

Namesakes of Iowa Cities

It is no small honor to have a ship named for a city or town. Much publicity accompanies the announcement, and citizens read with pride of the progress of her construction. Since every Navy ship must have a feminine sponsor (frequently the wife of the mayor of the town), there usually is no dearth of candidates. But in 1904, when the Navy Department asked Mayor Christopher H. Berg of Dubuque to name a sponsor for the new gunboat *Dubuque* to be launched on August 15, that busy official could not find a young woman willing to make the long trip to Morris Heights, New York.

The contractors then invited Miss Annette Hull, daughter of Congressman John A. T. Hull, to accept the honor, and she did. About this same time Mayor Berg received a letter from Miss Margaret Tredway, daughter of Harry E. Tredway of Dubuque, agreeing to act as sponsor. According to the Des Moines *Daily News* of August 20, 1904:

The contractors and all concerned were in a fine predicament. The whole question was laid before Secretary Moody, of the Navy Department, and he ruled that Miss Hull should pull the strings that sent the gunboat down

the ways while Miss Tredway could break the bottle of champagne and pronounce the ship's name. Miss Hull withdrew her name, and Miss Tredway had the honor alone.

Miss Tredway, who is but 15 years of age, was on hand bright and early on launching day. The word was given and she cut the string that started the big ship moving down the ways. Then she threw the bottle on the steel side. But it didn't break. The girl was so flustered over this failure that she forgot to pronounce the ship's name, and in a few seconds the new gunboat was in the water without champagne or name.

The gunboat was towed to a dock, where the girl climbed to her bow, and this time broke the bottle and said: "I christen thee *Dubuque*."

About 200 people witnessed the launching. After the ceremony Miss Tredway wept softly, despite the assurances of the naval officers present that the ceremony was just as good as if it had occurred on schedule time.

A dispatch from New York in 1904 declared that old sailors believed the *Dubuque* was "predestined to be unlucky" because Miss Tredway had failed to break the bottle of champagne over the vessel's bow at launching. The contractors, on the other hand, declared the gunboat was as near perfect as any boat in her class. Let us look at her record.

U.S.S. Dubuque

Few of the naval vessels named for Iowa towns have had longer or more useful careers than the *U.S.S. Dubuque*. Built at Morris Heights, New York, the *Dubuque* was launched on August 15,

1904. She was commissioned on May 31, 1905, as Gunboat Number 17, with Captain M. R. Wortley as her commanding officer. She cost (without armament) at commissioning approximately \$443,000. The *Dubuque* was 200 feet long, 35 feet in breadth of beam, drew $12\frac{1}{4}$ feet and displaced 1,085 tons. She had a 1,220 HP twin-screw engine that gave her a speed of 12.9 knots. Her crew consisted of eight officers and 190 men.

The *Dubuque* was called a "composite gunboat" and was attached to the Atlantic Fleet immediately after commissioning. During her first few years in service the *Dubuque* cruised up and down the Atlantic seaboard protecting American interests. In 1911 she was decommissioned and turned over to the Illinois naval militia at Chicago.

The *Dubuque* was recommissioned on August 4, 1914, and two months later went into service. She was placed in full commission on June 30, 1915, and was assigned to mine sweeping duty with the Atlantic Fleet during the perilous days of World War I. Six months after the signing of the Armistice, on May 27, 1919, the *Dubuque* was decommissioned once more. Subsequently she was fitted out for survey work and recommissioned, only to go out of commission on July 27, 1919. Her designation was changed to AG6 (Auxiliary Miscellaneous) and on April 3, 1922, she was assigned to the Ninth Naval District at Detroit for

training Michigan naval reserves. She remained on this duty until 1941.

On July 1, 1941, a few months before the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor, the *Dubuque* was recommissioned as Gunboat PG17 and put into service as a gunnery practice ship for the Armed Guard School at the Naval Section Base, Little Creek, Virginia. Although thirty-seven years old at the opening of World War II, the *Dubuque* spent her remaining career training Armed Guard gunners. Armed with one 5-inch 38 caliber gun, two 4-inch 50 caliber guns, one 3-inch 50 caliber gun, and three 20 millimeter mounts, the *Dubuque* kept her guns barking almost daily until Germany and Japan surrendered, when gunnery training was curtailed. The *Dubuque* was decommissioned at the Charleston, South Carolina, Navy Yard on September 7, 1945, after more than forty years of faithful service to the United States Navy. Her commanding officer at the time of decommissioning was Lieutenant Commander L. J. Perry. Apparently the ancient craft still had some value, for in July, 1947, she was sold to private interests.

