The First Battleship
By Brad Goforth

She was the first “real” battleship in the U.S. Navy. She led the way in shipbuilding design for those that followed. Crewmembers serving aboard were awarded the Medal of Honor. She was damaged in battle. She led the way in radio control. She was USS Iowa. Not BB-61, but BB-4.

Many people don’t really know much about the contributions of USS Iowa, BB-4. Yet in many ways she left just as lasting a legacy as any ship in the Navy. In 1892, Congress authorized a new warship of 9,100 tons. In particular, they were looking for a new design – an update from the previous Indiana class of coastal battleships which had not been designed to operate in a deep ocean environment. They also had problems with endurance and speed. In this case, they asked for a ship that could sail and fight effectively in deep ocean waters.

Iowa’s keel was laid by William Cramp and Sons of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on August 5th, 1893. The shipyard also built the coal-powered, 11,000 hp triple expansion reciprocating steam engines. She would be a coal burning ship carrying 1,628 tons of coal. Her design was based on the earlier Indiana-class with a similar armament layout, incorporating four hydraulically powered 12-inch guns in twin turrets fore and aft, supplemented by four twin 8-inch turrets (two on each side). The vessel had a higher freeboard and a longer hull and forecastle. This resulted in a more stable and seaworthy ship. The raised freeboard also made the gunnery area drier, reducing the risk of malfunctions due to wet weather. By utilizing the Harvey process (a type of steel armor developed in the early 1890s in which the front surfaces of the plates were case hardened), Iowa’s armor was thinner but stronger than the nickel-steel compound armor used in the Indianas. Compared to British warships, Iowa would have excellent speed (18 knots) and would be 3,600 tons lighter.

Iowa was launched on March 28th, 1896. She was sponsored by the daughter of the Governor of Iowa, Miss Mary Lord Drake. Miss Drake later commissioned the vessel on June 16th, 1897, with Captain William T. Sampson in command. It was just in time. The Spanish American War had just begun. Almost immediately after her shakedown cruise, Iowa was ordered to blockade duty off Santiago de Cuba. Under the command of Captain Robley D.
“Fighting Bob” Evans, she participated in the naval bombardment of the fort near Santiago.

Iowa’s first CO (now Rear Admiral Sampson) was put in charge of the naval blockade off Santiago. His plan was for blockading ships to wait 6 nautical miles out from Santiago harbor during the day. It was later tightened to 4 nautical miles. At night or in bad weather, the ships were brought in even closer to prevent escapes. In June, 1898, Sampson headed one squadron which included New York, Iowa, Oregon, New Orleans, Mayflower, and Porter, while Commodore Winfield Scott Schley headed a second “Flying Squadron” of Brooklyn, Massachusetts, Texas, Marblehead, and Vixen. The squadrons blocked both sides of the harbor. According to Iowa’s Captain Evans, by June 10th, Spanish warships in Cuba’s Santiago harbor were “neatly bottled up.”

On Sunday morning, July 3rd, 1898, there were partly cloudy skies with fairly calm water when Iowa sighted six Spanish warships steaming out of Santiago harbor in a southwesterly direction. Iowa signaled other American ships at 0930. USS Iowa fired the first shot in the Battle of Santiago. Iowa along with Indiana, Texas, Oregon and Brooklyn chased the Spanish cruisers, engaging in a brief but intense naval battle off the shores of Cuba. In the 20-minute sea battle with Infanta Maria Teresa and Almirante Oquendo, Iowa’s effective fire set both ships aflame and drove them on the beach. The continuing fire from both fleets was fast and furious with Iowa as a significant player throughout the battle.

As a result of the battle, a dangerous fire in Iowa’s lower decks occurred threatening lethal explosions. Fast and brave work by Fireman Robert Penn extinguished the blaze, sparing the ship. He was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism.

U.S. warships continued to pursue the fleeing Spanish. Iowa and Gloucester sank the Spanish destroyer Pluton and damaged her sister Furor to the point where the Spanish warship ran aground. Colon was beached as well. Iowa then pursued Vizcaya and ran her aground. When Spanish sailors on the beaches were being threatened by Cuban irregulars, Captain Evans sent a boat ashore to protect the captured sailors.

When Vizcaya exploded and beached at Playa de Aserraderos, Iowa lowered boats to rescue Spanish crewmen from shark-infested waters. Iowa received on board Spanish Admiral Pascual Cervera and the officers and crews of Vizcaya, Furor, and Pluton. Vizcaya’s Captain Don Antonio Eulate was soaked in oil and wearing a sooty, bloodstained bandage about
the head. The captured captain tried to offer his sword as a gesture of surrender but it was returned to him by Captain Evans.

At one point Iowa’s Captain Evans directed Harvard to rescue prisoners. In the end, Iowa and several other American warships were crowded with prisoners. A pig was even rescued from Co-lon. There were 1,612 Spanish sailors became U.S. prisoners of war until subsequent release during a prisoner exchange. It was a decisive victory for the U.S. Navy.

After the battle, Iowa left Cuban waters for New York City, arriving on August 20th. While being towed by four tugboats to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Iowa nearly collided with the cruiser Chicago, after a hawser attached to one tugboat broke. A new hawser was hurriedly run out to Iowa’s bow, preventing the collision.

