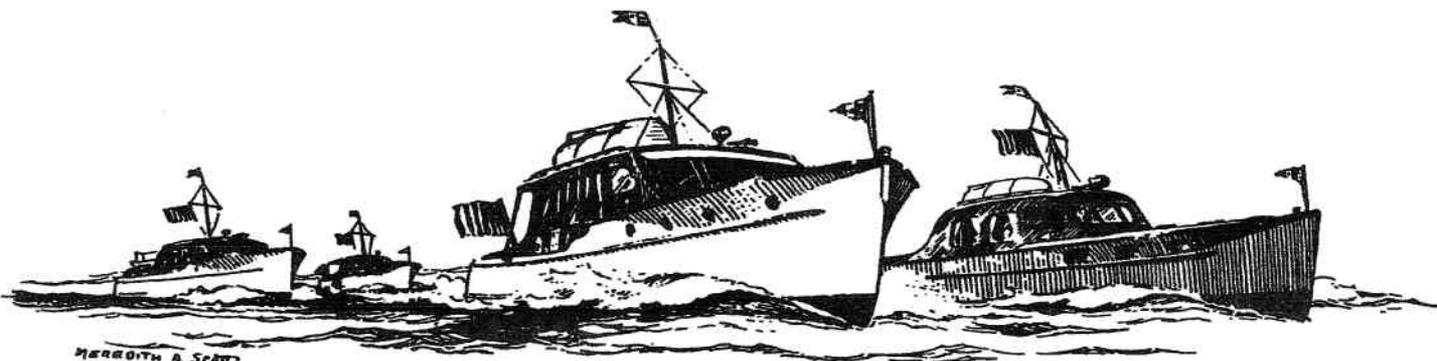




HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES POWER SQUADRONS ENSIGN

By the National Historians Committee

2004



MARION A. SEAN

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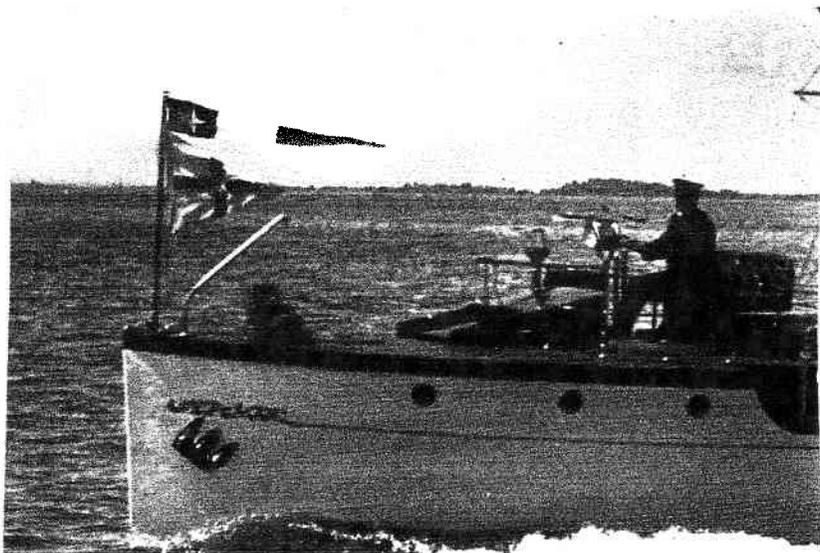


Roger Upton's Powerboat Club of the Boston Yacht Club was officially recognized at the yacht clubs Annual Meeting in January 1913 and was upgraded to the Power Squadron of the Boston Yacht Club and printed in the Club's Annual Year Book with its officers and official rules.

To recognize those members of the Power Squadron Division a distinguishing Squadron Pennant was designed. It was flown above the yacht club burgee on the bow staff, and only when a prospective member was able to pass a stiff examination in the requirements of what is now today's piloting and advanced piloting subjects.

