

A Short History of New Jersey's Naval Reserve Forces

The Naval Reserve of New Jersey was organized by an act of legislation in 1895. It was organized for the defense of the coast, harbors and waterfront property. It did not become the Naval Militia until 1916, when federal legislation passed the Federal Naval Reserve Law.

It consisted of two battalions, the Battalion of the East with three divisions (Newark, Hoboken and Jersey City) and the Battalion of the West with three divisions (Trenton, Haddonfield and Camden).

The Navy Department transferred two ships to New Jersey, the *USS Portsmouth*, berthed in Hoboken, and the *USS Ajax*, a monitor berthed in the Delaware River at Camden. The *Portsmouth* was stripped down to nothing but a floating armory when it arrived. But in due time the men of the battalion turned her into a well-equipped, full rigged sloop-of-war. The first practice cruise was in 1896 and was manned entirely by an all-volunteer crew in New Jersey's Navy.

The Battalion of the West took the *Ajax* on its first practice cruise also in 1896 from July 1 to 21st. Official records of the Navy Department state that the two New Jersey battalions were the only ones to cruise in 1897 on ships assigned to and manned entirely by a crew of the state force.

The Naval Reserve of New Jersey was mustered into federal service early in 1898 for duty during the Spanish American War. The men from New Jersey served on the *USS Badger*, *USS Montauk* and the *USS Resolute*. Aboard these ships they saw a great deal of action. They were under fire with the US Navy fleet at the blockade off Cuba and during the bombardment of Santiago de Cuba and Manzanillo. These vessels transported hospital supplies and ammunition between the United States and Cuban ports, evacuated the sick and wounded as well ferried captured enemy equipment. The battalions mustered out of service in October 1889.

At the turn of the 19th century, practice cruises by both battalions took place aboard the *USS Prairie*, a regular Navy ship. From 1902-1914 annual training cruises were made by the battalions aboard their own station cruising vessels.

With the declaration of war in April 1917 the Naval Militia of New Jersey was mobilized and became immediately part of the US Navy and were absorbed into the Navy at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Men were sent to serve on every type of Navy vessel. Some of the ships they served on were the *USS Missouri*, *USS Massachusetts*, and *USS Indiana*.

After the war, the Naval Militia was back again with battalions located in Jersey City and Camden. With the reorganization of the Naval Reserve in 1925 the Naval Militia so to reorganized. They took on numerous designations and were assigned within naval districts.

In the 1930s new armories were built for the Naval Militia, complete with all the facilities and equipment necessary to maintain the battalions. These were located in Perth Amboy, Camden and Jersey City. Prior to the members called to active service in 1940, the Naval Militia was organized as: Naval Militia Brigade HQ, Jersey City aboard the *USS Newton*, 2nd Battalion located in Camden, 7th Battalion located in Jersey City, and 8th Battalion located in Perth Amboy.

World War II again mobilized the New Jersey Naval Militia and in 1941 they were federalized for active duty. As in World War I, they were absorbed into the regular Navy serving on all fronts. Every member was activated for federal Navy service as individuals and the Naval Militia system lay dormant during this time.

After World War II, it was reorganized with units at Jersey City, Perth Amboy, Bordentown, Newark, Elizabeth, Passaic, Camden, and Trenton under the helm of Capt. Carl T. McNamara, a holdover from the pre-war days. Through numerous realignments in policy and oversight the state ceased to have control over the units. The New Jersey Naval Militia reached its peak in 1953 with

a total of 3,590 personnel. By 1965 they had been absorbed into the United States Naval Reserve. It was then that the Naval Militia was deactivated as part of the organized militia and the armories sold.

In 1999 Governor Whitman directed that the New Jersey Naval Militia and the New Jersey State Guard be reactivated and organized into a single joint regiment to be designated as the New Jersey Naval Militia Joint Command (NJNMJC) with headquarters in Plainfield. Two days after their official recognition they were activated, along with National Guard troops to fight the ravages of Hurricane Floyd. The terrorist attack on the county on 11 September 2001 saw the Naval Militia again activated for coastal defense, augmenting civil authorities, and transportation of National Guard and first responders on the waterways between New York and New Jersey.

In 2002, the Adjutant General of New Jersey, Maj. Gen. Glenn Reith terminated State active duty pay and halted accessions of new members of the NJNMJC. After numerous stakeholder discussions and state legislature hearings, the NJNMJC was in a holding pattern. Equipment was transferred from the Lodi Armory to a state-owned warehouse in Princeton, where it sits currently. The NJNMJC has an official headquarters in Joint Force Headquarters on Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, however they receive no government funding and currently have no mission.