On October 12th, Iowa departed for the Pacific, sailing via the Straits of Magellan at Cape Horn (the Panama Canal had not been completed). While stationed in Valparaíso, Chile, around December 17th, and later at Callao, Peru, December 26th, the sailors of Iowa and USS Oregon provided onboard entertainment for audiences including select sailors from the navies of Chile and Peru, as a way to ease tensions following the conflict over Cuba. The self-described “Iowa Minstrels” made a “melange of music, melody, and mirth” featuring a written program which included such entertainment as an overture, juggling, acrobatics, a “gifted Hibernian orator”, comic sketches, singing, and banjo playing. Iowa finally arrived at San Francisco, California, on February 7th, 1899. While in port, the crew presented Captain Evans with a new sword bearing the inscription “To our hero—Too just to take a fallen foe’s—We give this sword instead.” The captain thanked his crew for their bravery and respect. The battleship then steamed to Bremerton, Washington, where she entered drydock on June 11th.
After refit, Iowa served in the Pacific Squadron for two years under the command of Captain Goodrich. During that time they conducted training cruises, drills, and target practice. On August 1, 1900, the British cruiser HMS Phaeton narrowly avoided colliding with Iowa in the straits near Victoria, British Columbia, during a dense fog (this was well before the advent of radar). On January 25th, 1905, five of her crew—Fireman 1st Class Frederick Behne, Seaman 1st Class Heinrich Behnke, Fireman 1st Class DeMetri Corahorgi, Watertender Patrick Bresnahan, Boilermaker Edward Floyd, and Chief Watertender Johannes J. Johannessen—received the Medal of Honor for “extraordinary heroism” after a manhole plate of one of Iowa’s main boilers blew open. Their actions spared the ship and crew further disaster.

Iowa returned to the Atlantic in 1902, to become flagship of the South Atlantic Squadron. She then went to New York, arriving February, 1903, and was decommissioned in June.

Iowa recommissioned on December 23rd, 1903, and joined the North Atlantic Squadron. She participated in the John Paul Jones Commemoration ceremonies on June 30th, 1905. On 23 June, Iowa was serviced in the newly built floating dry dock Dewey. Iowa remained in the North Atlantic until she was placed in reserve on July 6th, 1907. (Note: Future Admiral Raymond A. Spruance served on Iowa during that time.) Iowa decommissioned again at Philadelphia, on July 23rd, 1908.

Iowa was recommissioned once again on May 2nd, 1910, with a new “cage” mainmast, and served as an at-sea training ship of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet for Naval Academy Midshipmen. On May 13th, 1911, at sea 55 nautical miles east of Cape Charles, Virginia, she and another vessel rescued passengers from the sinking Ward liner Merida after it collided with the United Fruit Company’s steamship Admiral Farragut in dense fog. All 319 passengers on Merida were rescued. During the next four years, she made training cruises to Northern Europe and participated in the Naval Review at Philadelphia from 10–15 October, 1912. She decommissioned at Philadelphia Navy Yard on May 27th, 1914.

Just prior to the First World War, Iowa was placed in limited commission. After serving as Receiving Ship at Philadelphia for six months, she was sent to Hampton Roads and remained...
there for the duration of the war, training men for other ships of the Fleet, and performing guard duty at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay. She was decommissioned for the final time after the armistice on March 31st, 1919.

On April 30th, 1919, Iowa was renamed Coast Battleship No. 4. This freed her name for one of six new South Dakota class battleships (which were later cancelled by the Washington Naval Treaty).

As Coastal Battleship No. 4, she was fitted with additional radio gear and became the first radio-controlled target ship to be used in a fleet exercise. At the Philadelphia Navy Yard, workers removed the ship’s guns, sealed compartments, and installed water pumps to slow the sinking process and enable a longer target session. The radio control gear, had been developed by the well known radio engineer, John Hays Hammond, Jr.

Coastal Battleship 4 ran trials off Chesapeake Bay in 1920, with the battleship Ohio serving as control ship. Once underway, the crew left the ship in small boats and she was fully controlled by radio signals. She returned to active service in April, 1922, in

One item of note. Although the later Iowa carries the nickname of “The Big Stick,” USS Iowa (BB-4) was not a part of the Great White Fleet. By that time, Iowa had already been placed in reserve and was decommissioned for a short period. But the name still fits. The Great White Fleet was comprised of ships built after the Spanish American War, and Iowa had been the blueprint for every ship in that fleet. She had taken the U.S. Navy from a coastal force to a deep ocean navy. She had set new standards for speed, armor, engineering and crew habitability. The ships of the “Big Stick” sent round the world were her offspring. Without Iowa, the Great White Fleet might not have sailed.

So when we think of the battleship Iowa as a museum in San Pedro, California, it is good to remember that the name she bears has a most impressive heritage. Both did more than their part to make the United States Navy what it is today.
USS Iowa (BB-4) Suffers Gun Explosion

Twelve-Inch Gun Bursts on USS Iowa; Three Men Dead

A disastrous explosion occurred on the battleship Iowa to-day when the vessel was at target practice in the Gulf (of Mexico). The forward port twelve-inch gun burst from the premature explosion of a shell, twelve feet of the piece outside of the turret being demolished. Three men were killed and five injured, two of them seriously. The killed are:
First-Class Seaman Kiele
Ordinary Seaman Purcell
Gunner’s Mate Berry
The injured:
First-Class Seaman Caught.
Ordinary Seamen Thursdale, Brown, Mansdale and Purcker

Seaman Walter F. Kiele, one of the men killed, was related to A. Moore of St. Charles, Mo., whose name is given in the man’s record as next of kin.

The seamen killed and injured were on the second or gun deck, at mess. Three pieces of the exploded gun each, weighing over a ton, passed downward through the spar deck, falling upon the men at mess, killing instantly the three men named.

All of the men were terribly mutilated from being crushed by the heavy projectiles. The steel fragments, after passing through the gun deck, continued down to the third deck, where they came in contact with the armored or protected deck, the steel bringing the big pieces to a stop, thus saving the mass of engineers and firemen who were at work below in the fire and engine rooms.

Although the upper decks were crowded with men, no one received injuries, except some scratches. The men in the turret felt but little of the explosion in the gun. The explosion occurred at 12:05 o’clock pm, just as the mess call had been sounded. Firing was to have ceased with the firing of the forward and port guns for the dinner hour. The range had been set for 1,700 yards and the Iowa was steaming along at a speed of twelve knots an hour, when Lieutenant Reed, in charge of the forward twelve-inch turret, gave orders to load and fire. The time fuse was cut out for the range and the piece charged, breech closed, and the word given to fire. Following the report of the gun was a second, the smothered report of the shell as it exploded almost midway in the gun.

