

The original documents are located in Box 12, folder “Transportation Secretary” of the Richard B. Cheney Files at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

Copyright Notice

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Gerald Ford donated to the United States of America his copyrights in all of his unpublished writings in National Archives collections. Works prepared by U.S. Government employees as part of their official duties are in the public domain. The copyrights to materials written by other individuals or organizations are presumed to remain with them. If you think any of the information displayed in the PDF is subject to a valid copyright claim, please contact the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20350

3 March 1975

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The keel of the first of the fleet ballistic missile submarines designed to carry TRIDENT missiles will be laid with appropriate ceremonies at Electric Boat Division of the General Dynamics Corporation at Groton, Connecticut, this summer or fall.

The previous 41 fleet ballistic submarines, which carry POLARIS or POSEIDON missiles, have been named for distinguished Americans and others whose lives have paralleled and contributed to the growth of democracy.

It is my intention to expand the name source for the new TRIDENT submarines to include states of the Union. Capital ships traditionally have honored the states which united form the Nation, and TRIDENT submarines will indeed be capital ships in the crucial nuclear deterrence area of national defense.

The name recommended to me by the Chief of Naval Operations for the initial TRIDENT submarine is MICHIGAN. It is particularly suitable for the first of the class. The United States Navy's first iron-hulled warship was USS MICHIGAN, built in 1843. Only one other Navy ship has borne the name, the battleship MICHIGAN (BB-27), which was scrapped in 1924 in response to the treaty limiting armaments.

I request your concurrence in the proposed name.

The keel-laying ceremony itself is a very colorful and enjoyable affair, the highlight being the authentication of the keel. Another key part of the event is the



principal speech given by a prominent person. The Navy will be greatly honored if Mrs. Ford would authenticate the keel of MICHIGAN, and if you could join her on that day as the speaker.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill". The letters are cursive and connected, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the word.

J. William Middendorf II

March 1975

Point Paper on Naming of U. S. Navy Ships

Since at least as early as 1819, the names of ships of the U. S. Navy have been assigned by the Secretary of the Navy in accordance with naval custom, tradition, and public law.

The legal conditions of 10 USC 7292 are: (1) no two ships on the Naval Register shall bear the same name at the same time; (2) battleships must be named for States of the Union, unless the names of all the States are in use, and (3) the Secretary of the Navy may change the name of any ship.

One of the greatest values of a ship's name is the inspiration it provides for those who sail in her. Therefore, special effort will be made to select names that reflect part of the Nation's and the Navy's great heritage. Naval tradition, policies and customs have evolved for more than a century to establish traditional name-source categories for more than 120 types of ships and craft now on the Naval Vessel Register. For example, conventional-powered destroyer-type ships are named for heroic personnel of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, from the earliest days of American history. Ships named for John Paul Jones, Farragut, Decatur, and many other naval heroes and leaders will always be a part of our country's fighting fleet. Certain types of ships are named for cities, thus providing a beneficial reciprocal relationship between the ship and the people of the namesake city.

The contributions of America's famous fighting ships of the past are brought freshly to mind by reassignment of their names to new ships. For example, beginning with the Sloop ENTERPRISE, captured from the British in 1775, eight gallant ships, including the present ENTERPRISE (CVAN-65), have borne this name, which has become a symbol of the great American struggle for liberty and justice.

Examples of name sources for types of ships are as follows:

Aircraft Carriers: Considered on an individual basis.

Destroyers & Ocean Escorts: Deceased members of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, including Secretaries of the Navy.

Attack Submarines: Fish and other denizens of the deep, and cities.

Amphibious Assault Ships (General Purpose): Cities and U. S. Naval battles of same name in which Marines played a prominent part (or battle only).

Ammunition Ships: Volcanoes or words suggestive of fire and explosives.

Fast Combat Support Ships & Replenishment Oilers: Rivers, lakes or bays (but not names of states or cities).

Submarine Rescue Ships: Birds.

Large Harbor Tug (self-propelled): Small cities with Indian names.

Presently, only nuclear-powered surface combatants are being named for states. The state names in use for these ships are California, South Carolina, Virginia, Texas and Mississippi. Four battleships named after states -- IOWA, NEW JERSEY, MISSOURI and WISCONSIN -- are in the Reserve Fleet. The remains of battleships ARIZONA and UTAH are national memorials. All other state names are eligible for assignment to either nuclear-powered surface combatants or to nuclear-powered TRIDENT missile submarines.

Two nuclear-powered surface combatants are in the Navy's current shipbuilding program. One of these has been authorized by Congress and funds for the other one requested in the Navy's FY-1975 budget. Ten TRIDENT submarines are planned.

Should the President not wish to name the initial TRIDENT submarine for the State of Michigan, it would be feasible to use that name for the next nuclear-powered surface combatant. However, its keel-laying date is undetermined, pending contractual negotiations, and it could be as much as two years or more from now.

