Newport RI Naval history
During the years of the Newport's heavy involvement in the Triangular Trade, the English considered establishing a navy yard at Newport. Robert Melville was hired to conduct a survey on the feasibility of the project. Melville documented:

I have been constantly engaged in obtaining the surveys and drafts of this harbor and Narragansett Bay...and the positions for docks, shipyards, hospitals, etc. The whole bay is an excellent man-of-war harbour...affording good anchorage, sheltered in every direction and capacious enough for the whole of His Majesty's navy...The vicinity of the ocean is such that in one hour a fleet may be from their anchorage to sea; or from the sea to safe anchorage, in one of the best natural harbours the world affords.
The English began enforcing Parliament's Navigation Act of the 1660s and the infamous Stamp Act of 1765 to recoup war expenditures. The stamp act that was claimed as "taxation without representation," led directly to the American rebellion ten years later. In response to the English taxes, Rhode Island petitioned Congress to establish an armed naval force. The American Navy was founded in 1775.
The years 1861 to 1865 saw the United States involved in the Civil War, which brought about much-needed advances in the American Navy. Steam power was now adopted for the movement of warships, and construction in steel and iron grew to be common. The battle between the Monitor and the Virginia determined the fate of the wooden-hulled based navies. The U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland experienced changes during the Civil War, as the school was moved to Newport.
The history of Navy development in Narragansett Bay did begin in 1869. The Secretary of War authorized the establishment of an experimental Torpedo Station on Goat Island. Today’s Naval Undersea Warfare Center, the Torpedo Station was to develop torpedoes, torpedo equipment, explosives, and electrical equipment.
The torpedo station was a success over the proceeding eighty years. From 1869 to its disestablishment in 1951, the Station contributed immensely to the developments in the navy. Through experiments conducted there, the torpedo evolved from the stationary explosive mine to the efficient and highly mobile weapon of today.

Approximately 13,000 people were employed at the Torpedo Station at the height of World War II, and they produced 80% of the submarine torpedoes in the United States.

In an address given by Captain Earle in 1924, while he commanded the Torpedo Station, many desirable features of the bay were outlined for mass fleet operations. Earle spoke of the deep water anchorage, accessibility to training waters, favorable weather patterns, and fueling facilities of the area. Although naval aviation was still in its earlier years, Earle described the region’s potential and ended his speech by saying:

…the Fleet can make, with advantage, a much greater use of this Narragansett Bay than has ever been the case in the past….A study of the needs of operating the Fleet as a whole point to the increasing utilization of the deep water anchorage in Narragansett Bay as the years go on.
As usual, peacetime found a reduction of naval activities in Newport. This occurred after the Second World War. This resulted in the closing of Goat Island's Naval Torpedo Station in 1951.
Torpedo Construction
Torpedo Carrier Construction
In reaction to the Naval decline in the 1970’s, Luce established and built up the Naval Apprentice Training System. This system trained staff for both the Navy and merchant marine. Luce’s major achievement was the founding of the Naval War College at Newport in 1884.
The Navy continued to grow in importance and size in the 1880's. Steam power had replaced sail, and more coaling stations were now required. Just north of Newport, one of the Navy's largest coaling stations was established at Melville. Some of Newport's older residents can recall battleships and cruisers anchored between Prudence Island and Melville, and on still days the musicians on board could be heard playing.
Coal Ships
Santee, Constitution, and Macedonian in the Harbor at Newport
Newport began to go through a tremendous amount of activity during the 1940’s. The U.S. Naval Operating Base was established in 1941. Coddington Point was reestablished, which became a Supply Station. A Patrol Torpedo (PT) Boat Training Center, a Naval Net Depot, and additional fuel facilities were set up at Melville. Newport and Narragansett Bay became one of the Navy’s largest and most critical bases of operation over night. By the end of the war, more than 100 ships of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet were based in Newport.
Submarine Scaffolding
Pier One located at Coddington Cove was extended 225 feet during 1968 and 1969 for the new longer ships. New underground fuel lines were provided to the piers. Fifty-eight destroyer-type ships were headquartered to Newport in the late-1960s, including, several guided missile carrying ships. These ships were among the 200-ship Cruiser-Destroyer Force of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. In the 1970's the ships based at Newport were moved to southern ports in the Shore Establishment Realignment Program of April 1973. The Navy commands and activities in Newport changed their mission from fleet support to officer training and education.
By the mid-1980's, the Naval Underwater Systems Center became the largest command in aspects of personnel and payroll.
The 1990's saw the construction of several new laboratories at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, which provides a full spectrum research, development, test, and evaluation, engineering and fleet support for submarines and underwater systems.
1998 saw the addition of the Navy Warfare Development Command to the Naval War Throughout many milestones and changes, Naval Station Newport still keeps a prestigious position as Newport County's largest single employer in terms of personnel and payroll, a position it has been able to keep since the 1970's.
Shipwreck