Pieces of the burst gun and shell went through the air with a noise as if the ship was being fired upon by a hostile fleet. Three great holes through the deck showed the course of the pieces which went downward, and for a few moments afterward officers and men were dazed. Then those who were below began streaming up on the deck, some bleeding and mutilated, while lying on the floor crushed almost beyond recognition, were the three unfortunate men.

The Massachusetts, six mile distant, was signaled for assistance and one of the two cutters put off with a surgeon and assistants. The wounded men were taken back to the hospital or sick ward and their injuries cared for, while the dead were laid out and the Iowa steamed up to the city, where a report was made to Adjutant Higginson.

Opinions differ among the officers as to the cause of the explosion, some claiming a defect in the shell, while others think the frequent firing- of the pieces at Culebra last winter, added to the work done hero for the last ten days, so strained the piece that the force of the charge burst the gun. Had the explosion occurred five minutes later, when more than 230 men would have been sitting under the piece at mess, the casual-
ties would have been ten times as great.

The damage to the battleship Iowa as a result of the explosion cannot be estimated. The decks are torn up, strained and bent, the gun almost completely demolished, or so badly injured as to have to be replaced, and the turret strained. The protected deck, it is thought, is not materially damaged. Some of the deck fixtures were carried away, and other slighter damage was done.

It is difficult to imagine how a similar incident could happen aboard a same named ship, in the same month, in the same area, nearly 80 years later. It reminds us of the sometimes dangerous situations America’s servicemembers face on occasion while serving their country, both in peace and war. Their courage and dedication to their country and service commands all our respect and appreciation. - Editor.

Clockwise from top: One of Iowa’s 4-inch guns and crew. Battle damage from the Battle of Santiago. Peeling spuds for a meal. Captain “Fighting Bob” Evans, CO during the Spanish American War. The Iowa galley. (All Detroit Photographic Co. public domain)
My Dad’s, (John “Jack” Berkery) uniform recently resurfaced. A cousin found it in a closet when we sold the family home in Troy, NY, some time ago.

He died in 1975 and Mom kept it all those years. He served aboard the USS Iowa from the initial shakedown to the end of WW II. He got to stand topside and watch the Japanese surrender. He never talked about the war much, but had a couple stories about shooting down a kamakazi with a 40mm and having a 5 inch shell go right through a bulkhead within inches of his head. Not much else.

It has a couple moth holes and the white trim has yellowed but it’s otherwise in good condition. He’s wearing it in their 1945 wedding photo above.

Jack Berkery in Latham, NY

On January 7, 1944 the USS Iowa passed through the Panama Canal en route to the Pacific and the 3rd/5th Fleet. In 1952, I was aboard the Iowa as we passed through the canal from the Pacific to the Atlantic. On our way to the locks we went through fresh water. We used the occasion to thoroughly wash the ship with the fresh water. When passing through the locks we dropped huge fenders over the side to protect the locks as well as the Iowa. It is true, the Iowa class battleships were designed to go through the locks, but just barely. If the ship is absolutely perpendicular she will go through unscathed. Of course absolutely perpendicular is not possible. The fenders we used were actually huge hemp ropes about one foot in diameter. When we rubbed the fender would disintegrate and another fender would be dropped in its place.

During the Korean War we were not allowed to shut down all our engines. I mention this simply to illustrate what comes next. We were given liberty in Panama City. The powers to be decided this would be a good occasion to paint the Iowa’s stacks. Staging was provided for deck apes to sit their buts down, with their backs to the hot equatorial sun painting hot stacks from the powered engines. Of all the hot scenes my mind can conjure, this is absolutely the hottest.

Dale McKinnon
The Final Offload
USS Missouri

My job was to oversee the safety of the evolution. I did no handling of the ammunition and weapons. I was the Naval Weapons Station Explosives Safety Officer and I acted directly for the Weapons Station Commanding Officer (CO). I ensured that all Station Personnel and Missouri personnel were Qualified and Certified to handle ammunition, all Weapons and Ordnance Handling Equipment (WHE & OHE) including cranes & forklifts, dollies, etc. prior to the evolution according to the current regulations at that time. I would be with the evolution as long as they were swinging ammunition and missiles. If there were any problems relating to Ordnance Safety I could not solve or if there was any explosives accident or incident, I notified the CO immediately.

We would load/offload the gun ammunition and small arms inside the breakwater onto or off of lighters that were brought from the Weapons Station by tug. Floating cranes were used to move the ammo from ship to lighter or vice versa. The loaded lighters were then taken by tug to the Weapons Station pier where they were unloaded and ammunition and missiles were stored in magazines for further disposition. Most of the 16 inch shells, the 5 inch 38 Shells were shipped to either Crane, Indiana or the Army at Hawthorne, NV. for deep stow along with the powder charges and final disposition. There were many thousands of 5”/38 shells removed along with their charges, hundreds of 16” shells and charges and hundreds of 20mm bullets, small arms ammunition and grenades for anti-personnel actions.

The ship was then moved to a pier at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard where the Tomahawk Missiles in the Armored Box Launchers were removed by Rail Crane. The missiles are in a firing tube and are lifted by a Missile Handling Beam by the rail crane and then moved to a barge and lowered into a missile container. The container is closed, locked and the missiles are transported by tug to the Weapons Station. They will be stored in a magazine until further disposition - usually put back in service on another ship.

We had a crew of approximately 20 - 25 Ordnance Workers from the Weapons Station and many support military from the Missouri. The whole evolution took around 10 days to completely download the ship.

This was the only Iowa class ship at that time. In the past we also loaded/offloaded the USS New Jersey many times.

The final offload was in February of 1993. One other note I must tell you. Each 16 inch turret had the number of 16 inch shells that were fired by that turret in the Persian Gulf War. Number One Turret fired 285 rounds and the Number Two Turret fired 289 rounds. I did not get Turret three. I do have pictures of the evolution taken with my ordinary camera and getting the film developed.

