

## Alcohol in the United States Navy, 1794-1935

The consumption of alcohol on board U.S. Navy vessels was prohibited by General Order 99, effective 1 July 1914, issued by Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels on 1 June 1914.

The following regulations governed the use of alcohol in the Navy from 1794 to 1935:

**1794** On 27 March, the daily ration established by Congress for the Navy included "one half-pint of distilled spirits," "or in lieu thereof, one quart of beer."

**1797** On 1 July, daily liquor ration set at "one half pint of distilled spirits."

**1801** Daily liquor ration established on 3 March, remained at "one half pint of distilled spirits."

**1831** General Order issued by Levi Woodbury on 15 June, allowed servicemen to relinquish their liquor ration in return for a cash payment of 6 cents per day.

**1842** On 29 August, Congress reduced the amount of liquor issued in the daily ration to one gill (1/4 pint). Also no commissioned officer, midshipman, or enlisted man below the age of 21 was allowed to draw his liquor ration.

**1847** On 3 March, the commutation rate for the liquor ration was reduced to 3 cents per day.

**1848** On 3 August, the commutation rate for the liquor ration was increased to 4 cents per day.

**1851** On 3 March, the commutation of the liquor ration was restricted to "officers and their attendants" only. Congress also stipulated that only those persons "attached to, and doing duty on board a sea-going or receiving vessel," or who were "attached to the ordinary of the navy yards" were eligible to draw rations.

**1853** On 31 August, Congress repealed the 1851 law restricting the commutation of the liquor ration to officers and their attendants only. Privilege was once again opened up to the rank and file.

**1862** Spirit ration was discontinued by act of Congress on 14 July. "Distilled spirituous liquors" were also banned from all naval vessels "except as medical stores and upon the order and under the control of the medical officers of such vessels." Those who are entitled to the spirit ration will receive a commutation payment of 5 cents per day (in addition to their regular pay) beginning 1 September.

**1862** General Order issued by Gideon Welles on 16 September, required captains of naval vessels to remove all distilled liquors from their ships except those that serve as medical stores. "Ale, beer, wine, and other liquors not distilled" were exempted from the provisions of the act of 14 July 1862.

**1864** Welles' General Order 29 of 1 February, stated that beer, ale, wine, "and other liquors not prohibited by law on board vessels of the Navy" were to "be regarded as private stores" and were "not [to] be brought on board without the sanction of the commanding officer."

**1870** The last year in which commutation of the spirit ration was specifically mentioned in Navy regulations.

**1893** Article 1080 of the Navy Regulations permitted wardroom and steerage officers to form their own wine messes. No officer was required to be a member of a wine mess.

**1899** General Order 508, issued by John D. Long on 3 February, directed commanding officers and commandants to forbid the sale or issue of "any malt or alcoholic liquor to . . . enlisted men, either on board ship, or within the limits of navy yards, naval stations, or marine barracks, except in the medical department."

**1914 General Order 99**, issued by Josephus Daniels on 1 June, strictly prohibited "the use or introduction for drinking purposes of alcoholic liquors on board any naval vessel, or within any navy yard or

station," to take effect on 1 July 1914, thus putting an end to the officers' wine mess.

**1917** On 18 May, in "An Act to Authorize the President to Increase Temporarily the Military Establishment of the United States" (also called the Selective Draft Act), the President was empowered to prohibit the sale, distribution, or possession of alcoholic beverages at military posts. It was also declared unlawful to sell alcoholic beverages to men in uniform. On 6 October, in "An Act to Promote the Efficiency of the United States Navy," the Selective Draft Act was amended to apply to the Navy.

**1918** Under authority granted the President in Section 12 of the Selective Draft Act, as amended in "An Act to Promote the Efficiency of the United States Navy," Secretary Daniels, on 5 March signed General Order 373 establishing dry zones, five miles in width, around U.S. naval installations. The sale, serving, or transport of liquor in these zones (excepting use in private homes) was prohibited.

**1921** Daniels' General Order 17, issued 5 January, prohibited naval personnel from purchasing or accepting "intoxicating liquor from bootleggers within the proscribed zones," or from having "intoxicating liquor in . . . [their] possession on board any naval vessel, or at any naval station, or at any other place under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Navy Department."

**1934** Acting Secretary H. L. Roosevelt's **General Order 244**, dated 21 March, restricted the use of alcoholic beverages at shore establishments under naval jurisdiction to "officers' quarters, officers' messes, and officers' clubs." Commandants and commanding officers were to issue the necessary orders to carry this into effect. Upon special consideration the Secretary of the Navy could grant special exceptions to this general order.

