

# USS Oregon: First Navy ship to carry the state's name since 1893

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submarine or ship, the Mk-48 has advanced proximity fuses to detonate with maximum explosive force.

When fired at surface ships, the Mk-48 torpedo dives under the hull and detonates at the keel, the blast breaking the back of the ship.

The USS Oregon has a quiver of variety when it comes to weaponry. It can fire surface-skimming Harpoon anti-ship missiles, a weapon that is now reaching Ukrainian coastal defense troops fighting Russia's attempt to bottle up the port of Odesa.

The submarine also is equipped with BGM-109 Tomahawk cruise missiles that can reach targets on land up to 1,500 miles away. It can carry conventional and nuclear warheads.

The USS Oregon is also designed to house and quietly deploy Navy SEAL commando teams on covert operations.

The submarine will move through the water powered by pump-jet propulsion instead of traditional screws with blades — reducing the amount of bubbles and noise — called cavitation — that can be heard on sonar.

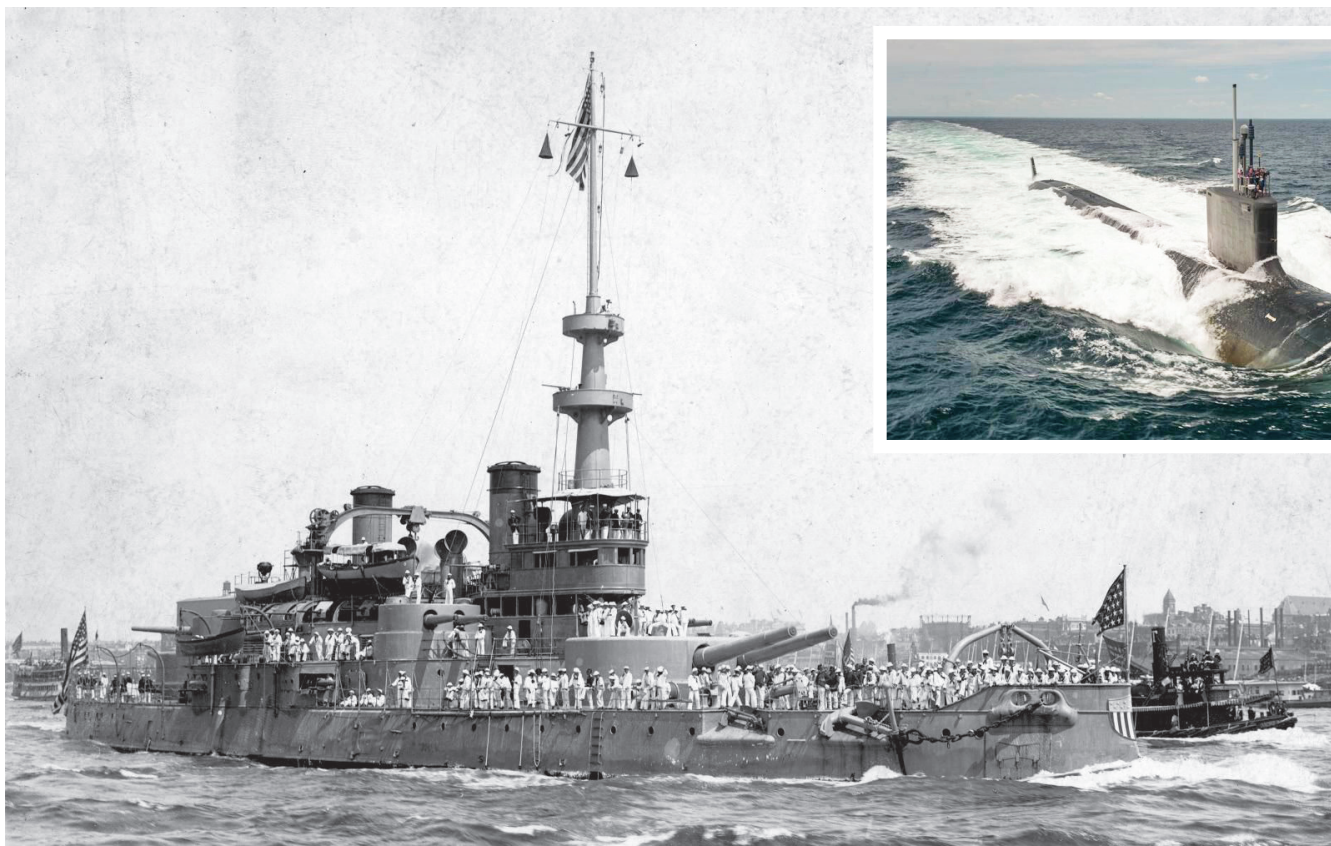
The submarine's S9G nuclear reactor gives the USS Oregon a top speed of 25 knots submerged. Its reactor will run for about 30 years without any additional fuel. The nuclear power gives the submarine virtually unlimited range and the ability to stay submerged for up to three months.

