette* was 61 37/95 tons 17.32 x 5.43 x 2.16 m (56.83 x 17.83 x 7.08 ft) and was described as having one deck, two masts, a square stern, and plain head (Survey of Federal Register 1942:9; von Mach, personal communication 2018).

During this same period, in 1833, author Juan de Dios Bonilla (1946:118) describes a schooner named *Montezuma*, under the command of Don Tomas Marin, as transporting troops to Matamoras and then New Orleans in November. It is unclear if this vessel is the recently captured schooner with inaccurate historic information regarding the later transport dates or if another ship with this name is also being used in this capacity since *Montezuma's* capture.

### **The New Threat *Moctezuma/Montezuma*, Alias *Bravo/General Bravo* (1834–1836)**

On May 3, 1835 a vessel referred to as both *Moctezuma* and *Montezuma* seized the New Orleans schooner *Martha* at Galveston Bay and brought it to Veracruz. First Lieutenant John Calva of *Montezuma* was accredited with the capture (Washington Globe 1835:2). Days later, in letters dated May 7 and 18, the Mexican commander at Anahauc, Antonio Tenoria, commented on the arrival of *Moctezuma* with troops and money and mentioned that some of the passengers did not have passports (Tenoria 1835a; 1835b). These May 1835 accounts are an early indication of activity by a new vessel bearing this name. *Moctezuma* appears to have been variably called *Montezuma*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo*, and possibly *Segundo Bravo* throughout the following years.

Is this schooner *Moctezuma* the former brig *Bravo* or an altogether new vessel? Less is known of the activities of the brig *Bravo* during these years with no references to it discovered by the author after 1836. At this juncture, the brig *Bravo* and schooner *Moctezuma* briefly coexist and are both listed in the official summary of naval expenses for the 12 years ending in 1836 (Mexico Ministerio de Hacienda 1837). Author Robert Scheina (1970:47) mentions that the schooner *Moctezuma* was already part of the navy when new vessels were acquired in 1835. This is likely based on an 1857 history of Veracruz (Lerdo de Tejada 1857:417) that states Porter's navy of 1829 was all but gone by 1835 except for the schooner *Moctezuma* and the brig *Veracruzana*. Scheina and Lerdo de Tejada can only be referring to the brig *Bravo* and not the schooner *Moctezuma*, as a schooner of this latter name seems to first occur in 1834 and does not appear to part of the 1820s fleet. At this time, the brig *Bravo* would have been in Mexican service for a decade following its use in England—it may have been retired at this time and placed in ordinary. Interestingly Mexican accounts refer to the new schooner as *Moctezuma*, whereas U.S. and Texas accounts often, possibly mistakenly, call this vessel *Montezuma*. In the following discussion, *Moctezuma* will be used.

A newspaper article from 1834 reports the arrival of the schooners of war *Moctezuma* and *Consolation* (79 tons) and the 111-ton pilot-boat schooner *Correo de Tampico*, with the navy on April 17. *Consolation* and *Correo de Tampico* had crews of 11 and 8 men respectively (Procurador del Pueblo 1834; von Mach, personal communication 2018). According to the Memoria del secretario de estado y del despacho de la guerra published in Mexico in 1834, *Moctezuma* was armed with one 12-pounder *culebrina* and two 8-pounder cannon; it had four

officers and a crew of 33 men. It had recently been outfitted at New Orleans (von Mach, personal communication 2018).

In late 1835 *Moctezuma* began regularly cruising the coast from the Rio Grande River to Galveston and into Galveston Bay, alarming revolutionary leaders. Texas had yet to declare its independence (the following March) so undeniably Mexico recognized the escalation in hostilities and the undisguised movements to both supply Texian volunteers and enlist privateers as unlawful actions. The “new” schooner *Moctezuma* became an immediate threat to Texas and U.S. commerce along the Texas coast as it attempted to deter revolutionary activities and prevent the shipment of contraband supplies to Texas. The presence of *Moctezuma*, and to a lesser extent *Veracruzano*, were a direct influence on the formation of the Texas Navy of 1836.

In June, *Moctezuma*, under the command of Lieutenant Calvi, was fired upon by the U.S. revenue cutter *Ingham*, though there is a debate as to which vessel fired the first shot. The revenue cutter was stationed off Texas to monitor perceived threats against American shipping by Mexico, aggravated by *Moctezuma*'s capture of *Martha* earlier in March. The “clipper-built schooner” *Moctezuma* was sighted off Brazos Santiago on June 14 and, by American accounts, quickly approached *Ingham* and opened fire. This shot was also interpreted as a “signal” to the revenue cutter. *Bravo* retreated, jettisoning heavy items as to lighten its load to cross the bar. The two vessels continued to exchange fire until Calvi inadvertently ran his vessel upon the bar. Captain Jones of *Ingham* decided not to sink the damaged *Bravo* as it lay grounded (Wells 1998:469–472). A newspaper summary of this engagement described *Moctezuma* as having four guns and a crew of 24 (London St. James Chronicle and General Evening Post 1835:4).

In October, the now-recovered Mexican schooner reportedly fired a shot at the town and fort of Velasco (McKinney and Williams 1835a) and in November it chased, ran aground, and captured the U.S. schooner *Hannah Elizabeth* with a contraband cargo of arms at Pass Cavallo (Fannin 1835; Fisher 1835). *Moctezuma* then indirectly caused the Texan privateer *San Felipe* to run around on Matagorda Peninsula before later approaching and firing into it (Fleury 1874; Wilson 1874).

