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Great White Fleet

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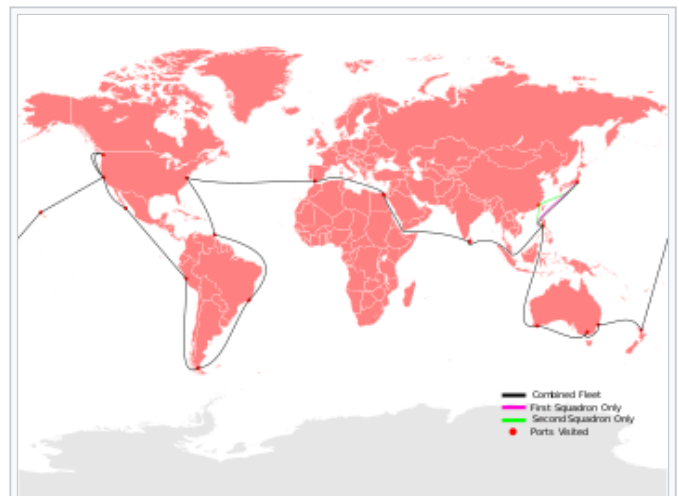


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For the United Fruit Company's Great White Fleet, see [United Fruit Company & The Great White Fleet](#).

The **Great White Fleet** was the popular nickname for the powerful [United States Navy](#) battle fleet that completed a journey around the globe from 16 December 1907, to 22 February 1909, by order of United States President [Theodore Roosevelt](#). Its mission was to make friendly courtesy visits to numerous countries, while displaying America's new naval power to the world.

It consisted of 16 [battleships](#) divided into two [squadrons](#), along with various [escorts](#).^{[1][2]} Roosevelt sought to demonstrate growing American martial power and [blue-water navy](#) capability. Hoping to enforce treaties and protect overseas holdings, the [United States Congress](#) appropriated funds to build American naval power. Beginning in the 1880s with just 90 small ships, over one-third of them wooden and therefore obsolete, the navy quickly grew to include new modern steel fighting vessels. The hulls of these ships were painted a stark white, giving the armada the nickname "Great White Fleet".^[3]



Map of the Great White Fleet's voyage (2009 political boundaries shown).



This article is part of
a series about
Theodore Roosevelt

[Political positions](#) · [Electoral history](#)

[Early life](#) · [Family](#) · [The Naval War of 1812](#)
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Vice President of the United States

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First term

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Background and purpose [[edit](#)]

In the twilight of his administration, United States President Theodore Roosevelt dispatched 16 U.S. Navy battleships of the [Atlantic Fleet](#) on a worldwide voyage of circumnavigation from 16 December 1907 to 22 February 1909.^{[1][2]} The hulls were painted white, the Navy's peacetime color scheme, decorated with gilded scrollwork with a red, white, and blue banner on their [bows](#). These ships would later come to be known as the Great White Fleet.

The purpose of the fleet deployment was multifaceted. Ostensibly, it served as a showpiece of American goodwill, as the fleet visited numerous countries and harbors. In this, the voyage was not unprecedented. Naval courtesy calls, many times in conjunction with the birthdays of various monarchs and other foreign celebrations, had become common in the 19th century. Port calls showcased pomp, ceremony, and militarism during a period of rising pre-war nationalism. In 1891, a large French fleet visited [Kronstadt, Russia](#), in conjunction with negotiations between the two nations. Although [France](#) and [Russia](#) had been hostile to each other for at least three decades prior, the significance of the call was not lost on Russia, and [Tsar Nicholas II](#) signed a treaty of alliance with France in 1894. As navies grew larger, naval pageants grew longer, more elaborate, and more frequent. The United States began participating in these events in 1902 when Roosevelt invited [Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany](#) to send a squadron for a courtesy call to [New York City](#). Invitations for U.S. Navy ships to participate in fleet celebrations in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany followed.^[4]

Additionally, the voyage of the Great White Fleet demonstrated both at home and on the world stage that the U.S. had become a major sea power in the years after its triumph in the [Spanish–](#)