**1935** General Order 59, issued by Claude Swanson on 13 May, reiterated provisions of General Order 244.

For additional information, see Hanson W. Baldwin "The End of the Wine Mess," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 84, no.8 (August 1958): 82-91; and Harold D. Langley *Social Reform in the United States Navy, 1798-1862*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967.

This section is a mind-blower, given the severity of the loss to materiel and to the availability of sober personnel, fit for purpose:

A report of the select committee of the British House of Commons affirms that the number of ships and vessels belonging to the United Kingdom, which have been wrecked and lost during six years, amounts to **2,905 ships**, worth, with their cargoes, £14,525,000, or \$70,101,000. Of **130 of these the entire crews were drowned**; and, in addition to these, **3,414 lives were sacrificed**. "Among the principal causes of these losses, the committee state drunkenness' and the use of spirits; these leading often to improper and even contradictory orders on the part of officers, sleeping on the lookout or at the helm among the men; occasioning ships to run foul of each other at night; to be taken aback or overpowered by sudden squalls; sinking, upsetting, or getting dismasted for want of proper vigilance in preparing for the danger; or in steering wrong courses, so as to run upon dangers which might otherwise have been avoided."

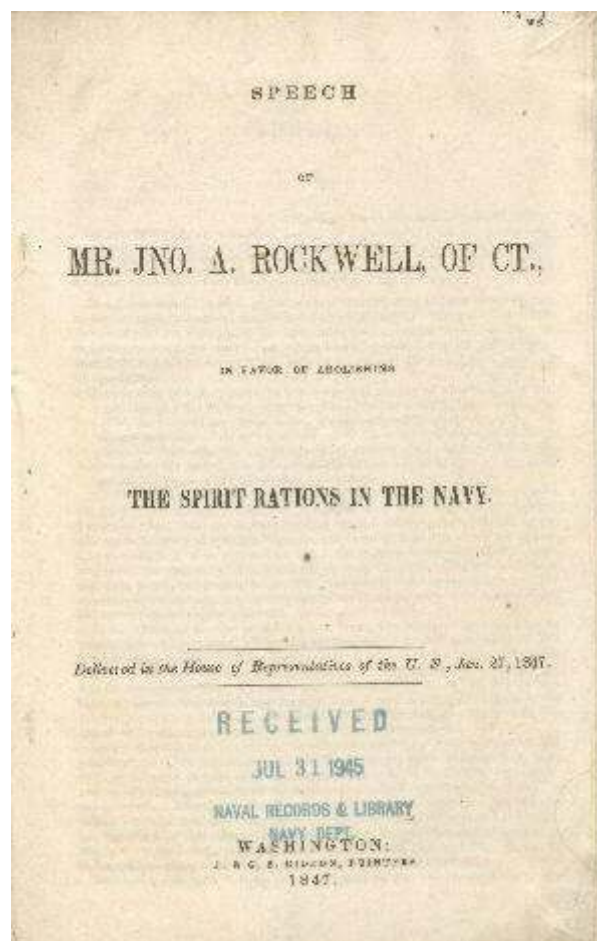
The report further states "that the happiest effects have resulted from the experiments, tried in the American navy and merchant service, to do with liquor as an article of daily use, there being more than one thousand sail of American vessels, traversing all the seas of the world in every climate, without the use of spirits by either officers or crews; and that the example of British ships sailing from Liverpool on the same plan has been productive of the greatest benefit to the ship-owners, underwriters, merchants, officers, and crews."

These statements present some idea of the enormous amount of property annually lost by shipwreck, and the great destruction of human life in the same manner.

The view taken on this question by underwriters, practical men, as a matter of business, without any reference to other than the pecuniary bearings of the question, is by no means to be disregarded or overlooked.

**Abolishing the Spirit Rations in the United States Navy.**

This below is the cover story and first page of the file containing the speech of Abolition.



Speech of Mr. Jno. A. Rockwell, of Ct., in Favour of Abolishing the Spirit Rations in the Navy by John Rockwell.

**SPEECH  
OF  
MR. JNO. A. ROCKWELL, OF CT.,  
IN FAVOR OF ABOLISHING  
THE SPIRIT RATIONS IN THE NAVY.**

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*Delivered in the House of Representatives of the U.S., Jan 27, 1847.*

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**WASHINGTON:**

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**1847.**

However if you want to read the whole speech then click below.

I STRONGLY RECOMMEND THE READ.

[SPEECH OUTLINING NEED FOR ABOLITION OF ALCOHOL IN THE USN](#)

You will note from the chronological data above that the USN got rid of their alcohol early in 1914 in their ships/vessels before [our] WW1 started –USN WW1 started in 1917! In the 1930's they got rid of it in shore-side messes.