Talks began immediately to formally create a navy to counter this activity. On November 9, Thomas McKinney was reported to be fitting out a vessel to pursue *Moctezuma* (McKinney 1835a). Days later, commissions (for privateers) were requested to protect the coast from *Montezuma* and *Vera Cruzana* (General Council 1835:8). On January 8, *Invincible* was offered by McKinney to serve in the new navy and the governor was additionally authorized to issue McKinney a letter of appointment as commander of the schooner as “a national vessel of war” (Barrett 1836). On January 9, volunteers were requested, likely to man the vessel, in pursuit of *Moctezuma* and on the 11th the purchase of the warship was officially announced (McMullen 1836; Telegraph and Register 1836:2). Other navy purchases would soon follow in January including *Brutus*, the former revenue cutter *Ingham* now called *Independence*, and the former privateer *William Robbins*—newly rechristened *Liberty* (Powers 2006:52–53). The captain and crew of *Invincible* felt it was their mission to capture the elusive *Moctezuma* and searched in vain for sight of it.

By April, historic accounts show that *Moctezuma*/*Montezuma* was renamed *Bravo* and under the command of Captain Fernando Davis. It was in convoy with the newly purchased two-gun schooner of war *Correo Secundo* (commanded by infamous Captain Thomas M. Thompson) preparing to transport troops and supplies to Copano in preparation for an Mexican military advance against the revolutionary Texians. *Bravo* and *Correo Secundo* were

at Brazos Santiago, the ocean-port for the river-town of Matamoros, located 88.5 km (55 mi) up the Rio Grande River. This river emptied in the Gulf of Mexico at a location approximately 12.9 km (8 mi) southwest of Brazos Santiago Pass. Before regular steam navigation, goods intended for Matamoros were shipped to the harbor at Brazos Santiago and then transported overland via two beach roads accessible at low tide. Scow barges carried passengers and freight to the mainland during high tide and flooding (Powers 2006:77–78). It is at this point in history that *Invincible* encounters *Bravo* after three months of searching. What happens next is still debated.

The bare and undisputed facts of the case are thus: *Bravo* is unattended (*Correo* was likely anchored in the harbor) and in the process of repairing its rudder that became damaged on the bar. Captain Thompson from *Correo* is helping with the rudder replacement. *Invincible*, flying American colors, approaches the vessel and immediately recognizes it as its nemesis *Moctezuma*. Officer Living convinces Captain Jeremiah Brown, against his better judgment, to allow him to proceed to *Bravo* in disguise as a U.S. revenue officer as a means to gain intelligence on Mexican activities. Living is taken by ship's boat to *Bravo* and is secured on board while *Bravo* sends its launch with Captain Thompson to *Invincible* to confirm Living's papers. Captain Brown recognizes Thompson and fires upon the launch and then at *Bravo* once the Mexican Navy has moved Living to shore. *Bravo* attempts to retreat but without a working rudder runs further aground on the bar and is fired upon by *Invincible* (Figure 9). During the engagement *Invincible* notices the approaching brig *Pocket* and leaves in pursuit—*Pocket* is captured and taken by *Invincible* to Galveston.



Figure 9. Engagement off Brazos Santiago, April 3, 1836; *Invincible* vs. *Bravo* by Peter Rindlisbacher (2017).

The main Mexican account of this transaction offers a slightly different perspective on *Invincible*'s departure from the battle—described as an actual retreat as opposed to a change in *Invincible*'s military priorities (the Texian version of events), i.e. capturing an unknown brig three to four miles distant instead of irrefutably sinking *Bravo*.

Captain Davis of *Bravo*, in his report to Jose Maria Espino, the captain of the port of Matamoros, acknowledged that *Bravo* was vulnerable as it lay aground on the bar, but described *Invincible* as retreating due to reinforcements in the form of the approaching armed *Correo* and the adjusted position of the land artillery (Espino 1836). Perhaps Jeremiah Brown felt that *Invincible*, in its slightly damaged condition, was more capable of capturing an unarmed brig as opposed to prolonging an armed engagement with *Correo*, *Bravo* with its pivot cannon, and shore artillery.

Two important facts of this event are heavily disputed: where this engagement occurred and if *Bravo* sank. Differing eyewitness and second-hand accounts of the “battle” are presented in Table 2, in chronological order of the historic report. Most often the early accounts place this naval exchange at Brazos Santiago wherein later post-19th-century authors instead place this at the mouth of the Rio Grande River. This may be, in part, due to misunderstanding Texas geography and perhaps not recognizing that Matamoros’ ocean port at this time was not at the river mouth but 8 mi. further northeast at Brazos Santiago Harbor and Pass. Some reports mention artillery firing upon *Invincible* and this, in itself, decidedly places the event at Brazos Santiago near the Mexican garrison. Living was also tried as a spy and executed at Brazos Santiago, and not Matamoros (Pierce 1917:22; Powers 2006:78–81), which lends additional credence to this location as the site of the battle. Finally, Brown, *Invincible’s* captain, explicitly states *Pocket* was captured off Brazos Santiago which should leave no room for doubt (Brown 1836).

Whether or not *Bravo* actually sank is more difficult to solve. U.S. and Texian eyewitness accounts and newspapers typically describe *Invincible* as prevailing in this incident with *Bravo* “sinking,” “wrecked by a broadside,” and “gone to pieces” (Table 2). Some newspaper reports do not describe the outcome—only that *Bravo* ran aground. Not so coincidentally, a Mexican account claims *Bravo* was largely uninjured and merely suffered a cannon shot to the poop (stern deck) and minor damages to the rigging (Espino 1836; Hill 1987:51–52). The captain sought to get the vessel off the bar, but a curious comment in the letter suggests *Bravo* may have been taking on water (Espino 1836). The mystery only deepens as a sailing vessel by the name *Bravo* continues to serve an active role in the Mexican Navy until 1838—more than a year after its “sinking.” The author reviewed a *Bravo* logbook in the collection of the Briscoe Center for American in Austin, TX (Añorga 1835), but unfortunately the last entry dates to December 1835, many months before the events on the Texas coast.