Paul Pudenz
FROM THE EYE’S OF BM2 SCOTT RUE
19 APRIL 1989 - AND 24 YEARS LATER

By Dave Chambers

That tragic day on 19 April, 1989 is known by all of us who served onboard Battleship IOWA. Whether you were there that day or not, it has affected us all deeply, and many of us lost very close friends that day.

As reveille sounded that day BM2(SW) Scott Rue rolled out of his rack as usual and prepared for another routine day onboard IOWA with a General Quarters (GQ) and gunnery exercises. On deck, he held quarters with his men. It was a beautiful day at sea as many of us experienced in years past.

With quarters complete, Scott decided to take advantage of the great sunshine and photograph his men one at a time since there was a short time before GQ would be called to order. After all of the pictures had been taken he told his men to go ahead and man the battle stations and ready for gunnery exercises. As good sailors do, they proceeded—all except one. BMSN Bob Gideon. When Scott asked him what was going on he responded, “I don’t want to go because something bad is going to happen.” Petty Officer Rue assured him all was okay and that we had done this a thousand times before. Gideon said okay and manned his station in Turret Two. Scott went to his gunnery station in Mount 56, the furthest mount from Turret Two. Out of the fifteen men whose photos Rue took that day, Gideon was the only one that came out in double exposure with an eerie mist.

Everything seemed normal, until Rue heard the muffle of the 16” gun which sounded unfamiliar. He described as the sound of a “firecracker going off in a can.” Then they smelled smoke in Mount 56. The rest of the day was almost a blur. At one point, according to Rue, he saw the carnage left by the explosion – people from the damage control teams trying to put out the fires, medical personnel trying to help where they could, removing fellow shipmates to check for signs of life or, finding none, respectfully placing their fallen comrades out of the way and then returning to the scene and repeating the process again and again.

Rue saw that the hatch for the turret was not where it was supposed to be, the smoke pouring from the giant structure. Minutes later, Petty Officer Rue headed to the repair locker to help retrieve additional fire hose when he tripped over a line on the deck. At that point he said, “It seemed that I was in slow motion and I was twisting as I fell.” Hitting the deck he fell unconscious, “for how long I don’t know,” he said. When he awoke, “all I heard was the names of missing sailors names being called over the 1MC.” At that moment he said, “I began to cry uncontrollably.”

Later that day as things became more controlled the mood solemn, Rue noticed a sadness in the crew. “There were no discussions or the usual chatter on the mess decks.” But what he does recall is the smell. “It was in everything. There’s no way to describe the smells of something like that. I’ve never experienced it before or after that day,” he said. The smell stayed for several days. “Once you’ve experienced that, it just doesn’t go away.”

As the ship returned to port, there were no welcome home festivities as usual. It was quiet and those on the pier were anxious to see both the sailors who had survived and to simply go to the place See SCOTT, page 12
Talking To The Iowa BB’s

By Dave Glow, AA1VX

As a point of background, I first became interested in listening to shortwave radio way back in 1963 when I was in my early teens. Besides listening to Shortwave Broadcast broadcast stations around the world, I soon discovered I could listen to lot of USN ships using their onboard MARS (Military Affiliate Radio Stations) to pass messages back and forth to families ashore. Since I was just a listener at the time, and most MARS stations didn’t have their own reception verification cards (QSL cards), I would make one up and send it to the ship for signature, along with a return envelope. I was really proud to log with the New Jersey (NNN0CNH) in April 1984, the Iowa (NNN0CMD) in December 1989, the Wisconsin (NNN0CW1) in January 1990, and finally the Missouri (NNN0CKK) in June 1990, to complete the official “Iowa Sweep”. Those cards are still prized items in my collection.

Around 2001, I was given a complete set of ham radio equipment by a neighbor. Although I had a ham license, I had never been on the air, as I didn’t have a transmitter. So, I set everything up and started tuning around. Unbelievably, the very first station I ever talked to on the radio was NJ2BB. “Wayne” was operating the USS New Jersey ham radio station on Memorial Day weekend, May 26, 2001. I was using just a long wire antenna, but he heard me loud and clear. My hands were shaking throughout the contact! In the years since then, I’ve made over 10,000 contacts with hams around the world. The NJ2BB confirmation card I received for my contact was my very first one as a ham radio operator.

Since my late uncle, LCDR Lewis Glow, served aboard the New Jersey in the Main Battery 16” turrets during WW2 and Korea, he spoke to me often about his experiences aboard and he always had a special place in his heart for BB-62. When the New Jersey first opened as a museum, I sent a couple of thousand 35mm slides and other BB-62 memorabilia to The Jerseyman in care of Master Chief Tom Helvig. In our name, Tom then converted all the slides to digital and donated all of it to the ship’s museum in the name of my late Uncle, LCDR Lewis Glow.

In recent years, I’ve spoken to the New Jersey operators at NJ2BB many times, and most often when the worldwide “Museum Ships on the Air” event occurs each July. One of the operators, Harry Bryant, became a very good friend of mine and gave me a guided tour in 2006 when I was finally able to visit and to visit my Uncle’s ship, and walk the same passageways… a thrill that is hard to describe.

To me, it’s a major blessing that the Iowa class battleships have all been preserved as well as they have. On July 22, 2001 I contacted N4WIS aboard USS Wisconsin on 10 meters, and on July 20, 2002 we made contact on 20 meters with KH6BB, the USS Missouri in Pearl Harbor. Both of these contacts were during “Ships on the Air” weekend events. Finally, I was also one of the few hams lucky enough to contact USS Iowa on May 18, 2012 on 15 meters. This was when the visiting UC Berkeley Amateur Radio Club operated from the bridge of Battleship Iowa as W6BB and while the ship was being fitted for her voyage to San Pedro. Since then, Battleship Iowa has established her own ham station, NI6BB. I am looking forward to contacting that station again, and soon, for yet another “Iowa Sweep”.

