

Navy Commissions Attack Submarine USS Iowa



Sailors attached to the fast-attack submarine USS Iowa (SSN 797) man their newly commissioned submarine during a ceremony in Groton, Connecticut, April 5, 2025. *Photo credit: U.S. Navy | Chief Petty Officer Joshua Karsten*

By Joe Markowski, Submarine Readiness Squadron 32, April 7, 2025

GROTON, Conn. – Christie Vilsack, Iowa’s sponsor and former First Lady of Iowa, gave the crew the traditional order to “man our ship and bring her to life,” after which Iowa’s sailors responded “aye aye ma’am” before ceremonially running aboard the submarine.

The ceremony culminated a years-long process of commissioning SSN 797, the first submarine and third naval vessel named for the Hawkeye State. The most recent USS Iowa, the highly decorated WWII-era battleship BB 61 (1943-1990), saw action in World War II, the Korean War, and Gulf War. The first BB4 Iowa (1897-1919) saw action in the Spanish-American War and World War I.

Iowa’s commanding officer Cmdr. Gregory Coy, a Walnutport, Pennsylvania native and 2006 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, called the event “a historic milestone” during his speech, praising the crew, shipbuilders, and commissioning committee.

“This event is significant for both the life of a submarine and for the amazing people from the Hawkeye State,” Coy said. “To the plank owners, the shipbuilders, the commissioning committee, and our Navy and Submarine Force leaders, this is your submarine.”

Coy took command of Iowa in June 2024 and led the crew from the shipyard and through a series of sea trials, to today's commissioning and subsequent underway operations.

"I am consistently humbled at what we have accomplished" Coy added. "Today, we become the 'USS' Iowa, and I intend to take her to the frontline, continuing the Navy's overwhelming display of undersea dominance and lethality."

Iowa's youngest plankowner – an honor given to commissioning crewmembers – Seaman Lilly Runyon shared her excitement, saying "today's a lot bigger than I thought it would be."

"It's kind of like I'm already used to this," said Runyon of her sea trials as a PCU. "But now that we're commissioned, it's going to feel a little bit more official and I'm very excited for actual operations and figuring things out."

Secretary of the Navy John Phelan praised the crew and the shipbuilders during his speech calling the ceremony an "opportunity to show Navy lethality and our unmatched undersea superiority."

"It is an honor to commission the Navy's newest nuclear-powered attack submarine, here at Groton, the submarine capital of the world," Phelan said. "USS Iowa will make our fleet stronger and more lethal. As Iowa goes to sea, she does so with one mission: to ensure that America's adversaries never doubt our resolve."

Adm. Daryl Caudle, U.S. Fleet Forces commander and senior naval officer at the event, called his participation in the event a homecoming to the submarine capital of the world, a place he called "the nation's center of gravity for the steely-eyed killers of the deep."

"In this coming year, this crew of proud American sailors will put this warship to sea and carry the name 'Iowa' to the far-flung corners of the globe projecting combat power for decades

to come,” Caudle said. “It is the fearless warriors before me that turn this piece of metal weighing almost 8,000 tons – with hundreds of miles of fiber, cable, and piping systems – into a combat ship, a warship designed to decisively win our nation’s battles. Your preparation and execution to get this ship to commissioning day is nothing short of amazing.”

Other platform guests at the commissioning ceremony included Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds; Vice Adm. Robert Gaucher, U.S. Submarine Force commander; representatives from General Dynamics Corp.’s Electric Boat shipyard, U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal and U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut. The master of ceremonies was Lt. Cmdr. Scott Carper, executive officer of the USS Iowa.

Capt. Jason Grizzle, commodore of Iowa’s parent Submarine Squadron (SUBRON) 4, likened the success of the crew to the “hard work and dedication that directly mirror people from the Hawkeye State.”

“Iowa’s motto states that ‘our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain,’” Grizzle explained. “This crew lives by that creed, evidenced today by this fine ship – built, manned, and prepared – in record time, ready to get out to sea where she belongs.”

Iowa, whose keel was laid in August 2019 and christened in June 2023, was designed with stealth and surveillance capabilities, as well as special warfare enhancements, to meet the Navy’s multi-mission requirements. The submarine is 377 feet long, has a 34-foot beam, can dive to depths greater than 800 feet, and operate at speeds in excess of 25 knots. Iowa has a crew of approximately 135 Navy personnel. It is designed with a reactor plant that will not require refueling during the planned life of the ship, reducing lifecycle costs while increasing underway time. The submarine was built by General Dynamics Electric Boat shipyard facility in Groton, Connecticut.

Fast-attack submarines are multi-mission platforms enabling five of the six Navy maritime strategy core capabilities – sea control, power projection, forward presence, maritime security and deterrence. They are designed to excel in anti-submarine warfare, anti-ship warfare, strike warfare, special operations, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, irregular warfare and mine warfare. Fast-attack submarines project power ashore with special operations forces and Tomahawk cruise missiles in the prevention or preparation of regional crises.