

THE U.S. NAVY'S TRADITION OF

SHIP COMMISSIONINGS



The commissioning ceremony is one of the most significant milestones in the life of a U.S. Navy ship. Here are some aspects of this time-honored U.S. Navy tradition.



DID YOU KNOW?

Ships commissioning programs often include an anecdote about the storied origin of the commissioning pennant.



According to legend, during the first of three 17th-century Anglo-Dutch naval wars (1652-54), Dutch Adm. Maarten Tromp set sail with a broom at his masthead, symbolizing his intention to sweep the English from the sea.



His British opponent, Adm. Robert Blake, two-blocked a coach whip to show his determination to whip the Dutch fleet. Blake won; in commemoration of his victory a streamer-like pennant, called a "coachwhip pennant" became the distinguishing mark of naval ships.



The modern U.S. Navy commissioning pennant is blue at the hoist with a union of seven white stars, and has a horizontal red and white stripe at the fly.



THE EARLY DAYS

The commissioning ceremony has been a U.S. Navy tradition since 1775.



The act of commissioning a ship was derived from British naval custom. The event wasn't public and followed no written procedure.



Alfred, the first ship of the Continental Navy, was commissioned in Philadelphia in December 1775. Since then, the commissioning ceremony has been a long-standing U.S. Navy tradition.



Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles made the first specific reference to commissionings in a November 6, 1863, letter where he directed that "commandants of Navy yards and stations will inform the Department...when each vessel...is placed in commission."

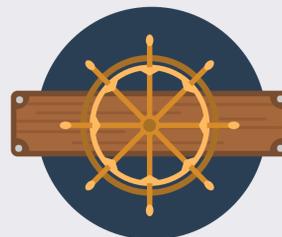


WHO'S WHO

From ship sponsors to plank owners, many people play an important role in the commissioning ceremony.



A central figure in a ship's life is the sponsor. Chosen by the Secretary of the Navy, a ship's sponsor is a female who is typically selected for her relationship to the ship's namesake or current mission.



"Plank owners" are members of the commissioning crew of a ship. The commissioning crew is responsible for bringing the vessel to life as a U.S. Navy warship.



The ship's prospective commanding officer (PCO) traditionally hosts the commissioning ceremony.



TRADITIONS

The commissioning ceremony is full of iconic traditions that make it a joyous and memorable occasion.



The commissioning ceremony usually includes speeches from flag officers, civil leaders, and other distinguished guests. Often, the Navy leader who delivers one of the final speeches will place the ship into commission with an announcement to the crowd.



Following the speeches, the ship's prospective commanding officer orders the prospective executive officer to hoist the colors and commissioning pennant. At the moment the commissioning pennant is broken at the masthead, the ship becomes a Navy command in her own right, and a member of the Navy fleet.



After the pennant is hoisted, the prospective commanding officer reads the orders appointing him to command. The now commanding officer orders the executive officer to set the watch.



The final and most iconic part of the ceremony occurs when the ship's sponsor gives the order, "Man our ship and bring her to life!" Crew members man the rails, side-by-side, as the ship's systems come online.