McKinley assassination • 1st inauguration
Square Deal • West Wing • Coal strike
Booker T. Washington dinner
Venezuela crisis (Roosevelt Corollary)

Second term

1904 campaign (Election)
2nd inauguration • Conservation
Antiquities Act • Forest Service
Pure Food and Drug Act
FDA • *Swift & Co. v. United States*
Meat Inspection Act
Treaty of Portsmouth • Nobel Prize • FBI
Panama Canal • **Great White Fleet**

1912 election

Republican Convention
Progressive Party (Convention) •
New Nationalism • Assassination attempt

Post Presidency

African Expedition •
River of Doubt Expedition
"Citizenship in a Republic" • WWI volunteers
Legacy • Memorials

Theodore Roosevelt



V • T • E



Flagship [Connecticut](#): one of a set of commemorative postcards of the ships of the Great White Fleet

[American War](#), with possessions that included [Guam](#), the [Philippines](#), and [Puerto Rico](#).^[5] It was not the first flexing of U.S. naval muscle since that war, however; during the [Algeciras Conference](#) in 1906, which was convened to settle a diplomatic crisis between France and Germany over the fate of [Morocco](#), Roosevelt had ordered eight battleships to maintain a presence in the [Mediterranean Sea](#).^[6] Since [Japan](#) had arisen as a major sea power with the 1905 annihilation of the Russian fleet at [Tsushima](#), the deployment of the Great White Fleet was therefore intended, at least in part, to send a message to Tokyo that the American fleet could be deployed anywhere, even from its Atlantic ports, and would be able to defend American interests in the Philippines and the Pacific.^{[7][8]}

That gesture capitalized on diplomatic trouble that had resulted from [anti-Japanese riots in San Francisco](#). Those problems had been resolved by the [Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907](#) and the fleet visit was a friendly gesture to Japan. The Japanese welcomed it.^[9] Roosevelt saw the deployment as one that would encourage patriotism, and give the impression that he would teach Japan "a lesson in polite behavior", as historian Robert A. Hart phrased it.^[10] After the fleet had crossed the Pacific, Japanese statesmen realized that the [balance of power](#) in the East had changed since the [Root–Takahira Agreement](#) that defined relevant spheres of interest of the United States and Japan.^[7]

The voyage also provided an opportunity to improve the sea- and battle-worthiness of the fleet. While earlier capital ship classes such as the [Kearsarge](#), [Illinois](#) and [Maine](#) were designed primarily for coastal defense, later classes such as the [Virginia](#) and [Connecticut](#) incorporated lessons learned from the Spanish–American War and were conceived as ships with "the highest practicable speed and the greatest radius of action", in the words of the appropriation bills approved by the [United States Congress](#) for their construction. They were intended as modern warships capable of long-range operations. Nevertheless, the experience gained in the recent war with Spain had been limited.^[11]

Concerns and preparations [\[edit \]](#)

Roosevelt's stated intent was to give the navy practice in navigation, communication, coal consumption and fleet maneuvering; navy professionals maintained, however, that such matters could be served better in home waters. In light of what had happened to the Russian [Baltic Fleet](#), they were concerned about sending their own fleet on a long deployment, especially since part of the intent was to impress a modern, battle-tested navy that had not known defeat. The fleet was untested in making such a voyage, and Tsushima had proven that extended deployments had no place in practical strategy.^[12] The [Japanese Navy](#) was close to coaling and repair facilities; while American ships could coal in the Philippines, docking facilities were far from optimal. An extended stop on the [West Coast](#) of the United States during the voyage for overhaul and refurbishment in dry dock would be a necessity. Planning for the voyage, however, showed a dearth of adequate facilities there, as well. The main sea channel of the [Mare Island Navy Yard](#) near San Francisco was too shallow for battleships, which left only the [Puget Sound Navy Yard](#) in [Bremerton](#), [Washington](#), for refit and repair. The [Hunter's Point civilian yard](#) in San Francisco could accommodate capital ships, but had been closed due to lack of use and was slated for demolition. President Roosevelt ordered that Hunter's Point be reopened, facilities be brought up to date, and the fleet to report there.^[13]