**Table 2. Accounts of the Sinking of *Bravo*.**

Source	Account Summary	Location*	Demise
William Gray 1836 (1909:154–155)	According to his diary account of April 7, 1836, William Gray was on board <i>Brutus</i> when it was approached by <i>Invincible</i> just returning from Brazos Santiago with the prize <i>Pocket</i> . Gray was told that when <i>Invincible</i> encountered <i>Montezuma</i> , “now called <i>Bravo</i> ,” both Davis and Thompson were on board. <i>Bravo</i> was run aground and “disabled” and could not be boarded due to the shallow waters and the presence of 1000 Mexican troops on the beach. The account mentions that Lt. Living was left on board <i>Bravo</i> but that the crew of the waiting launch took off when the action began. This occurred on April 3 which was Easter.	BS	Disabled
Walter Zimmerman 1836	Walter Zimmerman, who had been part of General Mexia’s expedition to Tampico, enlisted as crew on <i>Invincible</i> . He described <i>Montezuma</i> as being superior in men and guns. According to Zimmerman, after a conflict of 2 hours the “enemy went down with his larboard side entirely stove in.” It pursued a merchant brig [ <i>Pocket</i> ] after <i>Montezuma</i> sank, thinking it was an armed 18-gun vessel. There are problems with this source as <i>Invincible</i> had more crew and almost twice as many cannon.	—	Sunk
Newspaper Account 1836 (reprinted in Dienst 1909b:253)	This account mentions that <i>Invincible</i> approached the Mexican brig [ <i>Bravo</i> ] and made an inquiry then sent a boat out to meet it. <i>Invincible</i> exchanged gunfire with the Mexican vessel [ <i>Bravo</i> ] “which fired several guns each” - the schooner with the Mexican flag bore away towards shore and “the other vessel [ <i>Invincible</i> ] tacked ship and stood for his brig [ <i>Pocket</i> ], she being about three or four miles distant.”	BS	Retreated
Covington Western Constellation (1836:2)	“The Texian armed schooner <i>Invincible</i> , Captain Brown, fell in with the Mexican schooner <i>Montezuma</i> , at anchor off the Brasos Santiago. An action immediately took place, with a running fight of several hours, which terminated in the sinking of the <i>Montezuma</i> , before she reached the shore to which she was running. When last seen her yards were underwater. She was preparing to convey to Galveston Bay about two thousand men the expedition is now destroyed. The <i>Invincible</i> was somewhat cut in her sails and rigging but had not a man wounded. The fate of the <i>Montezuma</i> crew is not known.”	BS	Sunk
London Morning Post (1836:5)	“A naval engagement between the Mexican schooner <i>Montezuma</i> , and the Texian schooner <i>Invincible</i> , off the Brasos [sic] de Santiago, is reported to have taken place, which terminated, after a running fight of several hours duration, in the sinking of the former.”	BS	Sunk
Jose Maria Espino 1836	The captain of the port of Matamoras (Espino) relays information forwarded by <i>Bravo</i> ’s Captain Fernando Davis. While they were repairing <i>Bravo</i> ’s rudder, an American vessel approached and an officer from an American vessel came aboard <i>Bravo</i> wanting to communicate with the port. He describes the vessel [ <i>Invincible</i> ] as firing upon Thompson in the launch and also at <i>Bravo</i> . Levine [sic] was taken prisoner once they were attacked [by <i>Invincible</i> ]. <i>Bravo</i> only sustained a shot to the stern and damage to the rigging. The battle lasted over an hour and was cut short when the vessel left in pursuit of another brig. The letter implies that the approach of <i>Correo</i> and firepower from the beach encouraged the retreat of the warship [ <i>Invincible</i> ].	BS	Afloat and aground on the north side of the bar – only a shot to the stern
Edward Hall (Powers 2006:80)	Ed Hall was informed by an eyewitness that “the <i>Montezuma</i> is on the bar and so injured as to be abandoned: her guns taken on shore and put on other vessels.”	—	Abandoned
General Filisola 1836 (1849:242, 290- 292)	Reported on April 5 that <i>Segundo Bravo</i> and <i>Segundo Correo</i> are completely prepared to leave Brazos Santiago.	BS	Active
Morning Chronicle (1836a:4)	“The Texian armed schooner <i>Invincible</i> fell in with the Mexican schooner <i>Montezuma</i> , off the Brasos Santiago [sic]; an action took place, which terminated in the sinking of the <i>Montezuma</i> .”	BS	Sunk



