



ACTIVITY

## Rank & Responsibility of Captain

This is a two-page description of the captain's duties on board ship in the early 19th century. Captain was the highest rank in the Navy during the War of 1812, and a captain typically commanded ships of 20 guns or more. The captain had ultimate responsibility for the ship and its crew.

# Rank and Responsibility of Captain

## About

Captain was the highest rank in the navy during the War of 1812, and typically commanded ships of 20 guns or more. The captain had ultimate responsibility for the ship and its crew. According to the official naval regulations issued to officers, the captain's first duty was to prepare his ship for sea, which included making inventories of all stores and equipment, creating account books, recruiting a crew, and overseeing all the various tasks performed prior to a cruise. Once at sea, the captain was expected to have the ship ready for an engagement at all times, and to oversee the training of the crew. In battle his station was on the quarterdeck, where he could direct the action. All decisions regarding navigation, sail handling, or fighting ultimately descended from him. The captain's authority was law. They were also the highest paid officers, earning \$100.00 per month and the right to eight rations per day.<sup>1</sup>



## The Duties of the Captain

1. When a captain or commander is appointed to command one of the United States' ships, he is immediately to repair on board, and visit here throughout.
2. To give his constant attendance on board, and quicken the dispatch of the work; and to send to the navy department weekly accounts, or oftener, if necessary, of the condition and circumstances she is in, and the progress made in fitting her out.
3. To take the inventories of all the stores committed to the charge of his officers respectively, and to require from his boatswain, gunner, Sailmaker, carpenter and purser, counter parts of their respective indents.
4. To cause his clerk to be present, and to take an account of all stores and provisions that come on board, and when; which account he is to compare with the indents, in order to prevent any fraud or neglect.
5. To keep counter-books of the expense of the ship's stores and provisions, whereby to know the state and condition of the same; and to audit the accounts of the officers entrusted therewith, once a week, in order to be a check upon them.
6. When ordered to recruit, he is to use his best endeavours to get the ship manned, and not to enter any but men of able bodies, and fit for service; he is to keep the established number of men complete, and not to exceed his complement.
7. When the ship's company is completed, they shall be divided into messes and guards; and he shall order, without delay, the partition of the people for an engagement, to the end that, before they sail, every one may know his post.

<sup>1</sup>Naval Regulations Issued by the President of the United States of America. January 25, 1802, 4-13; Names, rank, pay, and rations, of the officers of the navy and marine corps, 3 Feb. 1812, American State Papers: Naval Affairs: 1: 255-263.

8. At all times, whether sailing alone or in a squadron, he shall have his ship ready for an immediate engagement: to which purpose, he shall not permit any thing to be on deck that may embarrass the management of the guns, and not be readily cleared away.
9. As, from the beginning of the cruise the plan of the combat ought to be formed, he shall have his directions given, and his people so placed, as not to be unprovided against any accident which may happen.
10. To keep a regular muster-book, setting down therein the names of all persons entered to serve on board, with all circumstances relating to them.
11. To send, every month, one muster-book complete, to the navy office, signed by himself and purser.
12. To make a list of seamen run away, inserting the same at the end of the muster-books, and to distinguish the time, manner, and by what opportunity they made their escape: if the desertion happens in any port of the United States, he is to send to the navy department their names, place of abode, and all the circumstances of their escape.
13. The captain of the ship shall be responsible for his crew, whose desertion shall be laid to his charge, whenever it proceeds from a want of necessary care; but if it proceeds from the neglect of an officer who shall have the charge of a watering party, or any other duty on shore, and, from his negligence, any part of the crew entrusted to him shall desert, that officer shall be responsible for the same.
14. He is to make out tickets for all such seamen as shall be discharged from his books, signed by himself and purser and to deliver them to none but the part; and if the party be dead or absent, he is to send the ticket forthwith to the navy-office.
15. He is not to suffer the ship's stores to be misapplied or wasted; and if such loss happens by the negligence or willfulness of any of the ship's company, he is to charge the value thereof against the wages of the offender, on the muster and pay-books.
16. If he is obliged to take up money abroad, for the use of the ship, he is to negotiate it at the best exchange.
17. He is to advise the proper officer of what bills he draws, with the reasons thereof, and with the said bills send duplicates of his accounts, and vouchers for his disbursements, signed by himself and purser.
18. He is to take care that all stores brought on board, be delivered to the proper officers; and to take their receipts for the same.
19. He is responsible for the whole conduct and good government of the ship, and for the due execution of all regulations which concern the several duties of the officers and company of the ship, who are to obey him in all things which he shall direct them for the service of the United States.
20. He is answerable for the faults of his clerk; nor can he receive his wages without the proper certificates, and must make good all damages sustained by his neglect or irregularity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Extracted from *Naval Regulations Issued by the President of the United States of America*. January 25, 1802, 4-13.