Also, the question of adequate resources for coaling existed. This was not an issue when the Atlantic Fleet cruised the Atlantic or Caribbean, as fuel supplies were readily available. However, the United States did not enjoy a worldwide network of coaling stations like that of Great Britain,

nor did it have an adequate supply of [auxiliary vessels](#) for resupply. During the Spanish–American War, this lack had forced Admiral [George Dewey](#) to buy a collier-load of British coal in Hong Kong before the [Battle of Manila Bay](#) to ensure his squadron would not run out of steam at sea. The need had been even more pressing for the Russian Baltic Fleet during its long deployment during the Russo-Japanese War, not just for the distance it was to steam, but also because, as a belligerent nation in wartime, most neutral ports were closed to it due to international law. While the lack of support vessels was pointed out and a vigorous program of building such ships suggested by Rear Admiral [George W. Melville](#), who had served as chief of the Bureau of Equipment, his words were not heeded adequately until World War II.^[14]

Federal regulations that restricted supply vessels for Navy ships to those flying the United States flag, complicated by the lack of an adequate [United States Merchant Marine](#), proved another obstacle. Roosevelt initially offered to award Navy supply contracts to American skippers whose bids exceeded those of foreign captains by less than 50 percent.^[15] Many carriers declined this offer because they could not obtain enough cargo to cover the cost of the return trip. Two months before the fleet sailed, Roosevelt ordered the Navy Department to contract 38 ships to supply the fleet with the 125,000 tons of coal it would need to steam from [Hampton Roads](#), Virginia, to [San Francisco](#). Only eight of these were American-registered; most of the other 30 were of British registry. This development was potentially awkward, since part of the mission was to impress Japan with the perception of overwhelming American naval power. Britain had become a military ally of Japan in 1905 with the [Anglo-Japanese Alliance](#), which obliged it to aid Japan should a foreign power declare war against it. Technically, the list of potential combatants included the United States. The British government decided to play both sides of the political fence with the intent of moderating any Japanese-American friction that might arise.^[16]

Voyage [[edit](#)]

As the [Panama Canal](#) was not yet complete, the fleet had to pass through the [Straits of Magellan](#). The scope of such an operation was unprecedented in U.S. history, as ships had to sail from all points of the compass to rendezvous points and proceed according to a carefully orchestrated, well-conceived plan. It involved almost the entire operational capability of the U.S. Navy. Unlike the formidable obstacles that had faced the Russian fleet^[nb 1] on its voyage from the [Baltic](#) to the [Pacific](#), which eventually led to its destruction by the Japanese in 1905,^{[17][18]} the U.S. effort benefited from a peaceful environment which aided the coordination of ship movements.

In port after port, citizens in the thousands turned out to see and greet the fleet. In 1908, the Great White Fleet visited [Monterey, California](#), from 1–4 May. The nearby [Hotel Del Monte](#) in [Del Monte, California](#), hosted a grand ball for the officers of the fleet.

In Australia, the arrival of the Great White Fleet on 20 August 1908 was used to encourage support for the forming of [Australia's own navy](#).^[19] When the fleet sailed into [Yokohama](#), the Japanese went to



[Kansas](#) sails ahead of [Vermont](#) as the fleet leaves [Hampton Roads, Virginia](#), on 16 December 1907.



A 1908 postcard welcoming the fleet to Australia

extraordinary lengths to show that their country desired peace with the U.S.; thousands of Japanese schoolchildren waved [American flags](#) to greet navy officials as they came ashore.^{[[citation needed](#)]} In [Sicily](#), the sailors helped in recovery operations after the [1908 Messina earthquake](#).

