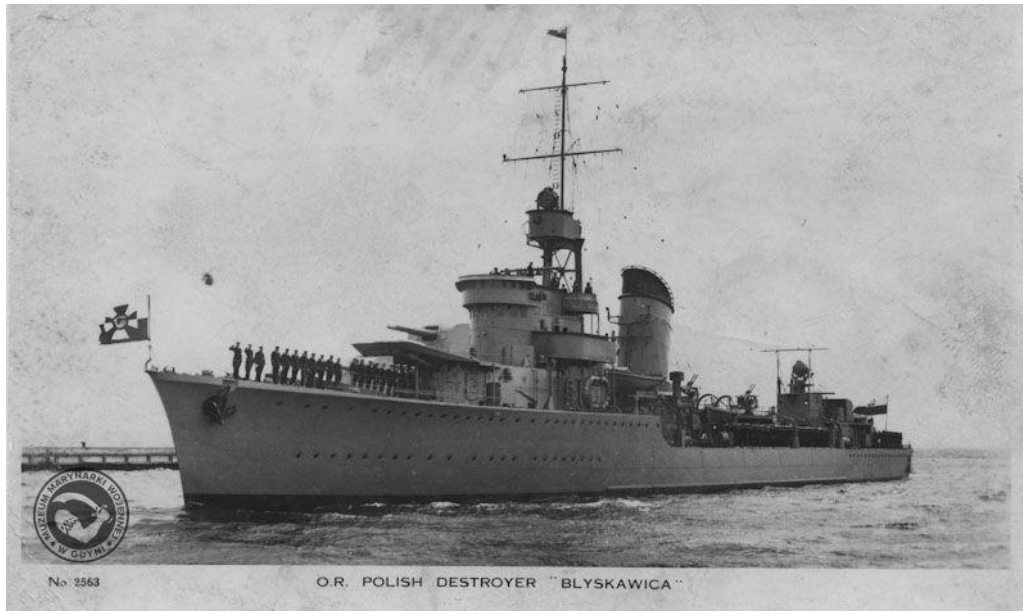


A Pledge to the Past: Swearing-In and Farewell Ceremonies Aboard ORP *Blyskawica*

By Rick Bialachowski, 6 July 2025



Since her commissioning in 1937 and heroic service through the Second World War, ORP *Blyskawica* (“Lightning”) has remained a potent symbol of Polish maritime valour. This historic destroyer today serves not only as a museum but also as the ceremonial heart of the Polish Navy—hosting both the solemn swearing-in of new recruits and the dignified retirements of career sailors.

Anchored in Tradition: Oath-Taking Aboard the *Blyskawica*

Twice each year, *Blyskawica* serves as the setting for the formal induction of new Polish naval recruits. Moored at Gdynia’s Kościuszko Square, the destroyer’s historic decks host these ceremonies on Polish Navy Day (May 28) and the anniversary of her commissioning into service (November 25).

Recruits, dressed in full white service uniforms, climb the gangway and assemble beneath the ship’s bridge. A senior officer then recites the Naval Oath in Polish: “I swear to faithfully serve the Republic of Poland, uphold its Constitution, and defend its sovereignty—even at the cost of my life.”



Blyskawica, pictured in Gdynia, 2012, flying the Polish Naval Jack on jack staff.

Following the final pledge, the white-and-red naval ensign is hoisted to the gaff and the ship's bell tolls. Each recruit places a hand on the weathered deck planking—once trod by wartime crews—to symbolize their entry into naval service and their connection to *Blyskawica* binding their futures to *Blyskawica*'s legacy of courage and sacrifice. In that charged moment—ensign aloft, bell tolling, hands on deck—the *Blyskawica* ceases to be a static exhibit and becomes a living vessel: a classroom, a chapel, and a proving ground where Poland's naval future takes its first solemn vow.

A Final Parade on Storied Decks

Decades later, after years of service, many of these same sailors return to *Blyskawica* for their final muster. Gathered on the quarterdeck, colleagues stand “honorary watch” as a commanding officer recounts the retiree's achievements and citations. When the last commission is formally returned, rank badges are lowered and uniform caps removed, symbols of the transition from active duty to veteran status. The retirement ceremonies aboard *Blyskawica* transform personal milestones into moments of shared heritage.

A Ship That Still Serves

Although no longer sailing the seas, *Blyskawica* remains a living symbol. As both the world's oldest preserved destroyer and the only Polish naval vessel to be awarded the *Virtuti Militari* (Poland's highest military honour), she carries forward the memory of past service while anchoring the traditions of the present. Her decks continue to witness not only history remembered, but history still in the making.



References

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