W6BB ONBOARD BB-61
SPECIAL EVENT STATION 5/18/2012
U.C. BERKELEY ARC

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SOURCE:
U.S. NAVAL PROVING GROUND, DAHLGREN, VIRGINIA, REPORT #5-47, “BALLISTIC TESTS AND METALLUGICAL EXAMINATION OF JAPANESE HEAVY ARMOR PLATE” (November 1947)

SUBJECT:
Test of 26” Class “A” Main Armament Turret Face (Port) Plate, originally for IJN SHINANO, the third Japanese YAMATO-Class super-battleship (converted into an aircraft carrier, instead, and sunk on its way to final fitting out yard by a U.S. submarine), which made up far left side of turret face looking from inside turret out of gun port, with “D”-shaped cutout making up about half of left curved gun port forming center of long right side of plate.

PLATE MATERIAL:
Japanese Vickers Hardened (VH) face-hardened, non-cemented armor (used only on YAMATO-Class battleships) The plate was hit with a 16” armor piercing projectile from fired from guns identical to those on an Iowa Class battleship. It is on display in the Washington Navy Yard.

where their loved one had given the last measure. While the ship had transited for several days from off Puerto Rico back to Norfolk, Casualty Assistance Calls Officers (CACOs) had been contacting the families of those who had perished. It had been an unfortunate thing that although the ship had allowed each crewmember to send out a short message to families saying they were safe, the messages didn’t get through the system until after the ship had returned home. Hundreds of anxious families were waiting on the pier. The decision was made that the families of the fallen shipmates would be let aboard first, then the rest came aboard.

Also on the pier were nearly 50 satellite television trucks. The media watched as the families went aboard.

Years have passed since then. Scott Rue is a successful small business owner. But that day has not left his memory. The nightmares are real. Many of us experience the waking in a cold sweat reliving the event that are forever embedded in our minds. The horror is always there, but the good memories of those we served with are also there and never forgotten.

24 YEARS LATER…

It was a Sunday night, and I, Dave Chambers along with my wife were rushing one of our Italian Greyhounds to the emergency room at our veterinarian. Stopped at a red light, this guy pulls up next to me motioning me to roll down my window. I complied. He asked me if I served on IOWA when he
saw my IOWA Veterans Association bumper sticker. I told him yes and he asked me to pull over. I told him where I was headed and he made the illegal turn and followed me to the animal hospital. My wife rushed the dog inside when Scott and I jumped out of our vehicles and we came face to face. Simultaneously, we shouted, “I know you!” I said, “You are BM2 Scott Rue,” and he responded, “You are YN1 Dave Chambers.” We stood in the parking lot and spoke loudly of our adventures on Battleship IOWA. Inside, my vet who is a retired Army Airborne Colonel asked my wife what was going on in the parking lot and she told him some guy followed us there. As he headed to the door to take care of the situation, my wife then told him it was ok as we served together in the Navy. Scott and I continued our discussion and shared phone numbers.

I left IOWA a few months prior to the explosion after being selected for Chief and as a Limited Duty Officer (LDO). As Ship’s Secretary for Captains Seaquist and Moosally, I dealt with the boat crews regularly and Scott was always available when needed.

Since that evening, Scott and I have rekindled our shipmate status. In fact, he lives just down the street from me, which we did not know. My wife graduated a year before him in the same high school which we discovered after two months of our reunion, and then as he and I were going to introduce my wife and his girl friend, before we could say anything they said hi to each other by name. Come to find out they were close friends in high school. Our families shared Christmas Eve this year and it is nice have an IOWA shipmate here in this small town on the west coast. Scott and I talk every day and always have a “sea story” to share.

**MY PRIDE IN SCOTT**

Last year on Scott’s birthday, his girlfriend, Cara, went to the local American Legion post and paid to have an artist who is a Vietnam Veteran paint a blue silhouette of the IOWA with the number 47 above it with wings as a memorial to those who gave it all that dreadful day. Scott said it was the greatest gift he could ever receive.

But Scott wasn’t ready to stop there. His goal was to raise money and have a placard of each of the

47 placed on the tile. So, he reached out to Battleship Sailors where he received some funds but not near enough to cover the cost.

That didn’t stop Rue. He went to the local newspaper and told them the story of how he and I reunited in this small town in order to peak interest. The next thing you know, we are being interviewed for a two page spread in the paper telling our story. We used the opportunity to tell the community about the “IOWA 47” and what it meant to share this memorial. In order to ensure that the community was certain the funds were being properly spent, Scott had arranged to have a special fund set up by the Treasurer at the American Legion with the caveat that once enough money was raised to pay for the placards that remaining funds would go to the Wounded Warriors Project. Within days the goal was met, all of the 47 names were placed on the tile and to this day funds continue to come in to the American Legion.

Because of Scott’s drive and determination to provide a memorial to our shipmates in this small town we live, he has made me proud and the readers of this article and all IOWA Sailors past and present should share this pride.
Kilroy is Still Here
By Bill Lee

World War II veterans, including crew members of the USS WEST POINT well remember when this image magically and mysteriously popped up in a wide variety of places. Several versions of its origin have been passed down, but like all urban legends, none of them can be verified.

During the 1940’s, Kilroy’s image appeared most often in military toilet facilities…along with far less innocent graffiti. Some of the earliest versions of this cartoon-like character apparently first appeared on military docks and onboard ships just before World War II commenced.

Long before the slang term ‘going viral’ became commonplace, Kilroy spread like wildfire; carried to all corners of the world by American military personnel. When troops embarked in the WEST POINT, they quickly found that Kilroy had preceded them. When soldiers marched into Paris, they found that Kilroy had already left his mark on the Arc de Triomphe. This sort of discovery was repeated over and over again, worldwide. More than once, a newspaper would report that when a pregnant woman was wheeled into the delivery room, hospital staff would find ‘Kilroy was here’ written on their swollen stomachs. Kilroy may have even made it to the Potsdam Conference in 1945.

