

Guide



# Ship Commissioning

Navy League of the United States  
July 2001

2300 Wilson Boulevard  
Arlington, Virginia 22201-3308  
800.356.5760

## ***The Commissioning Tradition***

*The naval commissioning ceremony has been a tradition of all navies for centuries. It has been in the United States Navy since its beginning. The commissioning is the final act that marks entrance of a man-of-war into the naval forces of her nation. This is the final and perhaps the most significant event of the triad that brings a ship to life: keel laying, launching and christening, and commissioning.*

### **Navy League Support**

The Navy doesn't have the funding to conduct all of the events that surround the commissioning ceremony of a naval ship. Without the active support of organizations such as the Navy League these events could not happen. To support a commissioning takes a lot of time and effort, but is a very worthwhile event. There are many items to contend with and support can be received from the Navy and from other organizations that have hosted commissioning ceremonies. The enclosed material is from the commissioning of the USS *John C. Stennis* in Hampton Roads.

**Hampton Roads Council  
Navy League of the United States  
*USS John C. Stennis* Commissioning Committee**

- To make the people of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Mississippi and the Nation aware of the *USS John C. Stennis* and its importance to the United States Navy.
- To stimulate interest in the life and interests, including the military side.
- To foster awareness of the role of the United States Navy in the protection of our freedoms.
- To commemorate the commissioning of the John C. Stennis.
- To finance appropriate events and activities associated with these objectives.

**COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

Finance Committee

This committee will seek out and determine how funds and services can be obtained and utilized to fund the various committee activities. The Chairman of the Committee will be supported by small finance committee and augmented by the entire Commissioning Committee who will assist in carrying out the fundraising functions.

Publicity Committee

This committee is responsible for the dissemination of information relevant to the activities of the Commissioning Committee. This includes relations with the media and, in coordination with the activities committee, assisting in development of media events to publicize the *USS John C. Stennis*.

Activities Committee

This committee initiates, plans, and carries out the activities of the Commissioning Committee. This includes activities associated with the commissioning, but also the events such as receptions, luncheons, sale of items, and speeches that will occur prior to Commissioning.

LOGISTICS: Coordinate with Navy Public Works

1. Pier assignment
2. Seating
3. Communications and Public Address systems
4. Ship's bunting, speakers platforms, etc.
5. Plan and implement plan based on time requirements

INVITATIONS: 1. Coordinate assembling of names for various commissioning function from:

- a.) Navy
  - b.) Civilian sector
  - c.) Major ship contractors
  - d.) Politicians
  - e.) Committee chairpersons
2. Furnish lists to Joe Hanna after first "sanitizing" them for duplications.

GIFTS:

1. Plan with Captain Klosteman and Commissioning Chairpersons appropriate gifts for participants.

SOCIAL COMMITTEE:

1. Plan for Captain's Reception
2. Plan for PreCom Breakfast
3. Plan for Crew Banquet
4. Plan for Post Commissioning Public Reception

TRANSPORTATION:

1. Plan for hiring of buses for transporting VVIPS and VIPS from breakfast to pier.
2. Plan for use of POVs for transporting of platforms quest to pier.
3. Plan with base police for use of parking areas and bus transport of general public to the pier.
4. Coordinate all above with Joe Hanna to coincide with arrival times of guest.

COMMUNICATIONS:

1. Arrange Media coverage, Video of Ceremony, Cox Cable.

TREASURER:

1. Collect money, balance check book
2. Write checks as per Chairman instructions.

3. Report balance on account.

SAFETY AND SECURITY:

1. Coordinate with Base security policy use of road network parking lots for commissioning day.
  2. Plan for emergency medical treatment and evacuation.
  3. Coordinate water and comfort facilities at site.
- Recommend projects aboard the Ship will include:  
  
“Museum” to the namesake (pictures, artifacts, memorabilia).  
Portraits or statuary of the namesake.  
Crew library.  
Exercise equipment.  
China or Silver services for VIP dining room.
  - Commissioning Activities include:  
  
VIP receptions and dinners (platform guest and VIPs),  
Dinner for crew,  
Refreshments for tour of ship on day of Commissioning,  
Mementos for crew and special guests,  
Guest lists,  
Plankowners gifts, (plaques, lithographs, certificates),  
Plankowners’ Ball.

