

CHANGE OF COMMAND

TRADITION

The Change of Command Ceremony you witness today is not prescribed specifically by U.S. Navy Regulations, but rather an honored product of the rich heritage of Naval Tradition. It is only a Naval custom without an equivalent counterpart in the Army or Air Force. Custom has established that this ceremony be formal and impressive designed to strengthen that respect for authority which is vital to any military organization. Parading all hands at Quarters and public reading of official orders stems from those days when movement of mail and persons was a very slow process. This procedure was designated to ensure only authorized officers held command and that all aboard were aware of its authority.

The heart of the ceremony is the formal reading of official orders by the relieving officer, and the officer to be relieved. Command passes upon utterance by the relieving officer, "I relieve you, Sir! (or Ma'am)"; the officer being relieved responds, "I stand relieved." This simple procedure is duplicated hundreds of times daily throughout the navies of the world as each watch officer passes responsibility to their relief in the conduct of each ship's routine.

The strength and supremacy of today's Navy stems in large measure from the observance of customs and traditions, each contributing its share to stability, combat effectiveness, and smooth transfer of authority. This simple ceremony, passing authority and responsibility to another officer, reflects the dedication of free men and women serving their nation proudly.

The Father of the U.S. Navy, John Paul Jones, a British born subject, gave our Navy its earliest traditions of heroism and victory. The traditions and customs have prevailed in the years since then. Some have become law. A short-lived attempt after World War II to do away with some of the time honored customs conducive to smartness and discipline fortunately did not prevail. The highest praise that can be paid to Navy members is that they lived and worked according to the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. Eternal credit is due to those who never underestimated the immeasurable value of Naval traditions, customs, and ceremonies, the spiritual cement in a Naval organization.