

THE PALIMPSEST

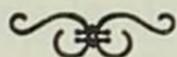
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USS *Iowa* (BB61)

Iowans have been singularly fortunate in the number of warships named for their state. While there is no fixed procedure, the Navy has been naming battleships after states more or less in rotation since the first *Maine* was launched in 1888. According to one Navy officer: "It usually is finally up to the White House and it depends on which state hollers the loudest and carries the most water politically." In 1937 the Iowa Congressional delegation served notice that it was prepared to "holler loud" for a battleship named for the Hawkeye State.

Plans for building several new fifty-million-dollar battleships were being laid as early as 1936. As soon as he learned of this Senator Guy M. Gillette began urging the Naval Affairs Committee to name one of these ships for Iowa. Senator Clyde L. Herring joined in Gillette's proposal. Republican forces were led by Representative Cassius C. Dowell of Des Moines. Congressional action was spurred by Iowa sailors and marines of

World War I who urged that the name Iowa be applied to the first battleship. The hopes of Iowans were strengthened by the fact that Admiral William D. Leahy, chief of naval operations and the ranking navy officer, had been born in Hampton, Iowa. With such forces at work, the outcome was never in doubt.

Authorized on May 25, 1939, the keel of the *Iowa* was laid on June 27, 1940. Meanwhile, World War II had broken out, followed two years later by the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The United States was thus catapulted into the world holocaust. On August 27, 1942, 30,000 persons, including navy yard workers, witnessed the launching of the world's greatest battleship at the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn. "I christen thee *Iowa*," said Mrs. Henry A. Wallace, wife of the Vice President of the United States, as she broke the bottle of champagne on the ship's keel. "May God guard the *Iowa* and all who sail in her."

The launching of the *Iowa*, according to Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, was "a major event in the history of the United States Navy." After pointing out that the *Iowa* was the most powerful ship ever built in the western hemisphere, Mr. Knox concluded: "This ship bears the proud name of one of the greatest states, a name that has been borne with honor by other great fighting ships in former wars."

From his office in Des Moines, Governor George A. Wilson sent the following message to be read at the launching ceremony: "Thousands of our boys from farms and shops and humble homes are cheerfully joining the ranks of the Navy, and back of them there is a united and determined people wholly committed to the all-out effort needed to assure a victory for the peace we love. God speed the new *Iowa* and give her the strength to overcome all enemies."

The new battleship represented 429,000 man-days in plan and design alone — fully 175 tons of blueprint paper having been used. In addition, 4,100,000 man-days in construction were required — the equivalent of one draftsman and 10 mechanics working six days a week for 1,374 years — to bring the *Iowa* to her launching.

The *Iowa* was 887 ft. long and 108 ft. broad. Her standard displacement was 45,000 tons but this figure increased to 57,600 tons when loaded. Her maximum draft was 38 feet. From her keel to her highest superstructure she was 186 feet high and contained 19 separate levels — six below the main deck and twelve above it.

The *Iowa* was driven by 8 turbines geared to 4 propellers, and developing 200,000 HP. She had a rated speed of 33 knots per hour but she was destined to reach 35 knots while in service. The *Iowa* was built to carry 2,582,000 gallons of fuel, much of it for her destroyer escort.

Additional highlights should be noted. She contained 1,091 telephones, 5,000 lighting fixtures, 900 electric motors, and generated enough electricity for a city of 200,000. She was designed to carry 2,500 officers and men during war. The ship carried nine 16-inch guns, twenty 5-inch guns, and numerous 40 and 20 millimeter anti-aircraft guns.

Two days after she was commissioned, the *Iowa* put to sea with a complement of 3,000 officers and men, many of whom had never been to sea before. For three months the giant battleship shook down in Chesapeake Bay and along the Atlantic coast. Finally, on August 27, 1943, the *Iowa* set out for Argentia, Newfoundland, and her first war assignment — the “*Tirpitz* Watch” in which she neutralized the threat of that powerful German battleship which was reported poised in Norwegian waters ready to pounce on Allied commerce.