COMMISSIONING COMMITTEE  
*USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN-74)*

Assign a Navy person to each committee

CHAIRMAN:	John A. Panneton
CO-CHAIRMAN/FINANCE:	RADM G. L. Riendeau, USN (Ret)
CORPORATE LIAISON:	Joseph M. Gianascoli
ADVISOR:	VADM Joseph Donnell, USN (Ret)
<u>TRANSPORTATION/LOGISTICS:</u>	Joe Milligan Joe Hunley Walter Wilkins
<u>CREWS/BANQUET:</u>	MCPON Robert Walker, USN (Ret)
<u>SECURITY:</u>	MAJGEN Ross Plasterer, USMC (Ret)
<u>GIFTS:</u>	Nancy Ryan
<u>INVITATIONS:</u>	Dan Heflin
<u>PLATFORM BREAKFAST/POST RECEPTION:</u>	Anita Gianascoli
<u>CAPTAIN'S BANQUET:</u>	Maryellen Baldwin
<u>COMMUNICATIONS:</u>	Irvine Hill
<u>ARTIST:</u>	Capt. Richard Whalen, USN (Ret.)
<u>HISTORIAN/RESEACH ANALYSIS:</u>	Jerome W. Nelinson
<u>PUBLIC RELATIONS:</u>	Dave Stump
<u>ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR:</u>	Barbara Gunby
<u>COMMISSIONING COMMITTEE COORDINATOR:</u>	Barbara Fosina

INGALLS SHIPBUILDING:

Joe Hanna  
Will Bramlett

COMMANDING OFFICER:

Capt. Robert Klosterman

EXECUTIVE OFFICER:

Capt. Denby Starling

COMMISSIONING COORDINATOR:

Cdr. Bernie Hamm

MISSISSIPPI LIAISON:

Andy Cote  
Radm Tam Ethridge, USNR

MEMBER:

Mark Laborne

MEMBER:

Diana Barnett



## What is a Plankowner?

A Plankowner is a ship's crewmember who is assigned to a U.S. Navy ship on the day of the ship's commissioning.

The naval term "plankowner" finds its origin back in the days of sailing ships when sailors slept on deck. Because some planks of the deck were softer than others, the crew would select those to sleep upon, and in time would regard them as their own. In many cases, when the ship was dismantled, crew members would, in fact, lay claim to these planks as mementos of their seagoing days.

The sense of ownership felt by a ship's crew, especially by its commissioning crew, has carried this naval term into the twentieth century – to today's steel ships capable of carrying jet aircraft. The Officers and Men of John C. Stennis (CVN-74) are justifiably proud to be on board during the ship's construction. They are looking forward to taking her to sea for the first time and bringing *USS John C. Stennis* to life during the commissioning ceremony.



## The Commissioning Tradition

It is a time-honored tradition, this ceremony that commissions a ship of the United States Navy. The commissioning ceremony signifies the acceptance for service and the entry of a ship into the fleet.

When her commissioning pennant breaks to fly from the mast, USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN 74) becomes a proud ship of the line.

The naval commissioning ceremony has been a tradition of all navies for centuries. It has been in the United States Navy since its beginning. The commissioning is the final act that marks entrance of a man-of-war into the naval forces of her nation. This is the final and perhaps the most significant event of the triad that brings a ship to life: keel laying, launching and christening, and commissioning.

In the early period of our navy's history, no exact commissioning procedure was prescribed. Thus, a ship's date of commissioning was recorded as any one of a number of days – when the colors were first raised, when the officers and crew reported aboard, when the first log entry was made, or when the ship first put out to sea.

Throughout the years, however, one visible and significant sign of the commissioned ship has remained constant: active ships of the United States Navy, from days of handsome frigates under sail to the era of the Nuclear powered ships, have proudly flown a commissioning pennant and the "Stars and Stripes."

Today, as the distinctive mark of commissioned warship, the pennant is flown except when displaced by the flag of a higher authority.

Our national commissioning pennant is blue at the hoist and a union of seven white stars and a horizontal red and white stripe at the fly. It has been the symbol for centuries of a man-of-war. The symbol is believed to date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Dutch were at war with the English. Dutch Admiral Maarten Harpertzoon Tromp hoisted a broom at his masthead to symbolize his intention to sweep the British from the sea. British Admiral William Blake hoisted a horsewhip to the masthead in response. The victorious British thus set the precedent for a long, narrow commissioning pennant to symbolize the original horsewhip as the distinctive symbol for a fighting ship.