**Table 2. Accounts of the Sinking of *Bravo*.**

Source	Account Summary	Location*	Demise
David Conrad 1836 (Powers 2006:80)	<i>Bravo</i> , after grounding had gone to pieces in the breakers.	—	Broken Apart
Rueben Potter 1836 (Powers 2006:80)	" <i>Bravo</i> sank more quickly that was would have been expected from a mere thumping."	—	Sunk
Hayes (1974 [1879]:146)	<i>Invincible</i> encountered <i>Montezuma</i> while cruising off Brazos Santiago and after a two-hour engagement <i>Montezuma</i> "was driven ashore and left in a sinking condition." Hayes incorrectly has the captain of <i>Montezuma</i> as Thompson and that <i>Invincible</i> returned to Galveston for repairs after the conflict and before capturing <i>Pocket</i> —both points disagree with other accounts.	BS	Sinking
Bancroft (1889: 272)	<i>Invincible</i> crippled <i>Bravo</i> and drove her ashore. <i>Invincible</i> only had injured rigging which was repaired. <i>Invincible</i> went in pursuit of <i>Pocket</i> .	—	Crippled
Dienst (1909b: 252- 253)	<i>Bravo</i> loses rudder crossing the bar at the mouth of the Rio Grande River. It ran aground near the north beach and was wrecked by a broadside from <i>Invincible</i> . Dienst's account disagrees with his use of a direct quote from a newspaper article that says this exchange occurred at Brazos Santiago.	RG	Wrecked
Fischer (1976:133- 134)	Account mentions <i>Bravo</i> losing its rudder crossing the bar and that Leving [sic] came aboard. Because the vessel could not be steered it ran aground. Mentions a brief engagement and that <i>Bravo</i> was put out of action by a broadside. Leving and the crew went ashore. The engagement interrupted by the arrival of <i>Pocket</i> .	RG	Put out of action
Pierce (1917:22)	<i>Invincible</i> arrives at the port of Brazos Santiago and encounters <i>General Bravo</i> and <i>Correo de Mexico</i> with food supplies for Mexican troops near Copano. Livine [sic] sent aboard <i>General Bravo</i> seeking to go ashore to speak to the American Consul of Matamoras. <i>Invincible</i> fired upon <i>Bravo</i> when <i>Bravo's</i> launch approached without Levine [sic] present. <i>Bravo</i> returned fire, <i>Correo</i> got under sail to attack <i>Invincible</i> , and Mexican shore artillery fired upon <i>Invincible</i> . <i>Invincible</i> retreated towards the bar or pass.	BS	Aground
Hill (1987:51-52)	<i>Bravo</i> at the mouth of the Rio Grande River with <i>Correo Segundo</i> in convoy. Lost its rudder and attacked by <i>Invincible</i> . After an hour in the engagement, the brig <i>Pocket</i> spotted and <i>Invincible</i> leaves in pursuit. Thomas Thompson was on <i>Bravo</i> helping with the replacement of a new rudder. Lt Leving [sic] went on board <i>Bravo</i> and Thompson was sent in a boat to <i>Invincible</i> to make arrangements to have Leving [sic] go ashore. <i>Invincible's</i> Captain Brown recognized Thompson and let him come aboard and imprisoned him below deck (this disagrees with other accounts) and fired a broadside. No injuries to <i>Bravo</i> other than a round shot to the poop and two minor injuries to the rigging. The battle was cut short when <i>Invincible</i> left in pursuit of <i>Pocket</i> . Hill's account paraphrases Espino's report to some extent but changes details (see above).	RG	Barely injured
Powers (2006:78-81)	<i>Invincible</i> , flying American colors, recognized and approached <i>Bravo</i> . It was commanded by Fernando Ricardo Davis, an American that started as a midshipman in the Mexican Navy in 1823. Living dressed in a revenue cutter's uniform and was taken to <i>Bravo</i> . Thompson on board <i>Bravo</i> believed the unknown vessel to be <i>Invincible</i> . Capt. Davis sent Thompson on a sloop-rigged harbor boat over to <i>Invincible</i> to verify Living's story. He recognized Captain Brown and reversed course and Brown fired upon <i>Bravo</i> . <i>Invincible's</i> boat was released (though Living was taken ashore) and at this point <i>Invincible</i> fired into <i>Bravo</i> as it was trying to get underway without its rudder. <i>Bravo</i> "lodged on the bar, where a few shots from <i>Invincible</i> filled her with water" <i>Bravo</i> fired return shots and was abandoned.	BS	Abandoned

**Table 2. Accounts of the Sinking of *Bravo*.**

Source	Account Summary	Location*	Demise
Jordan (2006:52-53)	<i>General Bravo</i> and <i>Segundo Correo Mexicano</i> stood guard at the mouth of the Rio Grande to keep news of the impending Mexican invasion from leaving Matamoras. They were to meet <i>John M. Brandel</i> , <i>New Castle</i> , and <i>Pocket</i> with their respective supplies to convoy them to Matagorda Bay. <i>Invincible</i> sights <i>Bravo</i> and <i>Correo</i> off Brazos Santiago, at the mouth of the Rio Grande, and recognized <i>Bravo</i> as having a damaged rudder. Eventually an hour or so gun battle ensues, <i>Bravo</i> runs aground at the river's mouth. <i>Invincible</i> captures <i>Pocket</i> .	RG	Run aground

\*BS=Bravos Santiago; RG=mouth of the Rio Grande River

## The *Bravo* and *Segundo Bravo* Puzzle (1836-1838)

In spite of Texian confidence in the loss of *Bravo* at the hands of *Invincible*'s gunfire, *Bravo* appears later in 1836-1838 now under the command of Captain Thompson, formerly of *Correo Mexicano/ Segundo Correo*. The author is grateful to colleague John Powers (2006) for being the first author encountered during research to question the veracity of the differing battle accounts and to acknowledge the disparity between the wrecked and surviving versions of *Bravo* after April 1836. His work was revisited in preparation for this study. Unless an extremely informative letter(s) is discovered, this mystery may never be satisfactorily resolved. Though it seems the evidence weighs more heavily towards the complete irreparable loss of *Bravo*, there is also evidence that suggests it did not, in fact, sink.

After the "sinking" of *Bravo* on April 2nd, later on May 17, it was reported that "*Segundo Bravo*" and "*Segundo Correo*" were at Brazos Santiago to pick up supplies for the army at Copano Bay (Filosola 1849:290–291). There were other earlier Filosola communications from April 5 and May 16 in regard to both vessels. Powers (2006:n. 37, 247–248) suggested that *Segundo Bravo* may indicate a replacement warship as an explanation for the disparity between these reports, the problematic timeline of the *Invincible* engagement, and the reference to the Mexican warship as the "second" *Bravo*.

An alternative explanation for "*Segundo*," however may simply be that the 1835 schooner *Moctezuma* became the "second" *Bravo* when it was renamed later that year, since the brig *Bravo* was already a recognized commissioned naval vessel. The use of "*Segundo*" does not necessarily imply a substitute schooner-of-war by that name—which would technically have been a third, and not second, vessel of the name *Bravo* to serve the Mexican government. It could have instead been a convenient way to differentiate between the schooner and the earlier brig.