When exiting a bathroom reserved for the exclusive use by President Truman, Prime Minister Atlee and Dictator Joseph Stalin, the latter reportedly asked: “Who is Kilroy?”

During the war, the image apparently mystified both German and Japanese intelligence officers. They thought it was some sort of coded symbol; unappreciative of the American soldiers’ irrepressible sense of the absurd. This fad largely died out after the war. But veterans who now visit the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC are often delighted to discover that Kilroy got there before them. The creators of that impressive memorial wisely included this familiar image in an out-of-the way corner.
Heinrich Behnke
Medal of Honor

Heinrich Behnke was born April 10, 1882, in Germany. After immigrating to the United States he joined the navy in 1902, in Washington, D.C. He was stationed aboard the USS Iowa (BB-4) as a seaman first class when, on January 25, 1905, a manhole plate blew out of boiler D. For his actions received the Medal of Honor March 20, 1905. His Medal of Honor was awarded for actions during Peace Time.

His award reads:

“The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Seaman First Class Heinrich Behnke, United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism in the line of his profession while serving aboard the U.S.S. Iowa. Seaman First Class Behnke displayed extraordinary heroism at the time of the blowing out of the manhole plate of boiler D on board that vessel, 25 January, 1905.”

While at sea the manhole plate of the boiler aboard U.S.S. Iowa blew out, endangering the ship. Fireman First Class Heinrich Behnke was one of six sailors of the ships crew who received the Medal of Honor for displaying extraordinary heroism in the effort to save the U.S.S. Iowa and avert disaster or loss of life.

Others receiving Medals of Honor in this action were: Fireman First class Frederick Behne, Watertender Patrick Bresnahan, Fireman First Class Demetri Corahorgi, Boilermaker Edward Floyd, and Chief Watertender Johannes Johannessen.

Behnke retired at the rank of Chief Water Tender and died June 19, 1952, at the age of 70. He is buried in Long Island National Cemetery, Farmingdale, New Y ork.

Editor’s Note: The Navy has a long history of men who have served “above and beyond the call of duty.” Their actions inspire us and often we remember these brave individuals by naming ships after them. Beginning with this issue, we will highlight a recipient of the Medal of Honor so that we may remember their contributions to our nation and service.

Remember this? The Ed Sullivan Show was taped aboard USS Iowa in the late 1950s while in New York harbor. Courtesy CBS.
Wonderful Memories
By Brad Goforth and Dave Chambers

I was dismayed recently when, on a comedy radio program, people were asked to send in the names of America’s best comedians of all time. Lots of names came up – all funny and most one of the more recent additions to the comedy experience in the United States. Yet one name stood out for not being on that list. It was obvious that no one had asked any of the soldiers, sailors or marines over the past 60 years. The outcome would have been entirely different.

Born as Leslie Townes Hope in 1903, Bob Hope was as the king of American comedy for decades. Yet he wasn’t originally an American. Hope spent his first years of life in England, where his father worked as a stone-mason. In 1907, Hope came to the United States and his family settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Hope said “I left England at the age of four when I found out I couldn’t be King.” His large family, which included six brothers, struggled financially in Hope’s younger years, so Hope worked a number of jobs, ranging from a soda jerk to a shoe salesman, to help ease the family financial strain.

Looking for anything to earn a living, he took dancing lessons and developed an act with his girlfriend, Mildred Rosequist, while a teenager. The pair played local vaudeville theaters for a time. Once bitten by the showbiz bug, Hope next partnered up with friend Lloyd Durbin for a two-man dance routine. After Durbin died on the road of food poisoning, Hope joined forces with George Byrne. Hope and Byrne landed some work with film star Fatty Arbuckle and made it to Broadway in Sidewalks of New York in 1927.

By the early 1930s, Hope had gone solo. He attracted widespread notice for his role in the Broadway musical Roberta, which showcased his quick wit and superb comic timing. Around this time, Hope met singer Dolores Reade. The pair married in 1934. He again showed off his comedic talents in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1936. Later that year, Hope landed a leading part in Red, Hot and Blue, with Ethel Merman and Jimmy Durante.

In 1937, Hope got his first radio contract. He had his own show by the next year, which became a regular feature on Tuesday nights. Every week, listeners tuned in to hear Hope’s snappy one-liners and wise-cracks. He became one of radio’s most popular performers, and stayed on the air until the mid-1950s.

In the late 1930s, Hope made the jump to feature films. His first major role came in The Big Broadcast of 1938, in which he sang “Thanks for the Memory” with Shirley Ross. The song became his trademark tune. The following year, Hope starred in The Cat and the Canary, a hit comedic mystery. He played a sharp, smart-talking coward in this haunted house tale—a type of character he would play numerous times over his career.

In 1940, Hope made his first film with popular crooner Bing Crosby. The pair starred together as a pair of likeable con artists in The Road to Singapore with Dorothy Lamour playing their love interest. The duo proved to be box office gold. Hope and Crosby, who remained lifelong friends, made seven Road pictures together.

On his own and with Crosby, Hope starred in numerous hit comedies. But to the people in uniform, Bob Hope’s career began in 1940, when his sponsors told him they wanted him to leave the studio and do a remote broadcast from March Field, an air base in California. At first he wasn’t happy. “What for? There’s no war going on. Why drag the whole show
down there?” Hope asked. But the sponsor was adamant.

The next Tuesday, Hope found himself on a bus getting ready to start something that would change his life. The date was May 6, 1941. “From the moment we drove through the gate, we were mobbed by a bunch of homesick kids in badly fitting fatigues, screaming greetings,” he said. To Hope, the rules of comedy were suddenly changed. He and his troupe of entertainers represented everything the soldiers and sailors didn’t have – “home cooking, mother, and soft roommates,” he said. “Their real enemies were never the Germans or the Japanese – they were boredom, mud, officers, and abstinence. Any joke that touched those nerves was a sure thing.”