A new honor and responsibility was given the *Iowa*, when, late in the fall of 1943 the gallant namesake of the Hawkeye State was assigned to carry President Franklin D. Roosevelt to Casablanca, North Africa, on the first leg of his journey to the conference at Teheran with Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill. During the conference the *Iowa* was under constant threat of German glider bombs, and the ship accordingly returned to sea, cruising to Bahia, Brazil. While

enroute to Brazil the *Iowa* welcomed King Neptune aboard for the first time, as she crossed the equator.

Returning to North Africa via Freetown and Dakar, the *Iowa* took President Roosevelt aboard from a French destroyer by use of a boatswain's chair. A safe return trip was made to the United States. As he was about to leave the *Iowa* at the mouth of the Potomac on December 16, 1943, President Roosevelt, while sitting bareheaded in a cold, biting wind, addressed the officers and crew as follows:

Captain McCrea, officers and men of the *Iowa*. I had wanted to say a few words to you on the trip east, but I couldn't do it properly because so many of you were mere, miserable pollywogs. Now I understand that I can talk to you as the Chief Shellback of them all. I have had a wonderful cruise in the *Iowa* — one I shall never forget. I think that all my staff have behaved themselves pretty well, with one or two lapses. When we came on board from that little French destroyer, I was horrified to note that Major General Watson and Mr. Hopkins came over the rail on all-fours. However, landlubbers like that do have lapses. Outside of that, all the Army and Navy and civilians have been wonderfully taken care of, and I am impressed with two facts — the first is that you had a happy lot of visitors — fellow shipmates. Secondly, from all I have seen and all I have heard, the *Iowa* is a happy ship, and having served with the Navy for many years, I know, and you know, what that means. It is a part and parcel of what we are trying to do, to make every ship happy and efficient. . . .

And now I have to leave you for the USS *Potomac*. When I came out on deck quite a while ago, and saw her about a half mile away, I looked and decided that she had shrunk since I had been on the *Iowa*.

Two weeks later, on January 2, 1944, as a unit of Battleship Division 7, with Rear Admiral O. M. Hustvedt, USN, flying his flag from the ship, the *Iowa* departed from the United States for the Pacific Theater. There she joined Admiral Raymond A. Spruance's Fifth Fleet at Funafuti, in the Ellice Islands, and as a part of Task Force 58, supported the air strikes against Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls in the Marshall Islands during January and February of 1944.

In mid-February the *Iowa* formed a part of a strong striking force sweeping around Truk, the great Japanese base in the Caroline Islands. Several Japanese ships were sunk by carrier-based planes from Task Force 58 in what was the first such raid against Japanese mandated islands. Later in the month the *Iowa* supported Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher's fast carrier forces which struck Tinian Island in the Marianas.

On March 18, 1944, flying the flag of Vice Admiral W. A. Lee, Jr., USN, the *Iowa* sortied from Majuro Island to bombard Mille Atoll of the Marshalls. It was here the *Iowa* received her only damage in all her fierce fighting during World War II. Two Japanese 4.7-inch projectiles struck her, one bursting on deck, causing little

damage; the other piercing the ship's side to burst in an empty compartment, also with negligible damage. Only one man was slightly wounded. Meanwhile, firing continued from the *Iowa* in an uninterrupted pattern, targets were obliterated, and two large fires observed.

On March 30, 1944, the *Iowa* supported carriers of Task Force 58 as they launched their air strikes against Palau and Woleai Islands of the Caroline group. These strikes continued for several days, at the end of which the *Iowa* left for Humbolt Bay, New Guinea, where our forces were landing. The *Iowa* supported covering strikes on Hollandia, Aitape, and Wakde from April 22 to April 28. Proceeding north, the *Iowa* again supported carrier air strikes on Truk. In this action five Japanese planes were splashed by gunfire from the ships of the Task Force. Two days later, flying Rear Admiral Hustvedt's flag again, the *Iowa* participated in the bombardment of Ponape Island in the eastern Carolines; the enemy airfield was shelled, its adjacent barracks destroyed, and fires were started along the waterfront.