In his report to Fernando Fernandez, Commandant of the Department of Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas, the commander of Matamoros, Jose Maria Espino, relays the account of the naval engagement. This information had been provided by Captain Fernando Davis of *Bravo*. Two key passages allude to the condition of the vessel: (a) the statement that *Bravo* was barely injured only having sustained a shot to the stern with two crew injured by a broken pulley and (b) that *Bravo* was aground on the north side of the bar awaiting a strong wind; they were working on saving the vessel though it was taking on water (Espino 1836). The eyewitness report to Edward Hall (Powers 2006:80) indicating the guns were removed from *Bravo* does not necessarily mean they were being salvaged from the presumed wreck and placed on other vessels. This action was the typical measure taken to lighten a grounded vessel so that it could be refloated by removing heavy items such as guns, cargo, and ballast. The cannon may have only been temporarily relocated with the intent to replace them on *Bravo* later. The Espino (1836) report showing that *Bravo* had a pivot cannon and broadside guns is consistent with the armament described on the later still-active *Bravo* in July 1836.

Curiously, historian Alex Dienst (1909a:139) in his early works on the Texas Navy references accounts from an unnamed July 1836 New Orleans newspaper claiming *Bravo* sank on its way from Matamoros to Veracruz with the loss of all on board except Thompson and two marines. Perusal of the *New Orleans Bee* for July failed to relocate such an article, but a similar account from the *New York Courier*

*and Enquirer* (reprinted in the September London Shipping Gazette 1836:1) describes the exact same event, excepting that this misfortune instead befell *Correo Secundo*. Considering Thompson at this time was the commander of *Correo Secundo (Segundo)* and not *Bravo*, this latter account is perhaps more compelling and believable.

It is tempting to consider if Thompson, upon his return to Veracruz without a ship to command, was made captain of the refloated *Bravo*; however the other option would be that he was given command of an altogether different vessel rechristened *Bravo*. Letters in the Mexican archives from July 1836 discuss Thompson as commander of the schooner *Bravo* (Figure 10a) and also summarizes its arms and crew as part of a larger discussion of naval affairs (Figure 10b, 10c) including a list of the crew and armament of all current navy vessels. *Bravo*, as described in a document dated July 20, was armed with a 16-pounder pivot cannon and four 9-pounder carronades. The 16-pounder is not a commonly recognized cannon “caliber” and may be the error of the original document’s author. *Bravo, Hidalgo* and two other gunboats were described as having 16-pounder cannon. A copy of the same document also describes the *Bravo* pivot gun as 16-pounder. *Bravo* had a crew of 60 including 10 soldiers and a garrison sergeant (Reibaud 1836; Secretaria de Guerra y Marina 1836). Is this an altogether different vessel than the previously described *Bravo* of four guns and a crew of 50 (London St. James Chronicle and General Evening Post 1835:4), with the additional pivot gun mentioned by Captain Fernando (Espino 1836)? This is difficult to say, especially with the misidentifications and errors occurring in the historic sources.

In August 1836, *Bravo* and the brig *Fama* (also called *General Urrea*) were preparing to disembark from Veracruz on a cruise (BMP 1836:2). Later in February 1837 Captain Thompson transported General Sayas on *Bravo* to Sisal to replace General Toro as the commander general of the Yucatan (BMP 1837a:2). *Bravo* was also involved in what was considered a scandalous incident at Brazos Santiago in April 1837 which resulted in an exchange of cannon fire between vessels of the U.S. and Mexican navies. The U.S. merchantmen *Champion* and *Louisiana* had been detained at Brazos Santiago and the U.S. Navy intervened to secure their release. USS *Natchez* arrived at Brazos Santiago and left in convoy with *Louisiana*.

Upon returning for *Champion*, *Natchez* encountered the Mexican fleet consisting of *General Urrea*, *General Teran*, and *Bravo*. Without provocation *Natchez* captured *General Urrea* on April 16 and was fired upon by both *Bravo* and the port artillery but both were at too great a distance to have an effect. A shot however did accidentally strike the U.S. merchant vessel *Climax*. This was viewed by Mexico as hostile action by the United States. Commodore Dallas of the U.S. Navy, with a fleet of five vessels including USS *Constellation*, traveled to Veracruz to deliver a formal apology to the Mexican government (Pierce 1917:23–24; Hill 1987:70–71). *General Urrea* was returned to Mexico. *General Bravo* is furthermore mentioned as being part of a flotilla including *Fama* and *Vencedor del Alamo* that arrived at Campeche in late August 1838 (Bonilla 1946:118).