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Bob, ‘March Field’ Hope telling all aviators, while we can’t advise you how to protect your ‘chutes, there’s nothing like Pepsodent to protect your toots.” According to Hope, “The laughter was so loud I looked down to see if pants had fallen down.”

“One of the aviators took me for a plane ride this afternoon. I wasn’t frightened, but at two thousand feet one of my goose bumps bailed out.”

“I got goose bumps myself from the roar that followed that one. Then I started to understand. What I said coincided with what these guys were feeling, and laughter was the only way they could communicate how they felt to the rest of the country. I was their messenger boy – a ski nosed western union,” Hope said later on.

That was the start of a career that spanned over 60 years and “kept me eating regularly.” From that first remote broadcast, Hope and his troupe, including singers like Judy Garland and Francis Langford, a variety of other entertainers like guitarist Tony Romano, and his sidekick, “Professor” Jerry Colonna went from base to base bringing a little relief to the troops and letting the nation know that their sons and daughters were fine. Two years after that first taste of the military at March Field, Hope went to war, traveling with USO performers to bring the laughs to military personnel overseas, including stops in Europe.

In the summer of 1944 Bob Hope hopped from island to island in the South Pacific to entertain the troops. It was an emotional, as well as dangerous, journey for Hope and his colleagues. He logged over 30,000 miles and gave more than 150 performances. Accompanying Hope on the trip were “Professor” Colonna, guitarist Tony Romano, singer Frances Langford, dancer Patty Thomas, and gag-writer and Hope chum, Barney Dean. From then on, the men and women in uniform were his favorite audience.

It didn’t stop with just the Americans. He entertained the British, French, Australians, anywhere there was a soldier or sailor. He took his variety show on the road to entertain troops wherever those soldiers were stationed. Hope’s variety shows included comedy monologues, specialty acts, celebrity appearances, dancers, singers, and skits. His mildly irreverent humor, teamed with his variety troupe’s beautiful women, provided a welcome respite for the U.S. forces, a reminder, in Hope’s words, “of
what they were fighting for.” The fast pace, broad diversity, and informality of the overseas shows, with acts ranging in tone from brash to sentimental, gave U.S. fighting forces a supportive reminder of home, an essence of American life and values.

His impressions on these young men and women and their families was immense. In a letter written to Hope by an Arlington, Virginia, woman whose son had been killed in action she wrote: “Mr. Hope, you gave our son the last few hours of happiness in his life. We lost him shortly after that. From the bottom of my heart and with utmost sincerity, may I say thank you, sir, thank you, thank you.”

But the emotions those encounters engendered were not just one-sided, as Bob Hope said in 1944, “Believe me when I say that laughter up at the front lines is a very precious thing—precious to those grand guys who are giving and taking the awful business that goes on there…. There’s a lump the size of Grant’s Tomb in your throat when they come up to you and shake your hand and mumble, ‘Thanks.’ Imagine those guys thanking me! Look what they’re doing for me. And for you.”

After World War Two, Hope and his troupe didn’t stop. They went to Europe almost immediately after the war to entertain the men and women waiting for their turn to go home. In December of 1948, Bob Hope and other performers traveled to Berlin, Germany, to entertain members of the armed forces participating in the Berlin Airlift. This was his first Christmas tour to entertain troops and the beginning of a Hope tradition that lasted until 1990. Nine of Bob Hope’s Christmas tours included Vietnam, from 1964 until 1972. It wasn’t long afterward that North Korea invaded the South. Pretty soon, the Hope Gypsies were at it again. In one instance he entertained aboard the Battleship Missouri. He commented that, “I felt very brave under those big guns.”

His entertainment didn’t stop at the front line. He even quipped with the Commander in Chief. In 1944, Hope entered the Washington political scene at the White House Correspondents Association’s annual dinner, attended by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR particularly enjoyed Hope’s jokes about his wife, Eleanor. “Good evening Mister President. I heard you just had a conference with Winston Churchill on a battleship, about war strategy. War strategy, meaning where will we attack the enemy and how will we keep Eleanor out of the crossfire.” He even made fun of his dog, Falla, saying, “he’s the only canine in history to be housebro-
ken on the Chicago Tribune,” one of the president’s leading critics.

Hope entertained 11 presidents from FDR to Bill Clinton. Presidents loved his ability to make them laugh. In a tribute to Hope, Clinton remarked, “When he makes fun of me or any other president, I think we know he’s doing it with a genuinely good heart and a good spirit and in a way that helps us to laugh at ourselves. And I think we all need to laugh at ourselves a little more.”

“Even when President Nixon went through all of his problems, Hope - though he made jokes about him - always retained his friendship with Nixon because he liked him as a man and felt that he was the president of our country and felt loyal to him. I think that’s a value and a virtue that we can all remember and treasure,” said his daughter, Linda Hope.

Starting in Korea, Hope and his gypsies began doing their Christmas show. Each year they would pack up the gang and head to some far off base to help bring a little good cheer to the troops at Christmas time. Not only did it cheer up the troops, but Mom and Dad at home could see their sons and daughters over the newest sensation – television.

While he and his wife Dolores had four children of their own, they spent many of their Christmases with the troops. Vietnam was one of his most frequent holiday stops, visiting the country nine times during the Vietnam War. Hope took a break from his USO efforts until the early 1980s. He resumed his comedic mission with a trip to Lebanon in 1983. He went to the Persian Gulf on numerous occasions. USS Iowa was one of those stops.