This pennant was a 6 to 1 size and shaped as the Clubs Officer in Charge pennant. It was composed of three sections, red, white, and blue. From the hoist outboard, a white five-pointed star whose diameter is two thirds of the pennants hoist centered on the blue portion, the second was white, and the outer end red. This pennant was flown up to the time that the USPS Ensign was officially adopted in March of 1915. Some of the older members preferred the pennant to the new ensign.

(Note: this pennant was reconstituted by the Flag and Etiquette Committee as a cruise pennant for the "Excitement 85", National Rendezvous and Cruise out of Baltimore after the 1985 Fall Governing Board Meeting. It was subsequently approved for the use by USPS members participating in any organized on the water activity, such as a cruise, rendezvous or boat parade, It may be flown day and night from the highest practical position for the best visibility, weather flown from an antenna or starboard spreader in conjunction with the USPS Ensign, it is to be flown above the Ensign.)



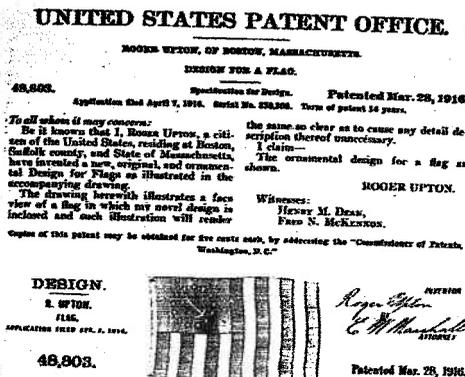
As news of Roger Upton's Power Squadron increased in publications and in the press much interest was developed, and in the June 1913 issue of Motor Boating Magazine, Charles F. Chapman, author and associate editor, gave the Power Squadron a full page display of activities, and other clubs wanted to join on.

Meetings were held in late 1913 at the New York Yacht Club to form a Power Squadron Conference Committee, with the possibility of forming a national organization. Delegates from clubs all up and down the East Coast and as Far West as Detroit attended. These meetings set the groundwork for the formation of what was to be the United States Power Squadrons. A final meeting was set to be held on 2 February 1914 in the Commodore's room at the New York Yacht Club. (This date was set to coincide with New York Boat Show, as many delegates would be in the city for the show.)

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Henry A. Morss of the Eastern Yacht Club of Marblehead, Mass. Much business was discussed. Officers were elected, with Roger Upton as Chief Commander, a Governing Board was appointed, and the United States Power Squadrons were officially formed.

At the meeting there were a few drawings for a flag for the new organization. Before the meeting was adjourned, Chairman Morss said "The next matter is that the Governing Board be requested to take immediate steps toward the authorization by Congress of a suitable, distinguishing flag." Mr. C. Longstreth, of the Corinthian Yacht Club of Philadelphia raised his hand. "Now about the flag, I move that the one with the blue and white horizontal and red field, as shown at this meeting, be urged as the most desirable and satisfactory for the United States Power Squadrons," The motion passed and our Ensign was born.

Roger Upton, the new Chief Commander, filed for a patent on 14 April 1914. It was not until 28 March 1916 that patent No. 48,803 was issued.



The Ensign was not officially recognized until March of 1915. On May 18, 1915, General Order No.11 was issued by Flag Lieutenant Nathaniel L. Stebbins, as it authorized the flying of our Ensign with or with out the USPS pennant, which up to

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that time had the distinguishing flag of the Squadrons. General Order No.11 is quoted below.

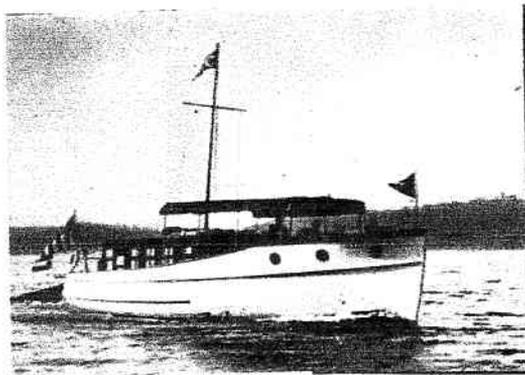
“Commanders of Local Squadrons are Authorized to permit their members to display, in addition to or instead of the United States Power Squadrons Distinguishing flag, a pennant. Said pennant to be a red, white, and blue streamer one and one-half the length of the club burgee, with one white five-pointed star in the red in the luff of the streamer. Said pennant when displayed should be considered as a commission pennant and flown continuously day and night at the mast or at the bow on boats without mast. Sample pennants, with explanation of flying, may be procured from Flag Lieut. Stebbins.