In February 1909, Roosevelt was in [Hampton Roads, Virginia](#), to witness the triumphant return of the fleet from its long voyage, and what he saw as a fitting finish for his administration. To the officers and men of the fleet, Roosevelt said, "Other nations may do what you have done, but they'll have to follow you." This parting act of [grand strategy](#) by Roosevelt greatly expanded foreign respect for the United States, as well as its role in the international arena.^{[[citation needed](#)]}



The Fleet Passing Through the Magellan Straits by naval artist [Henry Reuter Dahl](#), who traveled with the fleet on USS *Culgoa*

Fleet composition ^{[[edit](#)]}



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The fourteen-month-long voyage was a grand pageant of American naval power. The squadrons were manned by 14,000 sailors. They covered some 43,000 nautical miles (80,000 km) and made twenty port calls on six continents. The fleet was impressive, especially as a demonstration of American industrial prowess (all eighteen ships had been constructed since the [Spanish–American War](#)), but already the battleships represented the suddenly outdated '[pre-dreadnought](#)' type of capital ship, as the first battleships of the revolutionary [Dreadnought class](#) had just entered service, and the U.S. Navy's first [dreadnought](#), *[South Carolina](#)*, was already fitting out. The two oldest ships in the fleet, *[Kearsarge](#)* and *[Kentucky](#)*, were already obsolete and unfit for battle; two others, *[Maine](#)* and *[Alabama](#)*, had to be detached at San

Francisco because of mechanical troubles and were replaced by the [Nebraska](#) and the [Wisconsin](#). (After repairs, *Alabama* and *Maine* completed their "own, more direct, circumnavigation of the globe" via Honolulu, Guam, Manila, Singapore, Colombo, Suez, Naples, Gibraltar, the Azores, and finally back to the United States, arriving on 20 October 1908, four months before the remainder of the fleet, which had taken a more circuitous route.)

The battleships were accompanied during the first leg of their voyage by a "Torpedo Flotilla" of six early [destroyers](#), as well as by several auxiliary ships. The destroyers and their tender did not actually steam in company with the battleships, but followed their own itinerary from [Hampton Roads](#), Virginia to San Francisco, California. Also of note is that the [armored cruiser](#) *[Washington](#)* preceded the Fleet itinerary for its first and second legs by about a month, perhaps making arrangements to later receive the Fleet.



President [Theodore Roosevelt](#) (on the 12-inch (30 cm) gun turret at right) addresses officers and crewmen on [Connecticut](#), in [Hampton Roads, Virginia](#), upon her return from the Fleet's cruise around the world, 22 February 1909.

General fleet itinerary [edit]

With [Connecticut](#)^[21] as flagship under the command of Rear Admiral [Robley D. Evans](#), the fleet sailed from Hampton Roads on 16 December 1907 for [Trinidad](#), [British West Indies](#), thence to [Rio de Janeiro](#), Brazil; [Punta Arenas](#), Chile; [Callao](#), Peru; [Magdalena Bay](#), Mexico, and up the [West Coast](#), arriving at San Francisco, 6 May 1908.

At San Francisco, Rear Admiral [Charles S. Sperry](#) assumed command of the fleet, owing to the poor health of Admiral Evans. Also at San Francisco, the squadrons were slightly rearranged, bringing the newest and best ships in the fleet up to the First Squadron. [Glacier](#) was detached and later became the supply ship of the Pacific Fleet. At this time also, [Nebraska](#), under Captain [Reginald F. Nicholson](#), and [Wisconsin](#), under Captain [Frank E. Beatty](#), were substituted for [Maine](#) and [Alabama](#). In San Francisco, [Minnesota](#) was brought forward into First Squadron, First Division and [Louisiana](#) took her place as flagship, Second Squadron.

Leaving that port on 7 July 1908 the [U.S. Atlantic Fleet](#) visited [Honolulu](#); [Auckland](#), New Zealand; [Sydney](#), [Melbourne](#), and [Albany](#), Australia; [Manila](#), Philippines; [Yokohama](#), Japan; and [Colombo](#), [Ceylon](#); then arriving at [Suez](#), Egypt, on 3 January 1909.

