

DING! DING!



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THE TRADITION OF A SHIP'S BELL

From the first recorded mention of a shipboard bell in 1485 on the British ship Grace Dieu, to modern-day baptismal ceremonies aboard U.S. naval vessels, the ship's bell has long been a part of U.S. Navy tradition.

Inset photo: USS Ohio (1838 - 1883) crewmen with bell, circa 1870.

TIMEKEEPING



Before the chronometer came along, time was kept on the ship with a half-hour glass and a bell. One of the ship's boys would strike a bell every time he turned the half-hour glass over. This practice evolved into the tradition of striking the bell at every half-hour during watch. Refer to the chart to see how bell ringing corresponds with timekeeping in the U.S. Navy.

TIME	NUMBER OF BELLS
0030, 0430, 0830, 1230, 1630, 2030	1 bell
0100, 0500, 0900, 1300, 1700, 2100	2 bells
0130, 0530, 0930, 1330, 1730, 2130	3 bells
0200, 0600, 1000, 1400, 1800, 2200	4 bells
0230, 0630, 1030, 1430, 1830, 2230	5 bells
0300, 0700, 1100, 1500, 1900, 2300	6 bells
0330, 0730, 1130, 1530, 1930, 2330	7 bells
0400, 0800, 1200, 1600, 2000, 2400	8 bells

'EIGHT BELLS AND ALL IS WELL.'



A standard four hour watch ends at eight bells, hence the phrase "Eight bells and all is well," when referring to completing a watch with no incident.

EMERGENCIES

Bells are sounded in emergency situations. In the event of a fire, the bell is rung rapidly for at least five seconds followed by one (forward), two (amidship), or three (aft) rings to indicate where the fire is located.

SIGNALING

A ship sounds her bell in poor visibility as a signal to other vessels. In 1858, British naval regulations made it mandatory to ring a ship's bell in foggy conditions.



CEREMONIES & EVENTS



During naval ceremonies and events, the bell is used to signal the arrival and departure of a ship's captain, a flag officer, and other dignitaries.

BAPTISMS



The British Royal Navy began the custom of baptizing children under the ship's bell. In some ceremonies, the bell is filled with water and used as the christening bowl. The child's name is sometimes inscribed inside the bell.