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The World Cruise of the Great White Fleet, Honoring 100 Years of Global Partnerships and Security - Celebrating the Centennial of Theodore Roosevelt's Navy, Ships, Sailors

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This is a print replica reproduction of the official Navy history of the around-the-world voyage launched by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1907. Widely considered one of the greatest peacetime achievements of the United States Navy, the circumnavigation made Roosevelt’s message clear: America is a respected world power, with a strong Navy leading the way. A passionate supporter of the United States Navy, and a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt recognized the unique role and value of our nation’s maritime services. He understood that America’s interests had become intertwined with the global community and that the fate of the nation was, in many respects, inextricably tied to the strength of its Navy. For the man who made famous the phrase “speak softly and carry a big stick,” maritime power was uniquely suited to safeguard the interests of the nation. In a speech at the Naval War College on June 2, 1897, Roosevelt, inspired by the words of George Washington, declared, “To be prepared for war is the most effectual means to promote peace.” Naval presence unquestionably provided a measure of power projection, but it was also a valuable instrument for diplomacy and international partnership. As President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt put his ideas into action. In 1907, he made the prescient decision to take the United States Navy “global.” Some considered Roosevelt’s vision to be inordinately risky and espoused isolationism. Roosevelt, however, challenged his political detractors by stating, “We have no choice as to whether or not we shall play a great part in the world.” Accordingly, the “Great White Fleet” deployment embodied many of the core virtues that continue to shape our Navy. Today the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard jointly implement our shared vision as outlined in “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower.” The most important tenets of this maritime strategy are our commitment to our friends and allies, our desire to help those in need with disaster response capabilities, and our determination to maintain preeminence in the maritime domain. All have historical antecedents in the experiences of the Great White Fleet and remain as important now as they were then. As the Great White Fleet embarked on its around-the-world voyage with port visits across the globe—from Brazil and Chile to Australia, Japan, and Italy—the Sailors and Marines of the fleet furthered U.S. diplomacy and built relationships that still flourish today. Informed by its diplomatic tradition, the Navy continues to work with partners to deter aggressors, protect the right to operate freely at sea, and provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief around the world. Today our Navy remains an essential element of U.S. power. The U.S. fleet is present around the world 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, reassuring friends, deterring potential adversaries, maintaining security at sea, and providing for the defense of our homeland.

The world cruise of the Great White Fleet had dual origins, a diplomatic crisis with Japan and a need to test new U.S. battleships. On June 27, 1907, at the height of a crisis in Japanese-American relations, President Theodore Roosevelt decided to send the Atlantic battleship fleet to the Pacific in the fall. The 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War had demonstrated the military and naval might of Japan, while the decisive Russian defeat at Tsushima impressed on the public’s consciousness that a battle fleet, after steaming great distances, could arrive at its destination in no condition to fight. With nearly all U.S. battleships in the Atlantic Fleet, the U.S. naval force in the Pacific was no match for the Japanese Imperial Navy. Aware of these conditions, West Coast residents of the United States felt vulnerable to attack.

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