

Coast Guard Symbols 3-3.01-K

KNOW the origins and significance of each item below as presented in the E-PME Study Guide.

- National Ensign
- Coast Guard Flag
- Union Jack
- Coast Guard Seal Emblem and Shield
- Coast Guard Ensign
- Coast Guard Battle Streamers
- Commissioning Pennant
- Coast Guard Slash (Racing Stripe)

Coast Guard Symbols

Organizational heritage can often be found in the symbols and icons that evolve within the organization throughout its history. The Coast Guard is no exception; in fact, many of the Coast Guard symbols tell of general naval traditions as well as the Coast Guard's unique heritage.

- National ensign
- Coast Guard flag
- Union Jack
- Coast Guard seal, emblem, and shield
- Coast Guard ensign
- Coast Guard battle streamers
- Commissioning pennant
- Coast Guard slash (racing stripe)

National Ensign



A national ensign is the national flag flown to represent a national government. The national flag of the United States is commonly referred to as the *Stars and Stripes*. The U.S. flag, along with the flags of countries whose governments we formally recognize (provided we are not at war with that country), are to be treated with respect.

The U.S. national flag is called:

- *Ensign* when displayed on a vessel or facility
- *Colors* when carried by foot
- *Standard* when displayed on a vehicle or aircraft.

The Coast Guard authorizes the use and size of U.S. flags in accordance with Naval Telecommunications Procedures; *NTP 13 (B): Flags, Pennants, & Customs*. The national ensign will depend upon the purpose of display.

Coast Guard Flag



Coast Guard Standard

The Coast Guard Flag (until 1962 known as the Coast Guard Standard, and also known as the Coast Guard Colors) serves as the organizational flag for parade and display purposes ashore. Before 1917, this flag was used aboard ship.

The current design was approved on January 28, 1964. It is white, 52 by 66 inches, with the national arms of the United States in blue, the stripes of the shield in red. Above the arms is the Coast Guard name and below it the motto, with the date of the Coast Guard's founding at the bottom. The flag is trimmed with 2-1/2 inch golden-yellow fringe and the staff is topped by a battle-ax finial. Below the finial are attached the battle streamers won by the Coast Guard throughout its history.

When the flag is displayed without the streamers, the staff is decorated with a blue and white cord and tassels.

Union Jack



The union jack is the rectangular blue part of the United States flag containing the stars. There are specific times and reasons that dictate how and when the union jack is displayed. The union jack is nearly always displayed in conjunction with the national ensign (national flag). For example, when a:

- Vessel is moored, the national ensign and union jack must be displayed from the flagstaff and jackstaff, respectively, from 0800 until sunset. In the case of a mastless ship, the ensign shall be displayed from the loftiest hoist available.
- Vessel is under way, the jack is not flown at all and the ensign flies at the gaff.
- General court-martial or court of inquiry is in session, a daily-size union jack must be displayed at a signal yardarm.

Coast Guard Seal, Emblem, and Shield



U.S.C.G. Seal



U.S.C.G. Emblem

The designation of an official Coast Guard seal and emblem in 1927 confirmed the existence of a symbol that had evolved over the decades. The central visual in both the emblem and seal is the Coast Guard shield. The crossed anchors of the shield have been a symbol of the Coast Guard for many years. The date located on the bottom depicts the year the Revenue Cutter Service was established, the Coast Guard's predecessor.

Initially, the seal and emblem were identical. But over the years, the seal and emblem became two different devices. The emblem evolved as a simplification of the seal, and eventually was ordered to be used on the Coast Guard ensign. The seal is used for official documents and records of the Coast Guard. It may also be used for jewelry, stationery, etc., at the discretion of the Commandant. The official seal is also used on invitations, programs, certificates, diplomas, and greetings.

The Coast Guard emblem also appears on the Coast Guard slash shown on the sides of our cutters, small boats, aircraft, and at our units. In addition, it is used on medals and plaques where space is limited.

Coast Guard Ensign



The Coast Guard ensign represents a Coast Guard vessel's law enforcement authority. The ensign's heritage dates back to 1799, when the ensign was used to identify the cutters of the Revenue Marine, the principal predecessor of the modern Coast Guard.