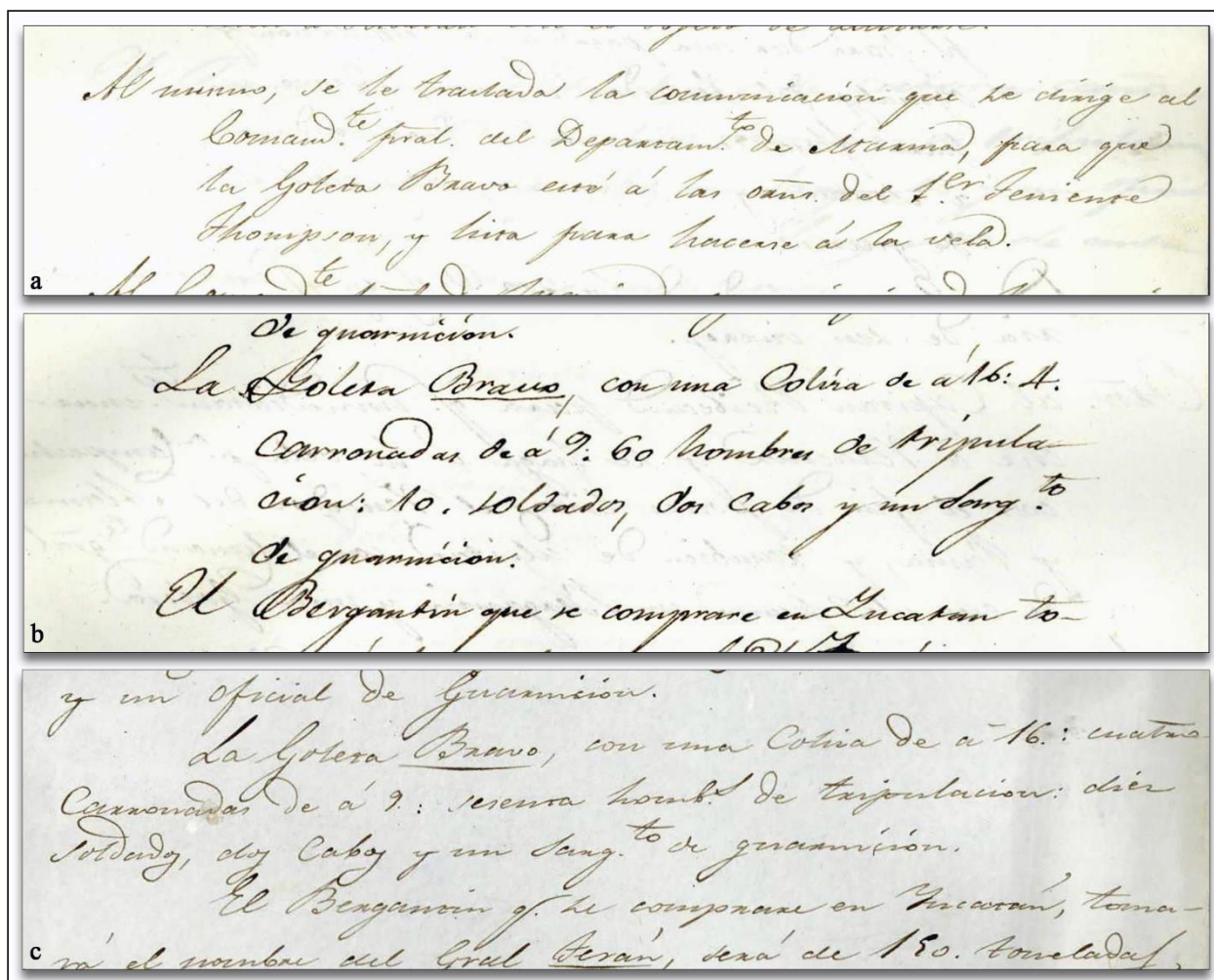


Figure 10. Mexican military documents referring to Bravo after its loss at Brazos Santiago in April 1836: (a) indicating Thompson as commander of Bravo and who is being asked to prepare Bravo to sail; (b) description of Bravo; and (c) copy of Bravo description. (Secretaria de Guerra y Marine 1836; Reibaud 1836).

During the Pastry War between Mexico and France in 1838-1839, the French Navy captured the entire Atlantic fleet of the Mexican Navy at Veracruz on November 28, 1838, including the corvette *Iguala*; brigs *Irtubide*, *Libertador*, and *Urrea*; and schooners *Terán* and *Bravo*, before French forces returned to France in March of 1839 (Penot 1976:451; Meed 2001:109; Jordan 2006:116). It is believed all these vessels were fairly new acquisitions, built in Baltimore (Jordan 2006:116; Williams 2010) though the original source of this information is not referenced.

Documentation suggests *Iturbide*, *Libertador*, *Urrea*, and *Bravo* were restored to Mexico in December 1838, though it appears Texas intended to acquire these captured prizes, evidenced by a new law to authorize such a purchase passed by the Texas Congress in 1838 (Wells 1988:4-5; Demerliac 2007:191). Additionally, the Memoria del secretario de estado y del despacho de la guerra of 1839 records that *Iturbide* had been sold by the French, *Teran* and *Urrea* had been disposed of, *Iguala* was still owned by France, and *Bravo* was at Tampico (von Mach, personal communication 2018). Some of these historic sources are not in agreement, so the fate of *Bravo* after the conclusion of the Pastry Wars is unclear.

### The Final *Montezuma* (1842–1843)

Ultimately by 1842, the various sailing vessels *Moctezuma*, *Montezuma*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo*, and *Segundo Bravo* appear to no longer be active. The Mexican Navy acquired a new state-of-the-art warship, the 204-ft steamship *Montezuma* built by Greens and Wigrams in England and armed with one 68-pounder shell gun, two long 32 pounders, four 32-pounder carronades, and one small 9 pounder. It was outfitted with two 140 horsepower engines and had a displacement of 1111 tons (Hill 1987:172–173). It participated in the Battle of Campeche in 1843 but ultimately Mexico was unable to afford payment on the vessel and it was repossessed in 1846.

In summary, four armed vessels bearing the names *Moctezuma*, *Montezuma*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo*, and/or *Segundo Bravo* were in operation off the Texas and Mexican coasts between 1825 and 1846—this quantity expands to five if it is believed the 1835 schooner *Moctezuma* legitimately sank at Bravos Santiago in April 1836. For simplicity they are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Armed Vessels Named *Bravo*, *Moctezuma*, or *Montezuma* in Operation in Mexico During the Early-to-Mid Nineteenth Century.**

No.	Name(s)	Vessel Type	Use Period	Armament
1	<i>Aerial/Bravo</i>	Brig	1825—ca. 1835	14 24-pdr. Carronades; 18 guns; or 20 carronades.
2	<i>Montezuma</i> *	Schooner	?—1832	A pivot cannon and two other guns
3	<i>Moctezuma</i> , <i>Montezuma</i> , <i>Bravo</i> , <i>General Bravo</i> , ( <i>Segundo Bravo</i> ?)	Schooner	1834—1836?	1 pivot cannon and 4 guns
4	<i>Bravo</i> , ( <i>Segundo Bravo</i> ?)**	Schooner	1836?-1838	16-pdr. pivot cannon and four 9-pdr. carronades
5	<i>Montezuma</i>	Steamship	1842-1846	68-pdr. Shell gun, two long 32 pdrs., four 32-pdr. carronades, one small 9-pdr.