The advanced systems of the submarine also cut the size of crew needed at sea. The submarine has 15 officers and 120 crew. The battleship could operate with 600 officers and crew.

The Navy has commissioned 19 Virginia-class submarines — the USS Oregon is the 20th. Eight more are under construction, including what would become the USS Idaho.

Vice Adm. Michael J. Connor told Congress in 2015 that the USS Oregon and its sister boats were "game changers" in maintaining a balance of power with Russia and China.

"The undersea arena is the most opaque of all warfighting domains," Connor said. "It is easier to track a small object in space than it is to



The crew of the USS Oregon line the railings as the battleship steams along at sea in the late 1890s.



U.S. Navy  
A Virginia-class submarine similar to the USS Oregon.

track a large submarine, with tremendous firepower, under the water."

The commissioning of the USS Oregon ended a long gap in Navy history without a ship named for the state.

### Once pride of the fleet

The first USS Oregon was a brigantine purchased in 1842 from a private owner to be used as an exploring ship until 1849.

The Confederacy seized a privately owned steam-wheeler mail boat during the Civil War and converted it into blockage runner christened CSS Oregon. It was scuttled and burned by its crew as Union forces closed in on New Orleans in April 1863.

By 1889, the Navy had adopted a tradition of naming battleships after states.

In 1893, the USS Oregon was launched at a cost \$4 million — about \$115 million in today's dollars. The nation's third battleship, it was 351 feet long — 26 feet shorter than the USS Oregon submarine. It was the first American warship named for the 33rd state.

More than 20,000 people came to the Union Iron Works shipyard on Mare Island to watch the ship slide into San Francisco Bay.

"The Oregon In Her Ele-

ment" said a wire report headline in the New York Times.

The battleship's four coal-fired boilers could push the ship to a top speed of 15 knots with a range of 4,900 nautical miles before requiring refueling. It was nicknamed "Bulldog of the Navy" for the way its bow thrashed through open seas.

In 1898, the USS Oregon made headlines by steaming more than 15,700 miles from San Francisco, around South America's Cape Horn, to Florida — arriving 66 days after it left, just as the Spanish-American War broke out.

At the Battle of Santiago de Cuba, the USS Oregon cornered a Spanish cruiser and ordered it to run aground and surrender. The New York Herald newspaper published a poem about the battleship on its front page.

But battleship design was evolving so rapidly that less than 10 years after it was commissioned, the USS Oregon was obsolete — too slow, too lightly protected, and carrying too many small-caliber guns.

It would be suicide for the ship to go blow-to-blow with the new type of dreadnaughts that began to appear in 1906. Featuring all large-caliber, long-range guns in turrets mounted on the deck, their thicker armor plating made it

easier to absorb hits from the biggest guns of opponents.

Reduced to a ceremonial role, the USS Oregon was decommissioned in 1919 and docked on the Portland waterfront for tourists to see. When World War II came along, the old ship was pressed into the fight, as scrap metal. Struck from the Naval Vessel Register, the hull became IX-22, an "unclassified miscellaneous vessel."

The husk of the battleship did get into the war zone, as an ammunition barge towed across the Pacific for the battle of Guam. American troops abandoned it there and the last remnants were sold for scrap by a Japanese company in 1956.