The Marianas were next on the *Iowa's* itinerary. First she took part in the carrier air strikes against Tinian, Saipan, and Guam; then she smashed at Tinian in a pre-invasion bombardment, blowing up an ammunition dump. Between June 19 and June 21, the *Iowa* joined in the now-famous

"Marianas Turkey Shoot" which saw 402 enemy planes (out of 545 observed) shot down with a loss of only 17 American planes, and minor damage to four ships. The battle, known as the First Battle of the Philippine Sea, was instituted in an enemy attempt to relieve their hard-pressed Marianas garrisons.

After suffering such devastating carrier plane losses, the Japanese became ineffective as a striking force and began to retire. Still hoping to bring the Japanese Fleet to action, United States ships went in pursuit: at extreme range, carrier planes accounted for two carriers, two destroyers, and a tanker, with other units severely damaged. The *Iowa* was among the pursuing force and shot down one torpedo plane, with an assist on another.

Throughout July, 1944, the *Iowa* remained in Marianas waters supporting operations there. She aided one air strike on Palau Island in the Carolines, and several strikes on Guam during early August. The *Iowa* then retired to Eniwetok for replenishment, having fought the enemy in the Pacific for fully seven months. On August 16, 1944, Captain McCrea was relieved by Captain (now Rear Admiral) Allan Rockwell McCann, USN.

After a brief respite, the *Iowa* became a unit of Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey's Third Fleet and again supported carrier strikes against the Central Philippines area. Turning eastward, the

Third Fleet struck the Palau Islands on September 17, in support of our landings on Peleliu Island. Four days later Luzon was hit again by "Bull" Halsey's Task Force. Moving southward again, the Force once more concentrated on the Central Philippines area, then retired to Saipan, and later to our base at Ulithi in the Carolines. Throughout these engagements the *Iowa* was always in the thick of the fight and was well on her way toward earning the name of "The First Lady of the Third Fleet."

In October, 1944, the gallant *Iowa* became press ship for the Fleet, with broadcasting, teletype, and wire-photo facilities. Leading newspapermen and commentators henceforth transmitted first-hand war news from the *Iowa*.

Flying the flag of Rear Admiral O. C. Badger, USN, who had relieved Rear Admiral Hustvedt as Commander of Battleship Division Seven on October 6, the *Iowa* arrived in the launching position off Formosa. On October 18 she was back in position off Luzon, which was being softened for invasion. Bases to the south were also neutralized in strikes which continued for six days, until the paralyzing blow struck the enemy at the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

The *Iowa* first accompanied the carriers of her group, which were attacking the Japanese units of the Central Force moving to cross San Bernardino Strait, between the islands of Luzon and

Samar. She soon departed, however, to meet the threat of the Japanese Northern Force, which was approaching Northern Luzon. This mission was interrupted when the Central Force broke through San Bernardino Strait, in spite of heavy losses, which included a battleship, and attacked our relatively unprotected light carrier group (now without the *Iowa's* support) in a running fight. The *Iowa* promptly sped southward again, but the Japanese had commenced to retire. The enemy sustained losses from our planes, and the light units of the *Iowa's* task group sank a Japanese cruiser.

During the remainder of October and throughout November of 1944, the *Iowa* remained in Philippine waters to support American operations there. Attacked on November 25, while supporting an air strike, superb gunnery on the part of the *Iowa's* crew accounted for three Japanese planes splashed and three others damaged. In this action the United States carriers *Intrepid* and *Cabot* were damaged.

On November 28 Captain McCann was detached and relieved by Captain (now Rear Admiral) James L. Holloway, USN. For his services as Commanding Officer of the *Iowa*, Captain McCann was awarded the Bronze Star Medal.

The *Iowa* now had logged close to 150,000 miles since she had been commissioned. The battle-weary craft accordingly departed for the

United States, arriving at San Francisco on January 15, 1945. She left Hunter Point Drydocks two months later, on March 19, for a training period off San Pedro, California.