While the fleet was in Egypt, word was received of an earthquake in [Sicily](#), thus affording an opportunity for the United States to show its friendship to Italy by offering aid to the sufferers. [Connecticut](#), [Illinois](#), [Culgoa](#), and [Yankton](#) were dispatched to [Messina, Italy](#), at once. The crew of [Illinois](#) recovered the bodies of the American consul, Arthur S. Cheney, and his wife, entombed in the ruins.

[Scorpion](#), the fleet's station ship at [Constantinople](#), and [Celtic](#), a refrigerator ship fitted out in [New York](#), were hurried to Messina, relieving [Connecticut](#) and [Illinois](#), so that they could continue on the cruise.

Leaving Messina on 9 January 1909, the fleet stopped at [Naples](#), Italy, thence to [Gibraltar](#), arriving at Hampton Roads on 22 February 1909. There, President Roosevelt reviewed the fleet as it passed into the roadstead.

First leg [edit]

From Hampton Roads to San Francisco, 14,556 nautical miles (26,958 km).

Itinerary [edit]

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[Connecticut](#) leads the way for the Great White Fleet in 1907.



The Great White Fleet arriving to a crowd at the Port of Los Angeles, 1908



Fleet Week celebrations in [Auckland](#), New Zealand.^[20]

Port	Arrival	Departure	Distance to next port
Hampton Roads , Virginia		16 December 1907	1,803 nmi (3,339 km)
Port of Spain , Trinidad	23 December 1907	29 December 1907	3,399 nmi (6,295 km)
Rio de Janeiro , Brazil	12 January 1908	21 January 1908	2,374 nmi (4,397 km)
Punta Arenas , Chile	1 February 1908	7 February 1908	2,838 nmi (5,256 km)
Callao , Peru	20 February 1908	29 February 1908	3,010 nmi (5,570 km)
Magdalena Bay , Mexico	12 March 1908	11 April 1908	1,132 nmi (2,096 km)
San Francisco, California	6 May 1908		

Ships [\[edit \]](#)

The Fleet, First Squadron and First Division, were commanded by Rear Admiral Robley D. Evans. First Division consisted of four ships of the 1906 *Connecticut* class: *Connecticut*, the fleet's flagship, Captain [Hugo Osterhaus](#); *Kansas*, Captain [Charles E. Vreeland](#); *Vermont*, Captain William P. Potter; and *Louisiana*, Captain Richard Wainwright.

Second Division was commanded by Rear Admiral William H. Emory. Second Division consisted of four ships of the 1904 *Virginia* class: *Georgia*, the division flagship, Captain Henry McCrea; *New Jersey*, Captain [William H. H. Southerland](#); *Rhode Island*, Captain [Joseph B. Murdock](#); and *Virginia*, Captain [Seaton Schroeder](#).

Second Squadron and Third Division were commanded by Rear Admiral [Charles M. Thomas](#). Third Division consisted of one *Connecticut*-class ship and the three ships of the 1902 *Maine* class: *Minnesota*, the squadron flagship, Captain [John Hubbard](#); *Maine*, Captain [Giles B. Harber](#); *Missouri*, Captain Greenlief A. Merriam; and *Ohio*, Captain Charles W. Bartlett.

Fourth Division was commanded by Rear Admiral [Charles S. Sperry](#). Fourth Division consisted of two ships of the 1901 *Illinois* class and the two 1900 *Kearsarge*-class ships: *Alabama*, the division flagship, Captain Ten Eyck De Witt Veeder; *Illinois*, Captain [John M. Bowyer](#), *Kearsarge*, Captain Hamilton Hutchins; and *Kentucky*, Captain [Walter C. Cowles](#).

The fleet auxiliaries consisted of *Culgoa* (a storeship), Lieutenant Commander John B. Patton; *Glacier* (a storeship), Commander William S. Hogg; *Panther* (a repair ship), Commander Valentine S. Nelson; *Yankton* (a tender), Lieutenant Walter R. Gherardi; and *Relief* (a hospital ship).