\*not part of the official Mexican Navy but used during a governmental coup.

\*\*only a separate vessel if record no. 3 above truly sank in April 1836.

### OTHER LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY SHIPWRECKS

Considerable time has been spent in an attempt to unravel the mystery behind *Bravo* and its loss as a means to investigate its promise as a wreck candidate for 41CF184. Other vessels sank in the general vicinity of the archeological site and these shipwrecks may be the key to realizing Boca Chica No. 2's role in Texas' history. Not much is known about most of these reported shipwrecks so the following discussion serves merely as an introduction to this still tantalizing puzzle—if not *Bravo* what could this shipwreck be?

As of January 2017 there are 297 historic shipwrecks in the THC's shipwreck database that have been reported in Cameron County: 49 are listed as being lost in or near the mouth of the Rio Grande River, approximately 120 wrecks are lost in Brazos Santiago harbor/pass, and nearly a dozen are

reported near shore between the river mouth and the pass. In considering potential alternative candidates for 41CF184, all vessels near the mouth of the Rio Grande River were initially selected as well as those in the area of south Boca Chica Beach (n=49). Nine of the vessels in this area were steamers and one was a barge—6 are unknown and the remaining 34 were sailing vessels that included 11 sloops, 2 barks, and lighters. Of the 21 verified two-masted sailing vessels from this group (Table 4), all were schooners. The THC database only has dimensions for two of these schooners, *Lodi* (wrecked 1832) and *Liberty* (wrecked 1892).

**Table 4. Two-Masted Vessel Losses near the Mouth of the Rio Grande River**

Vessel Name	Year Built	Year Lost	Vessel Type	Length	Breadth	Depth of Hold	Cause of Loss	Database Nos.*
<i>Alice And Mary</i>	—	1863	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 671
<i>Bonita</i>	1831	1837	schooner	60	19.3	5.9	storm	THC 680, GOM 120
<i>Caroline</i>	—	—	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 687
<i>Coffin</i>	—	1847	schooner	—	—	—	storm	THC 697, GOM 1552
<i>Emma</i>	—	1878	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 712
<i>Farmer's Return</i>	1837	1842	schooner	60.6	19.6	5.6	—	THC 719, GOM 411
<i>Florence Bernice</i> <i>General C. C.</i>	—	1800s	schooner	—	—	—	fire	THC 721
<i>Pinckney</i>	—	1863	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 724
<i>Halcyon</i>	1829	1836	schooner	72.5	22	8	—	THC 731, GOM 513
<i>Hunter</i>	—	1847	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 733, GOM 1571
<i>Ike Davis</i>	—	1864	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 736
<i>James Duckett</i>	—	1865	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 739
<i>Liberty</i>	1866	1892	schooner	66	21	4	—	THC 756
<i>Lodi</i>	1835	1836	schooner	71	21	6	—	THC760, GOM 691
<i>Louisiana</i>	—	1837	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 761, GOM 70
<i>Mary Emma</i>	—	1847	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 765, GOM 1579
<i>Mary Marshall</i>	—	1846	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 766, GOM 1578
<i>Phoenix</i>	—	1834	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 790, GOM 913
<i>Spartacus</i>	1834	1835	schooner	71.2	18.6	7.9	—	THC 813, GOM 1084
<i>Virginia</i>	—	1847	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 828, GOM 1597
<i>W. C. Preston</i>	—	1848	schooner	—	—	—	—	THC 832, GOM 1595

\*GOM references author's personal database

Cross-referencing the remaining 19 vessels against the author's personal database on early nineteenth-century regional watercraft only produced additional dimensions for *Farmer's Return*, *Halcyon*, *Spartacus*, and *Bonita*, though it is difficult to confirm if these are in fact the same vessels listed in the THC database. Without information such as the size, captain, city of build, or origin it can be hard to link vessels to register and enrollment data (Survey of the Federal Archives 1942) as many vessels shared the same names. The dimensions for the remaining 15 vessels in Table 4 are still unknown. There are likely other shipwrecks that are unknown to the THC and not documented in the agency's database.

*Bonita*, *Farmer's Return*, and *Liberty* are smaller than 41CF184, though *Lodi*, *Halcyon*, and *Spartacus* are close in size. With a beam of 5.5 m (18 ft), *Spartacus* is too narrow for serious consideration as a candidate and *Lodi* is more than a foot shorter, though this may be nominal due to the inexactness in considering the true registration dimensions of 41CF184. The schooner *Halcyon* is the most similar in size to 41CF184, with registration dimensions of 22.1 (length) x 6.7 (breadth) x 2.4 m (depth) (72.5 x 22 x 8 ft). It had a displacement of 110 22/95 tons. It was built in Sussex County, Delaware in 1829 and was first registered at Baltimore in 1831 (Survey of Federal Archives 1942:92). The first advertisement in the *New Orleans Bee* (1836b:2), discovered by the author, that lists its availability for Matamoros suggests it was not coppered as this was not described, which is typically the fashion for charter vessels at this time.