U.S.S. Keokuk

Like the *Dubuque* (although launched ten years later) the *U.S.S. Keokuk* saw service in both World War I and World War II. She was originally christened the *S.S. Henry M. Flagler* and served as a merchant vessel until inducted into

war service. The ship was built by William Cramp & Sons of Philadelphia in 1914. She was 336 feet long, 59 feet beam, 18 feet depth of hold, and grossed 2,699 tons. During World War I the Navy tabbed her the "struggle buggy" for her tireless work in hauling freight cars to Europe.

For several years after World War I, the *Flagler* ferried box cars between Key West and Havana. Sometime during this period she became known as the *S.S. Columbia Heights*. Then the Navy, eager to expand its strength in all ship categories before the outbreak of World War II, once more acquired the old vessel on July 28, 1941. The staunchness of this redoubtable craft is attested by the fact that she still operated with her original engines and boilers and was destined to do so throughout World War II.

On February 28, 1942, the commissioning pennant was run up on the ex-merchantman *Henry M. Flagler* at Hoboken, New Jersey, the Navy renaming her the *U.S.S. Keokuk* and classifying her as a net-laying auxiliary. During World War II the *Keokuk* had her serial number and duty changed several times — although her identification continued to honor the Gate City of Iowa. Her work was both varied and dangerous, including mine laying in the Atlantic and off the coast of Africa and Sicily, and operations at Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. Few vessels of a similar class can be singled out by the Navy as contributing so

nobly to the winning of World War II. Little wonder that the *Keokuk* should be hailed as the "fleet workhorse" by admiring Navy men.

After a trial run on the Hudson River, the U.S.S. *Keokuk* was redesignated as CM8 (minelayer) and made ready for the rapidly expanding minecraft program, then being given high priority. According to the Navy Department:

As a minelayer the *Keokuk* participated in virtually all of the Atlantic and European campaigns, gaining a record of submarine scares, air threats, near bomb misses, and the hazards of the sea. She sowed extensive mine fields in several areas, including Port of Spain, Trinidad, the Florida Keys and Cape Hatteras on the Eastern seaboard.

First cruise of the *Keokuk* as a naval vessel was from New York City to Norfolk, Virginia, beginning March 17, 1942. A later trip took her to Trinidad, British West Indies, and in 1943 she made two voyages to Africa, the first marked by an aerial attack by German four-engine bombers. During this period a mine field was laid off Casablanca.

The ship was underway July 6, 1943, for Sicily along with her sister ships, the minelayers U.S.S. *Salem* and U.S.S. *Weehawken*. Frequent air attacks were the rule at Sicily, where Nazi land-based aircraft "continually gave them a bad time." One attack blew up a nearby Allied munitions ship.

A highlight in the old ship's career occurred in July, 1943, when a 21-mile mine field — the longest of the war — was laid between Gela and Licata during the Sicily operation.

With the surrender of Italy the *Keokuk* re-

turned to the United States, where she was reclassified in October, 1943, as the AKN4 — a net cargo ship. The *Keokuk* left Norfolk for the Pacific, arriving at Pearl Harbor on December 21, for duty under the Commander Minecraft Pacific. From February to mid-April, 1944, the remodeled *Keokuk* engaged in net-laying activities at Majuro, Kwajalein, and Eniwetok. The *Keokuk* then returned to the United States to load a new type of net designed for use in amphibious operations, using it successfully during the June 15 landings at Saipan. The *Keokuk* repeated her efforts during the September, 1944, landings at Palau and in later operations at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. According to the Navy Department:

At Iwo Jima a two-man Japanese Kamikaze plane struck the *Keokuk's* starboard side aft, resulting in a severe explosion and numerous blazes, but the fires were extinguished within an hour by officers and men trained to control battle damages.

Personnel casualties suffered in this action were 18 dead and 43 wounded. Temporary repairs were received in the Philippines, and the *Keokuk* later took part in the Okinawa operation.