The "Torpedo Flotilla" of destroyers consisted of *Hopkins*, Lieutenant Alfred G. Howe; *Stewart*, Lieutenant Julius F. Hellweg; *Hull*, Lieutenant Frank McCommon; *Truxton*, Lieutenant Charles S. Kerrick; *Lawrence*, Lieutenant Ernest Friedrich; *Whipple*, Lieutenant Hutch I. Cone; and *Arethusa* (a tender), Commander [Albert W. Grant](#).

Second leg [\[edit \]](#)

Itinerary [\[edit \]](#)

The second leg of the voyage was from San Francisco to [Puget Sound](#) and back. On 23 May 1908 the 16-battleships of the Great White Fleet steamed into the Puget Sound where they separated to visit six Washington state ports: [Bellingham](#), [Bremerton](#), [Port Angeles](#), [Port Townsend](#), [Seattle](#) and [Tacoma](#).^[22] The fleet arrived in Seattle on 23 May and departed 27 May 1908.^[23]

Ships [\[edit \]](#)

The Fleet, First Squadron, and First Division were commanded by Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry. First Division consisted of [Connecticut](#), the Fleet's flagship, Captain Hugo Osterhaus; [Kansas](#), Captain [Charles E. Vreeland](#); [Minnesota](#), Captain John Hubbard; and [Vermont](#), Captain William P. Potter.

Second Division was commanded by Rear Admiral [Richard Wainwright](#). Second Division consisted of [Georgia](#), the Division flagship, Captain Edward F. Qualtrough; [Nebraska](#), Captain Reginald F. Nicholson, replacing her sister [Virginia](#); [New Jersey](#), Captain William H.H. Southerland; and [Rhode Island](#), Captain Joseph B. Murdock.

Second Squadron and Third Division were commanded by Rear Admiral William H. Emory. Third Division consisted of [Louisiana](#), the Squadron's flagship, Captain Kossuth Niles; [Virginia](#), Captain Alexander Sharp; [Missouri](#), Captain Robert M. Doyle; and [Ohio](#), Captain [Thomas B. Howard](#).

Fourth Division was commanded by Rear Admiral Seaton Schroeder. Fourth Division consisted of [Wisconsin](#), the Division flagship, Captain Frank E. Beatty, which replaced her sister [Alabama](#); [Illinois](#), Captain John M. Bowyer; [Kearsarge](#), Captain Hamilton Hutchins; and [Kentucky](#), Captain Walter C. Cowles.

The Fleet Auxiliaries were [Culgoa](#) (a storeship), Lieutenant Commander John B. Patton; [Yankton](#) (a tender), Lieutenant Commander [Charles B. McVay](#); [Glacier](#) (a storeship), Commander William S. Hogg; [Relief](#) (a hospital ship), Surgeon Charles F. Stokes; and [Panther](#) (a repair ship), Commander Valentine S. Nelson.



Historical marker in Seattle that notes the 1908 arrival of the Fleet.



The fleet in San Francisco: [Virginia](#) is closest to the camera, with the other ships anchored nearby.



Great White Fleet passing Trinidad Head, CA 1908

Third leg [\[edit \]](#)

From San Francisco to Manila, 16,336 nautical miles (30,254 km).

Itinerary [\[edit \]](#)

Port	Arrival	Departure	Distance to next port
San Francisco		7 July 1908	2,126 nmi (3,937 km)

Honolulu , Hawaii	16 July 1908	22 July 1908	3,870 nmi (7,170 km)
Auckland , New Zealand	9 August 1908	15 August 1908	1,307 nmi (2,421 km)
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia	20 August 1908	28 August 1908	601 nmi (1,113 km)
Melbourne , Victoria, Australia	29 August 1908	5 September 1908	1,368 nmi (2,534 km)
Albany , Western Australia	11 September 1908	18 September 1908	3,458 nmi (6,404 km)
Manila , Philippine Islands	2 October 1908	9 October 1908	1,795 nmi (3,324 km)
Yokohama , Japan	18 October 1908	25 October 1908	1,811 nmi (3,354 km)
Amoy , China (Second Squadron)	29 October 1908	5 November 1908	
Manila , Philippine Islands (First Squadron)	31 October 1908		
Manila , Philippine Islands (Second Squadron)	7 November 1908		