The commissioning ceremony is solemn, yet joyous event. It is within this context that the ship is brought to life.

On her commissioning day, USS JOHN C. STENNIS assumes a unique personality and is infused with the will, the spirit and the dedication of those who serve in her. Indeed, the indomitable will and the spirit of her namesake, Senator John C. Stennis, already have been inbred in the officers and men serving aboard this vessel.

This aircraft carrier has a special international distinction wherever she sails, *USS JOHN C. STENNIS* will project the character and perseverance of her namesake and her nation. We firmly believe that your presence at the commissioning will ensure us "fair winds and a following sea" in all her endeavors.

## **Questions/Answers Regarding Commissioning Committee USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN 74)**

1. **What is a commissioning ceremony---**? The Commissioning is a ceremony in which USS JOHN C. STENNIS will become a member of the active Navy. The Commissioning ceremony marks the acceptance of a ship as a unit of the operating forces of the United States Navy. Commissioning is an elaborate event, which dignifies the occasion. The ship's "Coming Alive" plan, when executed, is a significant and not be forgotten experience. Many high government officials and distinguished visitors participate and witness the commissioning ceremony. Receptions and opening of the ship of visitation often follow the commissioning ceremony.
2. **What is a commissioning committee---**? One of the keys to success in launching and commissioning a ship is the establishment of a Commissioning Committee. Civilian commissioning committees provide a link between a city, state or region and a U.S. Navy ship. The formation of a commissioning committee is a non-Navy function. The purpose of the committee is to act as a liaison between the ship and its "sponsor" community, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a continuing relationship between the ship and the area. The relationship benefits both city/state and the Navy. Local citizens have a ship with which they can identify and take special pride in, and the ship's crew has a community which routinely recognizes its effort and hard work. Such a relationship boosts morale both in the civilian community and aboard the ship.
3. **What is the composition of the Commissioning Committee---**? The USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN-74) Commissioning Committee is composed of civic leaders and influential citizens in the Hampton Roads Virginia area. The Hampton Roads Commissioning Committee enjoys proximity to the ship as well as previous experience in commissioning USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN 73), and have been designated as the lead committee formed to support commissioning of USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN 74). Mississippi will be formed to help further the goals of the commissioning committee and enhance the relationship of the ship, its crew and the citizens of Mississippi.
4. **What type of activities do Commissioning Committees participate---**? Typically fundraising is one of the major functions of the Commissioning Committee. Limited appreciated funds are available for commissioning activities, and the time-honored ceremony of activating a ship would be considerably less ceremonial without the assistance of these committees. Other activities of commissioning committees include:
  - Setting up meetings, receptions and/or speaking engagements for the Commanding Officer when he visits the region.
  - Designation of representatives to attend the Commissioning ceremony.
  - Hosting the Commanding Officers reception the evening before the commissioning, and augmenting funding for the crew's party.
  - Funding for travel of regional VIPS to attend the commissioning. Many commissioning committees present gifts to the ship for the Wardman Officers Mess or the Ship's museum. Navy Aircraft Carriers typically have a ship's museum located in a large compartment near the entrance to the ship where meaningful mementos and items are displayed which have special significance to the ship and its namesake.

Some of the following are traditional gifts presented to a ship:

- Model of Vessel
- Commissioning Commemorative Painting
- Presentation of Silver Service
- Ceremonial Brass Telescope
- Brass Bull Horn
- Electronic Entertainment Equipment for crews recreation

- City and State Flags
- Special Significance U.S. Flag for Commissioning
- Board Games
- Athletic Equipment
- Ceremonial Bibles
- Guest Book
- Memorabilia from Namesake or Namesake State

Some of the following are traditional gifts presented to each crewmember:

- Lithographs of Commemorative Painting
- Specially minted Commemorative Medallions
- Specially Printed Commemorative Booklets about Namesake and namesake city/state
- Framed Pictures of ship
- Plaques

5. **How would a Mississippi USS JOHN C. STENNIS Commissioning Committee be formed---**?

Interested groups and citizens should get in touch with the Hampton Roads USS JOHN C. STENNIS (CVN-74) Commissioning Committee via the following points of contact:

Chairman: Mr. John A. Panneton, Work Phone: 804-498-5000

Co-Chairman: Rear Admiral-Retired Gerald Reindeau, Phone: 804-340-6306