“I was there,” said Dave Chambers, a crewman aboard at the time. “We had been at sea for about 82 days on Christmas and were anchored in the Gulf of Oman. USS Midway had just been on station for a couple weeks. In fact, they had just had liberty in Mombasa, Kenya. They were having the USO show onboard which included Bob Hope, Lee Greenwood, Barbara Eden, Connie Stephens, her daughter, and the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders. They were not going to come onboard IOWA. Captain Seaquist took a boat and went to MIDWAY because he didn’t feel it was right that we were not getting a visit after spending so much time at sea and the MIDWAY had just got there. Long story short, he got us a USO show that afternoon. It was real nice. We made a make shift stage out of pallets on the main deck. Unfortunately, Connie Stephens fell and tore her nylons on it. Barbara Eden was so awesome and nice. Bob
was no spring chicken, but he did the show. Lee Greenwood and I watched “Another Stakeout” in my office. In fact, he and I have emailed one another until the last couple years. I actually met my wife through him. Of course he sang ‘God Bless the USA’ and I remember BMCM Bobby Scott and GMCM Chuck Hill crying like babies, but I don’t believe there were any dry eyes onboard,” he said.

“It was a nice sunny calm day and the Sailors really needed this entertainment. Bob made it clear we had to laugh as it was to be aired on his TV special. They were there probably about 3-4 hours before returning to USS Midway. The saddest part for me was when they all sang Silent Night and as I watched the young Sailors that had never deployed before they were really choked up and you could see the homesickness in their eyes. This was about my 7th deployment by then. Of course, Hope and his troupe signed lots of autographs and photos with the crew. It definitely had a positive impact on morale and the mood changed a lot because of the show,” Chambers remembered.

Hope traveled the world on behalf of the country’s servicemen and women, and received numerous accolades for his humanitarian efforts. A ship was even named after him. Perhaps the greatest honor, however, came in 1997, when the U.S. Congress passed a measure to make Hope an honorary veteran of the U.S. military service for his goodwill work on behalf of American soldiers.

By the late 1990s, Hope had become one of the most honored performers in entertainment history. He received more than 50 honorary degrees in his lifetime, as well as a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Kennedy Center in 1985, a Medal of the Arts from President Bill Clinton in 1995 and a British knighthood in 1998. The British-born Hope was especially surprised by the honorary knighthood, saying, “I’m speechless. Seventy years of ad-lib material and I’m speechless.”

Around this time, Hope donated his papers to the Library of Congress. He handed over his joke files, which he had kept in special file cabinets in a special vault in his Toluca Lake, California home. These jokes—accumulating more than 85,000 pages of laughs—represented the work of Hope and the numerous writers that he kept on staff. At one point, Hope had 13 writers working for him.


It is unfortunate that in our modern times we soon forget about the people who had such an impact on our lives and the history of our nation. It is not often that so much of that history can be wrapped up in just one man. Bob Hope was one of those people. To the “Greatest Generation,” Bob Hope was one of their own – someone who shared their foxholes, eased their pain and made them laugh despite all that was happening around them. From the desert of North Africa, to the jungles of New Guinea, Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf, Hope and his gypsies brought home to the men and women fighting for freedom. To American servicemen, he will always be the best.
THERE ARE HEROES
By Dave Chambers

I recently heard someone say that we don’t have any heroes anymore. No General MacArthur or Patton, Audie Murphy, or even any John Wayne. It was even stated that the young men and women in our country today are not patriotic and don’t have the values that previous generations carried. I believe this statement to be totally inaccurate.

Each month I go to the Veteran’s Hospital, visit the American Legion, and Veteran’s of Foreign Wars Chapters in my community. I see it with my own eyes. Not only do I see the World War II, Vietnam, Korean, and Gulf War Veterans, but I see and talk to those men and women who have just returned from theaters of combat. Some walk up right. Many are in wheelchairs unable to stand because they have lost their legs and some their arms. Many are required to wear safety helmets due to Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI). When I ask them do they have any regrets they mostly respond with: “Just that I got hurt and had to leave the fight with my buddies still there.” This is patriotism and a bond to their fellow Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, or Marines. For those of who have served know that they are not in it for a fat paycheck. Of course we would be naïve if we didn’t believe that educational benefits and travel opportunities didn’t come into play. They believe in what they are doing. Many of the senior enlisted or officers that I have talked to, joined because of 9/11 - to serve their country and preserve the freedoms that they enjoyed growing up in our great nation.

Many of us have family members and friends that are serving on active duty today. Thankfully, the luxuries of technology that were not available in the past are available today. Email, telephones, and the ability to sit in front of a computer screen and see one another as we talk to them. But that doesn’t mean that what they are doing is any more safe or easy as generations before them. They are still serving in harm’s way by choice.

We do have heroes and you see them in airports, malls and many other public areas. I for one thank God that we have these young heroes that are willing to step forward and continue on what most of us can no longer do even if we tried.

So, my request to you if when you see these heroes—thank them for serving the greatest nation on the face of the earth. They deserve it.
Letter from the Editor

Thanks for all the emails about our newsletter. I’m glad you enjoyed it. There is so much history surrounding our ship it is fun to look back and see her from many different sets of eyes. Recently we received some photos of names stamped into stainless steel in one of the machine shops aboard Iowa. It was all the people in the space upon the Japanese surrender ending World War Two. I have written to some of the men asking for their stories about what happened and how they felt. Hopefully we will be able to include it in our next newsletter.

Once again I ask your help. Who knows better about things that happened aboard our ship or her sisters than you? Lots of grandchildren are asking questions about what it was like back in the days. They have no idea how big a ship we were on or what it was like when we were at sea -- and you know you can’t really tell the real sea stories to a bunch of 7 year olds.... But you are a part of history and that history you hold deserves telling (even if we have to clean it up some). So take the time to send something in. It can be what happened in the heat of battle or even a little something that happened while you were on a port visit. No matter what, it may spark something in your shipmates or family that reminds them of the ship or you.

Take the time. Write it down. Send it to me. I can massage it and do the edits to make the best story ever.

Send your works to:
Brad Goforth, 1200 Somersby Lane, Matthews, NC 28105
or email it to: bgoforth@thesamaritanhouse.org

Without your help, we can’t make this letter happen! I look forward to reading about you.

Brad Goforth

Recognize this guy?

When was it taken?
Who are some of the others?
Send the identities to the editor at the email above. We’ll share unnamed photos periodically just to test your memories.

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