Upon departure from the United States, after additional training at Pearl Harbor and Eniwetok, the *Iowa* rejoined her old task group off Okinawa and again flew Rear Admiral Badger's flag. Here the gallant ship participated in operations furnishing air coverage over Okinawa. These were fearful days when the United States Fleet was taking severe punishment from the vicious kamikaze, or suicide plane, menace; but the *Iowa* came through unscathed, either shooting down or driving off any suicide planes that came within range of her guns. On May 12, 1945, the *Iowa's* task force retired to Ulithi and on May 25 returned with the Third Fleet, in Vice Admiral John S. McCain's Task Force 38, to the area off the Ryukyus. The *Iowa* supported repeated air strikes against southern Kyushu, one of the main Japanese home islands. On June 13, the *Iowa* retired to Leyte for replenishment.

Departing from Leyte on July 1, 1945, again in the Third Fleet's Support Group, the *Iowa* moved into position for sustained air attacks on Japan itself, attacks which were to last until August 15. Tokyo was hit July 10, and the islands of Honshu and Hokkaido on July 14. On July 15 the *Iowa* blasted the city of Murroran, Hokkaido, destroy-

ing steel mills and other targets with her 16-inch guns. On the night of July 17-18, the city of Hitachi, Honshu, was given the same treatment. More than 600 tons of ammunition were expended in those two bombardments which were so skillfully executed that Captain Holloway was awarded the Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit.

Again rejoining the carriers, the *Iowa* supported further strikes on Tokyo on July 18, and on the Kure-Kobe area of Southern Honshu on July 24. On July 25 Captain Holloway was relieved by Captain Charles Wellborn, Jr., USN.

For the remainder of July, air attacks continued and included the Tokyo and Nagoya areas. On August 10, while returning to the launching position from a refueling rendezvous, the Task Group was attacked by hostile planes, ten of which fell to ship's gunfire. Attacked again by enemy planes on August 13, while in the launching position, the Combat Air Patrol shot down twenty-two of them. Word of the surrender negotiations on August 15 stayed the strikes that had been prepared for Tokyo and Nagoya.

A period followed in which United States forces were being assembled for the occupation of the Japanese Islands. Then, on August 27 (three years to the day since her launching and with her log reading 190,313 miles) the *Iowa* as a part of Task Force 31 dropped anchor in Sagami

Wan, a bay 30 miles southwest of Tokyo. On August 29 she moved into Tokyo Bay and acted as one of the support ships in the initial landing on the Japanese home islands the following day.

The USS *Iowa* returned to the West Coast following the Japanese surrender. She was at Seattle for the Navy Day celebration on October 27, 1945. Already deservedly rich with honors after some of the most arduous fighting in the Pacific Theater, the *Iowa*, commanded by Captain Frederick I. Entwistle, USN, became Flagship of the First Fleet, in the spring of 1946.

During the following months the *Iowa* took part in the traditional cruises, drills, and maneuvers of the peacetime Navy. She returned to Seattle for the 1946 Navy Day celebration; during 1947 she participated in many United States Naval Reserve training cruises.

In the summer of 1948 the USS *Iowa* took part in the Midshipmen training cruise from Pacific Coast ports. About September 1, 1948, the inactivation of the ship was commenced. The official decommissioning of the *Iowa* on March 24, 1949, brought to a close the colorful career of a great ship.

Until July 16, 1951, the *Iowa* quietly rested with the San Francisco Group of the Pacific Reserve Fleet. Then, because of the Korean situation, the men in the Reserve Fleet were ordered to bring the proud battlewagon "out of mothballs."

On August 25, 1951, the *Iowa* was recommissioned at San Francisco. A host of distinguished visitors, among them Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz who delivered the commissioning address, were present for the colorful ceremonies. Mrs. Wm. S. Beardsley, wife of the Governor of Iowa, presented the flag of the state of Iowa to Captain Wm. R. Smedberg III, new Commanding Officer of the *Iowa*, as officers and men stood smartly at attention.

The *Iowa* had a Bay trial run on September 17, 1951. The next day she successfully passed her acceptance speed trial near the Farallon Islands. Soon the gallant craft was steaming south to Long Beach, taking out the kinks that had developed after three years of inactive service. Commanded by able officers, manned by a willing albeit somewhat green crew, the mighty warship was being rounded into shape when the Secretary of the Navy invited a select group of Iowa citizens to secure first-hand information about this proud namesake of the Hawkeye State. The writer was fortunate to be one of fourteen designated for this honor.

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