

The history of the Indian Navy can be traced back to 1612 when Captain Best encountered and defeated the Portuguese. This encounter, as also the trouble caused by the pirates, forced the British East India Company to maintain a small fleet at Swally, near Surat (Gujarat). The First squadron of fighting ships arrived on 05 September 1612, forming what was then called the Honourable East India Company's Marine. It was responsible for the protection of the East India Company's trade in the Gulf of Cambay and the river mouths of the Tapti and Narmada. The officers and the men of this force went on to play an important role in surveying the Arabian, Persian and Indian coastlines.

Although Bombay had been ceded to the British in 1662, they physically took possession of the island on 08 February 1665, only to pass it on to the East India Company on 27 September 1668. As a consequence, the Honourable East India Company's Marine also became responsible for the protection of trade off Bombay. By 1686, with British commerce having shifted predominantly to Bombay, the name of this force was changed to Bombay Marine. This force rendered unique service, fighting not only the Portuguese, Dutch and French, but also interlopers and pirates of various nationalities. The Bombay Marine was involved in combat against the Marathas and the Sidis and participated in the Burma War in 1824.

In 1830, the Bombay Marine was renamed Her Majesty's Indian Navy. With the capture of Aden by the British and the institution of the Indus Flotilla, the Navy's commitments grew manifold, and its deployment in the China War in 1840 bears adequate testimony to its proficiency. Whilst the Navy's strength continued to grow, it underwent numerous changes of nomenclature over the next few decades. It was renamed the Bombay Marine from 1863 to 1877, after which it became Her Majesty's Indian Marine. At this time, the Marine had two divisions, the Eastern Division based at Calcutta under the Superintendent, Bay of Bengal, and the Western Division at Bombay under the Superintendent, Arabian Sea. In recognition of the services rendered during various campaigns, its title was changed to Royal Indian Marine in 1892, by which time it consisted of over 50 vessels.

The Genesis of Indian Navy

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The Royal Indian Marine went into action with a fleet of minesweepers, patrol vessels and troop carriers during the First World War when mines were detected off Bombay and Aden, and was utilised mainly for patrolling, ferrying troops and carrying war stores to Iraq, Egypt and East Africa. The first Indian to be granted a commission was Sub Lieutenant D.N. Mukherji who joined the Royal Indian Marine as an engineer officer in 1928. In 1934, the Royal Indian Marine was re-organised into the Royal Indian Navy, and was presented the King's Colour in 1935 in recognition of its services. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Royal Indian Navy consisted of eight warships. By the end of the war, its strength had risen to 117 combat vessels and 30,000 personnel who had seen action in various theatres of operations.

On India attaining Independence, the Royal Indian Navy consisted of 32 ageing vessels suitable only for coastal patrol, along with 11,000 officers and men. The senior officers were drawn from the Royal Navy, with Rear Admiral John Talbot Savignac Hall, CIE, being the first Post-independence Commander-in-Chief. The prefix 'Royal' was dropped on 26 January 1950 with India being constituted as a Republic. The first Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Navy was Admiral Sir Edward Parry, KCB, who handed over command to Admiral Sir Mark Pizey, KBE, CB, DSO in 1951. Admiral Pizey also became the first Chief of the Naval Staff in 1955, and was succeeded by Vice Admiral Stephen Hope Carlill, KBE, CB, DSO. On 22 April 1958, Vice Admiral Ram Dass Katari assumed office as the first Indian Chief of the Naval Staff.

The Names over the Years

- Indian Marine: 1612 - 1686
- Bombay Marine: 1686 - 1830
- Indian Navy: 1830 - 1858

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- Her Majesty's Indian Navy: 1858 - 1863

- Bombay and Bengal Marine: 1863 - 1877

- Her Majesty's Indian Marine: 1877 - 1892

- Royal Indian Marine: 1877 - 1934

- Royal Indian Navy: 1934 - 1950

- Indian Navy: 1950 - Present