



NAUTICAL TERMS & NAVAL EXPRESSIONS

Part Two

In this series of infographics, we'll explore the origin of some common and peculiar nautical terms and expressions used in your U.S. Navy

PEACOCK

['pē-,kōt] noun

The topcoat worn in cold weather as part of a Sailor's uniform. It is believed that the peacoat gets its name from the Dutch word *pij*, a coarse, woolen cloth, or the fact that it was a coat made out of pilot cloth—a “pi” coat. Sailors have been wearing this coat for more than 200 years.



TOE THE LINE

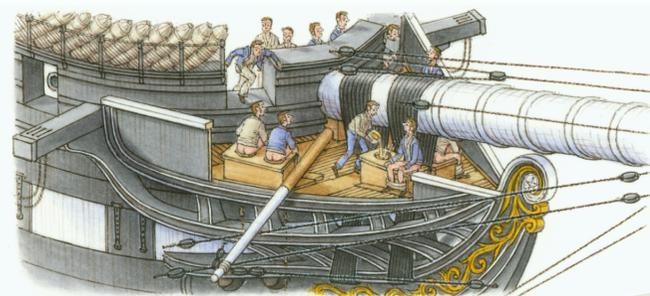
['tō - thə -'līn] verb

In the days of wooden ships, the sealant between the deck planks formed lines, and Sailors would place their toes to these lines when falling-in at quarters. This was also used as a form of punishment for unruly Sailors who had to toe-the-line in silence for a designated amount of time.

HEAD

['hed] noun

The bathroom. On old square-rigged sailing ships, the wind almost always came from astern. So, Sailors would go to the “head” so as not to relieve themselves “into the wind.” The use of this term dates to at least 1708, when English privateer Woodes Rogers used the term in his book “A Cruising Voyage Around the World.”



“The Head.” Courtesy USS Constitution Museum. Illustration by Stephen Biesty.



BRAVO ZULU

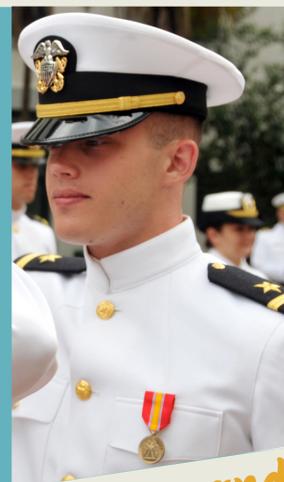
['brä-(.)vō 'zū-(.)lū] noun

This is a naval signal, conveyed by flaghoist or voice radio, meaning “well done.” It is also written as “BZ.” Signals were organized originally in the Allied Naval Signal Book (ACP-175) by general subject. The B signals referred to administrative issues. BZ was the last signal in that series.

ENSIGN

['en-,sīn] noun

A flag, or, the lowest officer rank of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. Taken from the old Norman word *enseigne*, the U.S. Navy adopted the rank of ensign in 1862 from the French.



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