1908 bronze medal for the Great White Fleet's visit to Auckland, New Zealand

Ships [\[edit \]](#)

The Fleet, First Squadron, and First Division were commanded by Rear Admiral Charles S. Sperry. First Division consisted of *Connecticut*, the Fleet's flagship, Captain Hugo Osterhaus; *Kansas*, Captain Charles E. Vreeland; *Minnesota*, Captain John Hubbard; and *Vermont*, Captain William P. Potter.

Second Division consisted of *Georgia*, the Division flagship, Captain Edward F. Qualtrough; *Nebraska*, Captain Reginald F. Nicholson; *New Jersey*, Captain William H.H. Southerland; and *Rhode Island*, Captain Joseph B. Murdock.

The Second Squadron and Third Division were commanded by Rear Admiral William H. Emory. Third Division consisted of *Louisiana*, the Squadron flagship, Captain Kossuth Niles; *Virginia*, Captain Alexander Sharp; *Missouri*, Captain Robert M. Doyle; and *Ohio*, Captain Thomas B. Howard.

Fourth Division was commanded by Rear Admiral Seaton Schroeder. Fourth Division consisted of *Wisconsin*, the Division flagship, Captain Frank E. Beatty; *Illinois*, Captain John M. Bowyer; *Kearsarge*, Captain Hamilton Hutchins; and *Kentucky*, Captain Walter C. Cowles.

The Fleet Auxiliaries were *Culgoa* (a storeship), Lieutenant Commander John B. Patton; *Yankton* (a tender), Lieutenant Commander Charles B. McVay; *Glacier* (a storeship), Commander William S. Hogg; *Relief* (a hospital ship), Surgeon Charles F. Stokes; and *Panther* (a repair ship), Commander Valentine S. Nelson.

Final leg [\[edit \]](#)

The final leg ran from Manila to Hampton Roads, 12,455 nautical miles (23,067 km).

Itinerary [[edit](#)]

Port	Arrival	Departure	Distance to next port
Manila, Philippine Islands		1 December 1908	2,985 nmi (5,528 km)
Colombo, Ceylon	13 December 1908	20 December 1908	3,448 nmi (6,386 km)
Suez, Egypt	3 January 1909	4–6 January 1909	2,443 nmi (4,524 km)
Gibraltar	31 January – 1 February 1909	6 February 1909	3,579 nmi (6,628 km)
Hampton Roads, Virginia	22 February 1909		



Political cartoon from *The New York Herald*, 22 February 1909. [Uncle Sam](#), [George Washington](#) and [Theodore Roosevelt](#) welcome the Great White Fleet home to [Hampton Roads](#), Virginia.

Experience gained [[edit](#)]

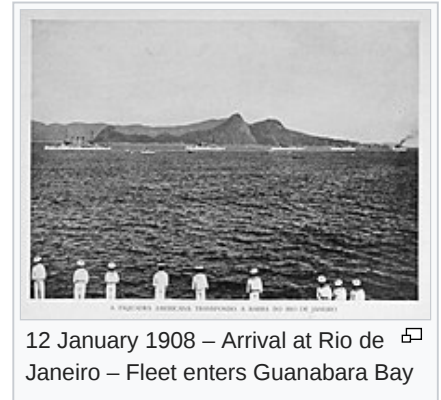
The cruise of the Great White Fleet provided practical experience for US naval personnel in sea duty and ship handling. It also showed the viability of US warships for long-range operations as no major mechanical mishaps occurred. However, while the cruise uncovered design flaws, it did not test the abilities to engage in battle fleet action. In fact, the success of the deployment might have helped obscure design deficiencies that were not addressed until [World War I](#). These included excessive draft, low armor belts, large turret openings and exposed ammunition hoists.^[24]