The display or non-display of said pennant is optional with each Squadron. Said pennant is not legally protected.

Commanders will also note that the manner of displaying the United States Power Squadrons distinguishing flag is left optional with Local Squadrons. The customary method is to display said flag as an ensign, * which method is commended but the flag may be displayed at the mast, in place of the private signal or club burgee, or at the bow, in place of the club burgee, as may be preferred. When displayed at the mast or on the bow, said flag should be of smaller size than where displayed as an ensign. Such display at the mast or bow is the only method in which said flag can at present be legally displayed on boats over 15 tons.

By order of the Chief Commander.”

**N.L.Stebbins,
Flag lieutenant.**



During World War I, the Governing Board ordered that Squadron boats fly a pennant of somewhat different design from the original pennant and the American Flag be flown at the taffrail or gaff. Similarly during World War II Old Glory was flown in her proper place and the USPS Ensign at the starboard spreader.

For many years it was said that Roger Upton and Charles F. Chapman designed the USPS Ensign. At an interview with P/C/C Chapman, on October 25, 1975, he acknowledged that he had designed the Ensign and that Roger Upton had gotten the patent. Its design is currently protected under U.S. copyright laws. Early on, the USPS Ensign* assumed much the same dignity as the yacht ensign and was flown in place of the U.S. ensign while in domestic waters.

The USPS Ensign may be flown only when the vessel is under direct command of a USPS member.

Today most members prefer to fly their USPS Ensign at the lowest starboard spreader of the foremost mast, reserving the flagstaff for the National Flag. When flown from the flagstaff, gaff or leach of a sail, as a substitute for the U.S. Flag, the USPS Ensign is displayed only from 0800 till sunset. The USPS Ensign is never flown in place of the U.S. ensign in foreign waters.

There is a USPS Ceremonial Ensign. A special ceremonial Ensign in the form of a tapered, swallow-tail USPS Ensign. This Ensign is used only under the direction of the Chief Commander. This flag is employed in situations such as presentations to heads of state. C/C William D. Selden presented one to President George H.W. Bush in the oval office, in September 1989 for the 75th Anniversary of USPS.

At the 1989 Annual Meeting held at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami, Fla. Five 75th Anniversary Ensign left by boat, each with a Logbook. Each Ensign had a specific route it was to take so that one Ensign would pass through every Squadron in every District of USPS. An entry was to be made in the LogBook for every vessel that the Ensign was aboard. These Ensigns had to pass from Squadron to Squadron by boat. The boat could be afloat, on a trailer, in a boat on a truck, in a boat model and delivered by land or air transportation. All five Ensigns arrived at the Fall Governing Board Meeting in Richmond, Virginia aboard the replica of Christopher Columbus's flagship, "Nina, navigating up the James River from Norfolk, Virginia.

There is one special USPS Ensign in the Charles F. Chapman memorial library at headquarters in Raleigh. That Ensign flew on a space mission during the Apollo Series.

*The term *ensign* historically describes a national flag in maritime use but has been adopted to describe the flags of naval services and nationwide organizations.

Acknowledgments

The information obtained for this "History of the United States Power Squadrons came from: The USPS Operations Manual (1997, Early History Of USPS (1958) revised (1970), Footnotes and Acknowledgments of USPS Orientation Program of 1976 with reference to USPS library – 1913 – 1916 Minutes.

Compiled by P/D/C James E. Coley, JN National Historians Committee. March 2004.