For many years, this flag was actually flown by vessels of the Revenue Marine (later called the Revenue Cutter Service) in lieu of the national ensign (the *Stars and Stripes*).

By regulation (33 CFR 23.05), the Coast Guard ensign must be displayed whenever a Coast Guard vessel is engaged in law enforcement actions. Even when they are not conducting law enforcement missions, Coast Guard vessels normally fly the ensign from the head of the forward most mast.

Aboard cutters in commission with a single mast, the ensign flies immediately below the commissioning pennant. It may be displaced to the starboard yardarm under certain conditions, such as visits by senior civil officials or when firing salutes to foreign countries, particularly on cutters with a single mast (increasingly the norm with modern vessels). At shore installations, it is displayed from the starboard yardarm of the flagmast.

The 16 vertical red and white stripes on the Coast Guard ensign represent the number of states in the Union at the time the flag was adopted. The ensign's design has evolved since its introduction.

- In 1910, the Revenue Cutter Service's distinctive emblem was added to the ensign. The emblem distinguished this flag from the flag flown at customs houses and other ports of entry ashore.
 - In 1927, the emblem was changed from the Revenue Cutter Service to the Coast Guard.
 - In 1951, the artistic treatment of the U.S. coat of arms in the top inner quarter of the flag (canton) was made to conform to the coat of arms on the Great Seal of the United States.
 - In 1966, the motto above and below the shield was removed.
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Coast Guard Battle Streamers



Embroidering the names of battles on flags may be traced to the early days of the Republic. By the end of the 19th century, embroidery was discontinued in favor of inscribed silver bands around the color staffs. This too was changed in World War I in favor of small ribbons bearing battle names. The Coast Guard adopted battle streamers in 1968 following the practice established by the U.S. Marine Corps.

Streamers are attached to the Coast Guard standard, replacing cords and tassels. They are carried in all ceremonies representing heroic actions in all naval encounters from 1798 to the Persian Gulf war and beyond.

The following web link presents a complete list of Coast Guard battle streamers. **This information is not testable.** It is included in the E-PME Study Guide for informational purposes only.

<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/history/FAQS/BattleStreamers.html>

Commissioning Pennant



The commissioning pennant is displayed to indicate the vessel is under the command of a commissioned officer or a commissioned warrant officer. Its hoisting is the central event in the commissioning of a new ship.

From the commissioning until the vessel is decommissioned, the pennant is flown day and night from the aftermost masthead. An exception is made when the cutter is flying an admiral's flag or a command pennant.

The commissioning pennant is also used to indicate the presence of a commanding officer in a boat. It is used for all the same purposes as its U.S. Navy equivalent. Coast Guard commission pennants are the same size as those used by the Navy...2-1/2 by 72 inches at the largest.

Coast Guard Slash (Racing Stripe)



Coast Guard Slash (Racing Stripe)

The Coast Guard's familiar and distinctive red slash or "racing stripe" did not appear on our cutters, boats, and aircraft until relatively late in our history.

In the early '60s, an industrial design firm completed a commissioned study that concluded the Coast Guard should adopt a standardized symbol or mark. This unique symbol or mark would distinguish the Coast Guard from other government agencies. It could be applied to ships, boats, aircraft, stations, vehicles, signs, and printed forms.

The recommended design was a wide red bar to the right of a narrow blue bar, both canted at 64 degrees, with the Coast Guard emblem centered on the red bar. By 1967, the now famous slash appeared throughout the Coast Guard.

Coast Guard Motto



An important component in the Coast Guard's heritage is the Coast Guard motto...*Semper Paratus*. This translates to Always Ready and is both the Coast Guard's motto and the title of its service song. No official recognition was given to the Coast Guard motto until it appeared in 1910 on the ensign.

No one seems to know exactly how the motto was chosen. But there is no doubt who put the famous motto to words and music. Captain Francis Saltus Van Boskerck wrote the words in the cabin of the cutter *Yamacraw* in Savannah, Ga., in 1922. He wrote the music five years later on a beat-up old piano in Unalaska, Alaska.

For probably as long as Captain Van Boskerck could remember, *Semper Paratus* had been a Revenue Cutter and Coast Guard watchword. The words themselves, always ready or ever ready, date back to ancient times.
