

# This Day in History... April 10, 1794

## Birth of Matthew C. Perry

Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry was born on April 10, 1794, in South Kingstown, Rhode Island.

Born to a naval captain, Perry was the younger brother of Oliver Hazard Perry. Navy life was in his blood and Perry began his career at the age of 15 as a midshipman aboard the USS *Revenge*, under his older brother's command.

In the coming years, Perry served on several other ships, including the USS *President*, aboard which he was an aide to the commodore. While on that ship, he took part in a battle against the British before the start of the War of 1812. He remained on that ship after the conflict started when the *President* fired the first shot of the war at the HMS *Belvidera*. Perry was later transferred to the USS *United States*, where he served under Stephen Decatur.



Matthew's older brother was the "Hero of Lake Erie," an important War of 1812 battle.

After the war, Perry served on several ships in the Mediterranean. He served under William Bainbridge in the Second Barbary War and took part in patrols off Liberia. He was even offered a commission in the Imperial Russian Navy, though he turned it down.

By 1821, Perry was in command of the USS *Shark*. The following year, he sailed the *Shark* to Key West, Florida, to claim the Keys as United States territory. Perry then took command of the USS *Concord*, served as the second officer of the New York Navy Yard, and was promoted to captain.

As a captain, Perry oversaw the construction of and then commanded the USS *Fulton*, the Navy's second steam frigate. Perry recognized the importance of naval education and promoted an apprentice system to train new sailors. He helped create the course of study for the US Naval Academy, organized the first corps of naval engineers, led the first naval gunnery school, and pushed for the modernizing of the Navy. For his efforts, he was called the "Father of the Steam Navy."

During the Mexican-American War, Perry was in command of the USS *Mississippi*. He captured Frontera and Tampico and fought at the First Battle of Tabasco. He also participated in the end stages of the siege of Veracruz before attacking other Mexican port cities, and he personally led a landing force in taking San Juan Bautista.



Perry recommended the building of this lighthouse while in the Florida Keys in the 1820s.

One of Perry's most famous accomplishments came in the 1850s. Under the direction of President Millard Fillmore, he traveled to Japan to open relations. On July 8, 1853, Perry led four steamships into Tokyo Bay. The Japanese were impressed by the giant steamships, which they had never seen before and described as "giant dragons puffing smoke."

When Perry arrived in Tokyo Bay (then called Uraga Harbor), he demanded to be allowed to present President Fillmore's letter. His requests were rejected, so Perry opened fired blacks from the ships' cannons. The Japanese, concerned about the threat to their capital, allowed Perry to come ashore.

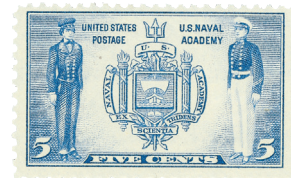
Perry then presented the letter, requesting that Americans stranded in Japan be returned home and expressing interest in opening trade between the two nations. He also presented the emperor with a variety of gifts, including a working steam locomotive model, a telegraph, a telescope, and several wines and liquors, all intended to show the Japanese the American culture and benefits of trade.

The following year, both sides signed the Treaty of Kanagawa, establishing peace between the two nations. The treaty also called for the opening of two ports to American ships, assistance and protection for American ships stranded in the area, and permission for American ships to buy supplies, coal, water, and other provisions in the two Japanese ports.

Upon his return to the US, Perry received a reward of \$20,000, which he used to compile a three-volume report on his time in Japan. Perry finished his report just months before his death on March 4, 1858.



Stamp pictures Perry's ships in Tokyo Bay with Mount Fuji in the background.



Perry gave the US Naval Academy the Gokoku-ju Bell he received in Japan. Since replaced with a replica, it rings for every football victory over the US Army team.



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the US and Japan.

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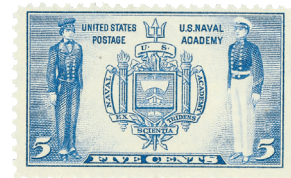
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