Effects on US capital ship design [[edit](#)]

While the capital ships of the Great White Fleet were already obsolescent in light of the "big gun" revolution ushered in by the construction of [HMS Dreadnought](#), their behavior at sea furnished valuable information that affected future construction. For instance, in terms of seaworthiness, all the capital ships in the fleet proved wet in all but the calmest seas, which led to the flared bows of subsequent U.S. battleships, increased freeboard forward and such spray-reducing measures as the elimination of billboards for anchors and gun [sponsons](#). Increased freeboard was needed; this and related considerations demanded increases in beam and overall size. Between the [Florida-class battleships](#), the last American capital ships completed before data from the cruise became available, and the [Wyoming class](#), the first designed after this data was received, displacement (and, as a result, cost) per ship increased by one third.^[25]

Deficiencies in seaworthiness in turn reduced the battle-worthiness of the fleet. Turret heights for main armament proved too low and needed to be raised. Secondary armament was useless at speed and especially in tradewind conditions (with the wind moving over the sea at 10 knots (19 km/h) or greater) and needed to be moved much higher in the hull. Improved placement began with the *Wyoming*-class battleships and was further refined in the [Nevada class](#).

Casemates for the bow 3-inch guns in the newer pre-dreadnoughts were untenable due to wetness and were removed. Another discovery was that, even when fully loaded, the bottom of the battleships' side armor was visible—and the ships thus vulnerable to shells that might hit beneath it to reach their machinery and magazines—in smooth to moderate seas. The profile of crests and troughs in some ships contributed to this problem. Admiral Evans concluded that the standard 8-foot (2.4 m) width of belt armor was inadequate.^[26]



One other necessity the cruise outlined was the need for tactical homogeneity. Before the cruise, critics such as then-Captain [William Sims](#) (to whom President Roosevelt listened) had argued that American warship design had remained too conservative and precluded the level of efficiency needed for the fleet to function as an effective unit. The cruise proved the charge true. This would eventually lead to the building of [standard type battleships](#) in the U.S. Navy. When President Roosevelt convened the 1908 Newport Conference of the [Naval War College](#), he placed responsibility for U.S. battleship design on the [General Board of the United States Navy](#). This gave line officers and planners direct input and control over warship design, a pattern which has persisted to the present day.^[27]

Effects on fleet operations [[edit](#)]

Experience gained by the cruise led to improvements in formation steaming, coal economy and morale. Gunnery exercises doubled the fleet's accuracy. However, the mission also underlined the fleet's dependence on foreign colliers and the need for coaling stations and auxiliary ships for coaling and resupply.^[24]

See also [[edit](#)]

- [Big Stick ideology](#)
- [Peace through strength](#)
- [List of circumnavigations](#)
- [Operation Sandblast](#), a Cold War circumnavigation by the US Navy with a submarine
- [Operation Sea Orbit](#), a Cold War circumnavigation by the world's first all-nuclear squadron
- [Exercise Summer Pulse](#), a worldwide test of the U.S. Navy's Fleet Response Plan (FRP)
- [Cruise of the Special Service Squadron](#)

References [[edit](#)]

Notes

- ↑ The Russian fleet had no coaling stations and foreign coaling stations were off limits to them during their voyage. The fleet had to refuel at sea via German contractor coaling vessels or on the sly at French ports.(Busch 86, 87)

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- ↑ ^{***a***} ^{***b***} "[The Great White Fleet](#)"^{[[?](#)]} by Department of the Navy-- Naval History and Heritage Command [Archived copy](#)^{[[?](#)]} at the [Library of Congress](#) (4 February 2012).

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4. ^ Hart 1965, pp. 15–21.
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12. ^ Hart 1965, pp. 23–24.
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18. ^ Semenov p. 16, 17
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External links [edit]

- US Navy Historical Center Site
- Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Monterey
- Guide to the Theodore W. Richards Great White Fleet Scrapbook, 1908–1909; 1916; 1945 MS 219 held by Special Collection & Archives, Nimitz Library at the United States Naval Academy



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