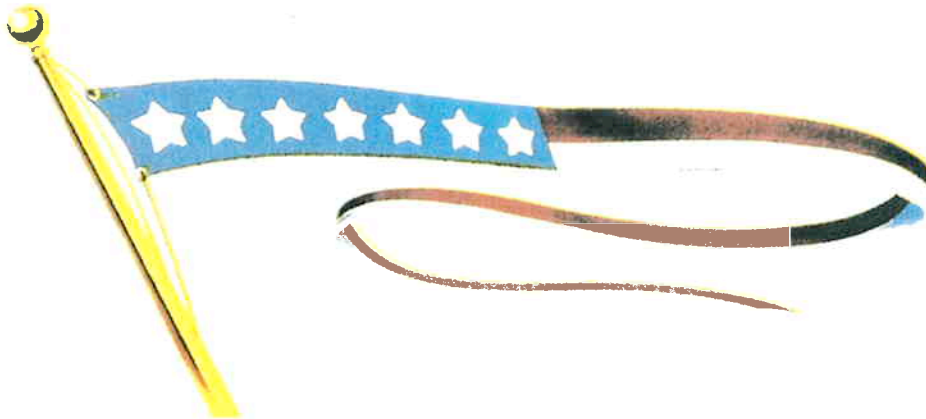


The Decommissioning Ceremony

A N O B S E R V A N C E O F N A V A L T R A D I T I O N



The decommissioning ceremony is a solemn occasion, one on which we gather together to say farewell to a legacy of steel, sweat, and blood. This ceremony signifies the end of an era in which thousands of men have sacrificed their time, energy, and upon occasion their lives, in order to ensure that the ship's mission was accomplished.

Nowhere in Navy Regulations will you find rules that state a ship must have any sort of decommissioning ceremony. This custom has risen out of the human need to reflect upon the loss of something that is a major part of one's life. It is only precedence that dictates that this should be a formal, impressive, and solemn event. The decommissioning ceremony for UNITED STATES SHIP NEW ORLEANS marks the end of twenty nine years of service for a ship that received her baptism of fire in Vietnam and is being laid to rest in the city she has called home for all these years.

The symbol above has its origin in European antiquity. During the Middle Ages, the mark of knights and other nobles was the "coachwhip" pennant. This pennant was known as a pennon. The size and elaborateness of the design generally indicated the relative rank and importance of the noble it heralded. On the rare occasions that these nobles embarked upon seagoing vessels, they ensured that their pennons were flown from the ship. The pennons generally flew from the vessel's most visible point, usually the forecastle or main mast.

It is believed that the first time the pennon was used independent of feudal heraldry dates back to the 17th century during a conflict between the Dutch and English Navies. In one particular engagement, Maarten Harpertzoon Tromp, the Dutch Admiral, hoisted a broom at his masthead to indicate his intention to sweep the English from the sea. The English Admiral then hoisted a horsewhip, indicating his intention to chastise the insolent Dutch. Ever since that time, the narrow coachwhip pennant, symbolizing the original horsewhip, has been the distinctive mark of a man-of-war. This tradition of so designating ships of war has been adopted by all nations.

The modern United States Navy commissioning pennant is blue at the hoist with a horizontal red and white stripe at the fly, and varies in length with the size of the ship. At one time, there were thirteen white stars in the blue field representing the original states, but in 1933 seven white stars became the standard. The commissioning pennant is flown at the main on vessels with no flag officers embarked. Ships with a high ranking officer embarked will fly a personal or command pennant instead.

During the ceremony, NEW ORLEANS will "strike colors" for a final time. The commissioning pennant will be lowered and presented to the ship's final Commanding Officer. This ceremony will mark the official retirement of NEW ORLEANS. Above all this ceremony is to say goodbye to an old and faithful servant. Fair winds and following seas, old girl.