

USS Henry Clay SSBN 625:

Hall of Fame Boat Inductee: 2025

USS Henry Clay (SSBN-625) A [Lafayette class ballistic missile submarine](#), was the only ship of the [United States Navy](#) to be named for [Henry Clay](#) (1777–1852), the American statesman and orator.

Construction and commissioning

The contract to build *Henry Clay* was awarded to [Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company](#) in [Newport News, Virginia](#) on 3 February 1961 and her keel was laid down on 23 October 1961. She was [launched](#) on 30 November 1962, sponsored by Mrs. Anna Gratz "Nannie" (Clay) Gibson, and [commissioned](#) on 20 February 1964, with [Commander](#) Thomas A Bryce in command of the Blue Crew and Commander John C. Lewis in command of the Gold Crew.

Operational history

Henry Clay conducted [shakedown](#) off the coast of [Florida](#) beginning on 28 February 1964. She completed her first submerged [Polaris missile](#) firing on 6 April 1964 and returned to Newport News on 29 May 1964.



April 1964 Polaris missile launch

The *Henry Clay* (SSBN-625) launches a Polaris Missile from the surface of the Atlantic Ocean off Cape Kennedy, Florida on 20 April 1964. The objects flying through the air around the missile are launch adapters designed to detach themselves automatically once the missile left the tube. The sub's slight port list is a standard part of surface launch procedures. The tall mast is a temporary telemetry antenna installed for operations at the Cape only. This was the first demonstration that Polaris subs can launch missiles from the surface, as well as beneath the surface. Thirty minutes earlier the ***Henry Clay*** successfully launched a missile while submerged.

She then moved to her new [home port](#), [Charleston, South Carolina](#), and departed for her first deterrent patrol on 17 August 1964.

By January 1967, *Henry Clay* had completed 11 deterrent patrols. As of mid-1967, she was assigned to [Submarine Squadron 14](#).

During December 1986, *Henry Clay* made a port call at [Plymouth, England](#), while being operated by her Gold crew, the only port call the Crew made between April 1985 and October 1987.

In 1987, *Henry Clay's* Gold Crew underwent an unannounced Operational Reactor Safeguards Examination (ORSE). She received an EXCELLENT grade, the only submarine in the [United States Atlantic Fleet](#) other than the [attack submarine USS Hyman G. Rickover \(SSN-709\)](#) up to that date to receive an EXCELLENT on an unannounced ORSE.

RECORD SETTING: In 1989, in preparation for its final deterrent patrol, the *Henry Clay* crew spent just three days in Holy Loch, Scotland for its refit (instead of the normal three week refit period), and unloaded 250,000 pounds of food. *Henry Clay* spent a record 121 days (April–August) beneath the North Atlantic waves on deterrent patrol. It made two, short back to back port calls in Plymouth and Portsmouth, England respectively. After its successful patrol, the *Henry Clay* pulled into Norfolk, VA for a brief rest and to pick up many of the crew's (male) family members for a three-day, fun "Tiger Cruise" to her home port of Charleston, South Carolina.