The USS Oregon's mast and bow shield were preserved and used in 1956 to create the Battleship Oregon Memorial in what is now Tom McCall Waterfront Park in Portland. It's frequently used as a meeting point for downtown demonstrations.

### No battleships put Navy in a bind

After ship-launched Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the Navy made aircraft carriers the premier ships of the fleet.

The USS Missouri was the last battleship commissioned in the Navy, one of four Iowa-

class battleships ordered and being built at the time of Pearl Harbor. Commissioned in June 1944, its most historic role was as the site of the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay in September 1945.

After World War II, no more battleships were built, putting the Navy in a political bind.

Naming a battleship after a state was political prestige for members of Congress, who voted on the Navy's budget.

In the 1960s, the Navy named six guided-missile cruisers after states.

Attack submarines had traditionally been named after sea creatures — the Tang, Snook, Seahorse and Wahoo were among the top submarines to sink Japanese shipping during World War II.

But pressure mounted to name attack submarines after major cities, then states. Submariners didn't like the switches, but Adm. Hyman Rickover, the father of the nuclear-powered Navy, once observed, tradition and political expediency don't always match.

"I guess I'm a traditionalist — I think submarines should be named after fish," retired Navy Capt. William F. McGonagle told the New York Times in 1996. "But as Admiral Rickover said, 'fish don't vote.'"

When the new Sea-wolf-class fast attack submarine was introduced to the fleet, one was named USS Connecticut. Since the introduction of the Virginia-class submarines, nearly all have been named for states.

In 2011, U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, an Oregon Democrat, inquired about naming a ship after Oregon. A constituent's letter had noted a long gap in having a USS Oregon in the fleet.

Merkley wrote a letter to then-Navy Secretary Ray Mabus asking him to put Oregon near the top of the queue for submarine naming.

"It would be a great honor to the sailors, marines, military service members as well as citizens of Oregon to have one of the newest naval submarines named in their honor," Merkley wrote.

In October 2014, Mabus came to the Battleship Oregon Memorial in Portland to announce that a fast attack submarine with hull number SSN-793 would be named the USS Oregon.

The Navy plans on keeping the new USS Oregon much longer than its predecessor's namesake. The Navy forecast the USS Oregon will be in service until at least the mid-2050s.

Saturday was officially Day One in the Navy for the new USS Oregon.

"May this crew remember that at the heart of service is compassion and love: love of this country, love of this people, love of her values," Gov. Kate Brown said at the ceremony.

*The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

# Johnson: Former state senator widely expected to qualify for election



Kaylee Domzalski/Oregon Public Broadcasting  
Betsy Johnson, a former Democrat, often broke with Democratic leaders on gun control when she served in the state Legislature.

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Johnson, meanwhile, played down the incident in a statement to news outlets.

"While the vast majority of people were supportive, a few folks tried to shut down productive dialogue," Johnson wrote. "That's unfortunate, but I remain undaunted."

The decision to invite Johnson drew criticism of the TEDxPortland conference from some who felt the event was offering free publicity to a candidate whose

politics they do not agree with. Johnson has not yet made the November ballot, but will collect signatures for a nonaffiliated campaign widely expected to qualify for the election.

TEDxPortland issued an apology to its audience that evening.

"Having a potential political candidate for public office on our stage this morning was not the right decision," the organization wrote.

Assuming Johnson, who has millions of dollars on hand, can collect 23,744

signatures, she'll face former House Speaker Kotek and former House Minority Leader Christine Drazan, a Republican.

Kotek has been a supporter of gun control laws, while Drazan and Johnson last year voted against a bill mandating safe storage of guns when not in use. Johnson has also opposed bills allowing courts to confiscate the guns of someone deemed high risk, and requiring background checks for private gun sales.

Johnson has received

favorable ratings from the National Rifle Association. And the Oregon Firearms Federation, the state's most hard-line gun rights group, wrote in a recent post that "one thing Johnson most certainly has been, is strongly and unapologetically pro-gun."

New polling from Morning Consult suggests a broad majority of Americans support steps such as mandatory background checks for all gun sales and banning people reported as dangerous from purchasing guns.

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