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The Colors

of a Navy

and Nation

Flags, standards, and banners

have been used for thousands of years as visual symbols of those who bear them.

The "broad stripes and bright stars"

of the American flag represent an indivisible nation "with liberty and justice for all," and symbolize sacrifices made by many for the sake of the nation and freedom the flag stands for.

Read how the U.S. Navy has flown the various flags of our growing country and carried on the customs of honoring those flags.

The Navy Jack

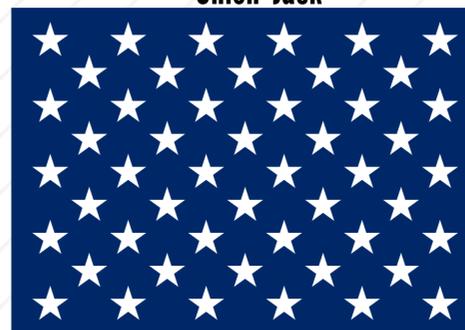
'Rattlesnake' Jack



DONT TREAD ON ME

It is widely believed that when the Navy was established on Oct. 13, 1775, ships of the Continental Navy flew a "jack" as seen above, also referred to as the "rattlesnake" jack. While there is no firm historical evidence that this was the first actual Navy jack, it is well documented that the rattlesnake and motto were used on several flags during the War of Independence.

'Union' Jack



The Navy jack eventually evolved into the flag seen here, also referred to as the "union" jack. This flag remained the Navy jack until 1976, when the rattlesnake jack made a one-year return to celebrate our nation's bicentennial.

Other Notable Flags in History



Grand Union Flag & Lt. John Paul Jones



On Dec. 3, 1775, Lt. John Paul Jones hoisted the Grand Union flag, also known as the First Navy Ensign, aboard the warship Alfred. This marked the first time the American flag was raised over an American naval vessel.

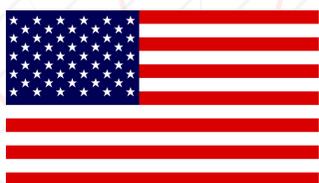
When Francis Scott Key saw the American flag flying over Ft. McHenry the night after the British bombardment Sept. 14, 1814, he wrote the lyrics to what later became our national anthem.



Star-Spangled Banner & Francis Scott Key

Today's Navy

In today's Navy, only a few select flags are authorized to be displayed from a ship or craft of the Navy or naval station.



National Ensign

The most honored flag in the Navy is the U.S. national ensign. For ships in port, the national ensign is displayed from 0800 until sunset from the flagstaff aft. For ships underway, the national ensign is displayed during daylight from the gaff. For shore commands, it is displayed from 0800 to sunset.



President of the U.S.



Secretary of the Navy

Personal Flags

Personal flags represent senior officials all the way from the President of the United States down to an officer of the Navy commanding a ship. When a senior official visits a Navy ship afloat, his or her personal flag is flown from the ship. Otherwise, the commander afloat displays his or her flag.

Commissioning Pennant

The commissioning pennant is the mark of a commissioned Navy ship. It is flown at all times as long as a ship is in commissioned status, except when a senior official is embarked and flies his personal flag in its place.



Commissioning Pennant

Command Pennants

There are two types of command pennants: broad or burgee. Broad indicates command of a force, group, or squadron of ships, aircraft wing, or carrier air wing. Burgee indicates command of a division of ships or craft, or a major subdivision of an aircraft wing.



Broad command pennant of Destroyer Squadron 23, commanded by then-Captain Arleigh Burke during World War II in the Pacific.



Broad command pennant of Destroyer Division 95, from World War II in the Pacific.