After completing her mission to Okinawa the *Keokuk* returned to Pearl Harbor where she was repaired in the Navy Yard. Soon she was underway again with all types of net material she had loaded aboard at the Net Depot in Pearl Harbor, all of which were sorely needed for net repairs at

the large fleet anchorage at Ulithi. She arrived at Ulithi on July 13 and promptly commenced making net repairs. Her work completed on July 25, the *Keokuk* returned to Pearl Harbor, receiving word en route of the Japanese peace negotiations. The *Keokuk* arrived at Pearl Harbor on August 10, and while anchored there, her crew heard that the war had ended. Her work done, the *Keokuk* set sail for San Francisco, where she was shortly decommissioned. In March, 1947, the *Keokuk* was disposed of by the War Shipping Administration, after a thirty-two-year career as merchant vessel, as carferry, and as "fleet workhorse" in the United States Navy.

U.S.S. Burlington

It would be impracticable to give brief biographies of all the ships during World War II that were named for Iowa cities and towns. Their duties were as varied as the men and women of the Hawkeye State who saw service on the seven seas in the thousands of vessels, large and small, that combined their efforts to bring victory to our armed forces on so many farflung battlefronts.

The story of the *U.S.S. Burlington* is typical. Built at Los Angeles by the Consolidated Steel Company, the *Burlington's* keel was laid on October 19, 1943, two weeks after United States warships bombarded Japanese-held Wake Island. The ship was launched on December 7, just two

years after the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The *Burlington* was commissioned as PF51 (frigate) on March 31, 1944, two days after the Navy raided Palau Island. She was sponsored by Mrs. Florence E. Conrad, wife of the mayor of Burlington, Iowa. Lieutenant Commander Edgar V. Carlson of the United States Coast Guard served as her first commanding officer.

The facts of the *Burlington* were similar to those of other vessels of her class — she was 304 feet long, 38 feet beam, measured 1,190 tons, and cost \$3,022,000. She was armed with three 3-inch 50 caliber guns, 40 millimeter and 20 millimeter anti-aircraft guns, and she had a speed of 20 knots. The *Burlington* served exclusively in the Pacific during World War II.

Leaving San Pedro, California, on July 27, 1944, the *Burlington* stopped at Espirito Santo on August 14 before proceeding to the Southwest Pacific via Cairns, Australia. She at once plunged into the operations that culminated in the invasion of Morotai Island on September 15, and was hotly engaged in antiaircraft action off that island the following day.

The *Burlington* then went to the Philippines, where she participated in the invasion of Leyte — October 16 to 28 — the greatest naval action of all time — 166 United States ships against 65 Japanese. The *Burlington* saw more action against Japanese aircraft off Leyte Island on November

12, 1944. She returned to the New Guinea area on November 30, 1944, and departed for the United States on December 2, 1944, by way of Manus and Pearl Harbor. Lieutenant B. K. Cook of the U. S. Coast Guard Reserve became commanding officer of the *Burlington* on December 16, 1944, and he endeared himself to his men by arriving at San Francisco on Christmas Day.

After an all too brief respite, for the nation was still grimly engaged in war, the *Burlington* departed for Adak in the Aleutians and remained on patrol duty there until July 6, 1945, when she returned to Seattle. The *Burlington* was turned over to Soviet Russia on lend-lease, a small albeit important part of the \$9,128,875,000 worth of goods that went to that nation during World War II. She arrived at Petropavlovsk, Siberia, on September 5, 1945. The *Burlington* was returned to the United States on November 14, 1949, at Yokosuka, Japan, and placed on the active list from August, 1950, to August, 1952. She was stricken from the Navy List in May, 1953, after which she was transferred to Colombia on June 26, 1953.

The combined contributions of the *Dubuque*, the *Burlington*, and the *Keokuk* were both numerous and varied. Their experiences cover a half century of time, serving the nation both in war and in peace. During the course of their wanderings they visited every ocean and touched all continents. To Iowans — whether dwelling on the At-

lantic or Pacific coasts, or at the four corners of the globe — their sudden appearance must have brought back nostalgic memories as they saw these namesakes of our Iowa cities drop their anchors in faraway ports.

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