*Halcyon* was a well-known New Orleans schooner that cruised frequently between New Orleans and Matamoros. It was regularly advertised for Matamoros in the *New Orleans Bee* between May 7 and November 4, 1836 at which time it was under new ownership to Thomas Cucullu, Manuel Simon Cucullu, and Jean Martial Lapreyre (NOB 1836b:2, 1836c:1; Survey of Federal Archives 1942:92). They operated this vessel on behalf of M.S. Cucullu Lepeyre & Co. and also acted as agents in the slave trade emanating from Havana. *Halcyon* was registered to this company on May 12 (NOB 1836d:1; Macauley and Lewis 1839; Survey of the Federal Archives 1942:92). Not only did it carry freight and passengers but was also used to convey dispatches and relay news of occurrences in Mexico to the newspapers (BMP 1835:2; NOB 1836e:1, 1836f:2; Huron Reflector 1836:2; The Morning Chronicle 1836b:1). In June and August 1836, it transported almost \$200,000 in specie from Matamoros to New Orleans (NOB 1836g:2; 1836h:2; Huron Reflector 1836).

During one of its trips in the Gulf, *Halcyon's* crew became inadvertently involved in an international incident at Tampico, Mexico. General José Antonio Mexía conspired with supporters in New Orleans and Texas to plan and supply an expedition to attack Tampico, Mexico. After arriving off Tampico on November 14, 1835, Mexía's vessel grounded while trying to approach the city under the cover of night, his troops having to wade ashore during the early hours on November 13. The delay in landing allowed Mexican troops to prepare a response and Mexía and his troops were unsuccessful in their attempt to attack the town. His soldiers retreated and dispersed with many being taken prisoner. For an additional 10 days Mexía remained at the fort, but in the absence of expected reinforcements he chartered the schooner *Halcyon* for \$2000 to affect his return to New Orleans. He abandoned some of his troops, many of whom later claimed to not be aware of the true nature of the enterprise. They were tried and executed on December 14 (Gomez 1835; Barker 1903:171–177).

According to a list of shipwrecks compiled by historian Albert Alfonso Champion and sent to the THC (Champion 1974), *Halcyon* sank at the mouth of the Rio Grande River in 1836. The THC has not been able to independently verify this wrecking event, though charter listings for *Halcyon* in the *New Orleans Bee* were not discovered after early November 1836, perhaps suggesting it sank towards the end of the year. An altogether different vessel, the copper-fastened and copper-sheathed *Mexicana*, formerly advertised for general charter to Mexico, was specifically listed for Matamoros (as had been *Halcyon*) by November 22 (NOB 1836i:1, 1836j:2). *Halcyon* is not registered at New Orleans after May 12, 1836 (Survey of Federal Register 1942:92).



In general, 41CF184 is consistent with the size and wreck location of *Halcyon* and is only slightly larger than *Spartacus*—close enough to perhaps also maintain this latter schooner as a candidate. *Halcyon* was built in Sussex County, Delaware which is a regional source of baldcyprus and the northernmost occurrence of this species in the United States. Despite this circumstantial information, the dimensions of 41CF184 are fairly common for merchant vessels being used in the Gulf and the current analysis could easily be overlooking other potential historical candidates for which the hull dimensions are not known. Without more complete historical information regarding the known, and as yet undocumented historic wrecks in this region and in the absence of historic artifacts at 41CF184, it may not be possible to ever conclusively identify this significant State Antiquities Landmark.

## CONCLUSION

As 41CF184 does not appear to contain any of its cultural material, likely salvaged at the time of its loss and in the years since, only its hull dimensions and characteristics may truly advance or eliminate historic vessels as candidates. Regardless of the complexity of the varying histories of *Moctezuma*, *Montezuma*, *Bravo*, *General Bravo* and whether or not one ultimately wrecked at Brazos Santiago or at the mouth of Rio Grande River, none of the available published studies on the Mexican and Texas Navies, associated archival documents, or regional histories perused by the author have included dimensions for these Mexican navy sailing vessels.

Historic evidence indicates the candidate *Moctezuma*, if it was successfully sunk by *Invincible*, went aground on the north side of the bar at Brazos Santiago Pass and not near the mouth of the Rio Grande River—the latter of which is the location of 41CF184. The reliability of these historic accounts and the strong possibility that *Bravo* did not sink, offer enough doubt to remove *Bravo* from consideration as a wreck candidate.

In addition, 41CF184 does not have any of the attributes that would typically identify this as a naval vessel of the period, especially one described as a clipper schooner. The hull dimensions, length-to-beam ratio, and absence of copper sheathing are more consistent with merchantman and in particularly a specific example (*Halcyon*) that frequented the area between 1835 and 1836. Other unknown or lesser documented vessels may equally qualify.

So the story of *Moctezuma* doesn't quite conclude, but merely teases a larger more complex narrative that also highlights the fallibility of historic and eyewitness accounts. The phantom ship is still elusive, not perhaps to its original pursuers in 1835 and 1836, but to those archeological investigators seeking that evidence of our history.

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My deepest gratitude is also extended to Boca Chica No. 2 investigators Steve Hoyt, Andy Hall, and Tom Oertling for their review of this article and editorial comments. These archeologists conducted the principle work on the shipwreck, which I myself (unfortunately) have never visited.

**Publisher’s Note:** the author has prepared additional documentation on her topic that appears in a separate linked folder. The appendix will feature a sample of the photographs of Boca Chica No. 2 from the Texas Historical Commission’s (THC) photography collection. There are currently more than 700 images for this shipwreck in the form of color slides, 35 mm print film, and digital photography. The images in the appendix are provided for research use only and are Copyrighted intellectual property of the Texas Historical Commission, Austin, Texas. **They may NOT to be used in any publication format without express written permission of the Agency.** If there is an interest in using these photographs for publication, marketing, or any commercial use, please contact the THC regarding the agency’s image use policy. Please allow for a lengthy download time due to file size. [Click here for the Appendix.](#)

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