The Birth of a Ship
By Brad Goforth

For many, the birth of a ship is when she is launched and her keel touches water for the first time. For others, it’s when the ship is commissioned. In reality, the birth of a great ship begins years before even her steel is made or the rivets are heated. Many questions come to mind. Why was she built this way, what prompted her construction, what problems arose, and in general what helped develop the personality of the ship as she came to be? For the Iowa, thinking began as early as 1935.

The 1930s were troubling times for the United States. The depression was into its 8th year and 20 percent of Americans were still out of work. In Europe, Hitler had been busy building an army, navy and air force and had his eyes on Austria. Italy had invaded Ethiopia. Germany and Italy had signed the Axis agreement. Japan and Germany had formed an alliance. Japan had invaded Manchuria, and then China. Many could see the handwriting on the wall and sought to prepare for eventual war.

The United States Navy had 15 battleships. Most had been built during World War One, with only three being designed and built in the interim. Both the Washington Treaty and the London Treaty had limited battleship production. None of the nations really wanted another battleship race which had preceded World War One. That one had nearly bankrupted the nations involved. During the 20s and 30s, nations were permitted to modernize and reconstruct the older ships, build new only after a ship had lasted 20 years, and new ships were limited to 35,000 tons. After the London Treaty in 1930, two under construction American dreadnoughts had to be converted to the aircraft carriers Lexington and Saratoga.

Naval leaders were very concerned about developments in the Pacific. The Japanese had been building new ships at an alarming rate and improving the older ships to meet modern standards. With the US turning more of its interest toward the Pacific, something needed to be done to counter this perceived threat. The Secretary of the Navy had two separate advisors; the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) and the General Board (a group of senior officers that advised the Secretary of the Navy on naval policy, including strategy, tactics and construction). The CNO had a number of bureaus governing operations and shipbuilding. Under shipbuilding was the Bureau of Construction and Repair, Bureau of Ordnance and Bureau of Engineering. These
bureaus operated with almost complete au-
tonomy.

To begin countering the perceived threat, in 1935 the General Board asked the Bureau of Construction and Repair to begin work on a new class of battleship. The North Carolina Class was a whole new design in American dreadnoughts. Previous battleships had from 14” to 16” guns. The engines were a mix of triple expansion steam (pistons) geared turbines and turbo-electric drive; most of which could only propel the ships at a maximum of 21 knots. Fire control was rudimentary at best, and in some ships, sailors still slept in hammocks. The North Carolina would eventually have nine 16” 45 cal. guns, a secondary battery of 5” guns and would be controlled and directed via multiple fire control directors linked through a then state of the art analog computer. North Carolina’s engines were steam turbines developing 121,000 shaft horsepower which could propel the 714 foot long ship at 27 knots. Work began on the North Carolina in June of 1936. When she entered the fleet in 1942, she was so now and made such an impression she was nicknamed the “Showboat.”

Immediately after the contract for the North Carolina and Washington, design studies for the next generation of battleships were begun. The North Carolinas had some drawbacks to keep them within the 35,000 ton limits set by treaty. Armor was less than what was considered adequate to save weight and the engines had less horsepower than desired. In the South Dakota Class, these deficiencies would be corrected. Weight was saved by reducing the overall length from 714 to 666 feet and engine horsepower would be increased to 130,000. This allowed armor protection for up to a 16” shell while still maintaining 27 knots. The South Dakota was laid down on 5 July, 1939; just before Germany invaded Poland and World War Two began in Europe.

According to Robert Sumrall in his book, *Iowa Class Battleships*, by this time there seemed to be a lack of good intelligence on what the Japanese Navy was doing in its construction and fleet operations. Indeed, the Japanese had very tight security around the ships it was building. As the Yamato was being constructed, there were even camouflage tarps and nets covering the ship to keep people from seeing her. But they did know Japan was building. There were reports that the Japanese had laid down three large battleships and that the first was reported to be at least 45,000 tons. Some reports said she was much heavier and may carry 18” guns.

At the Bureau of Construction and Repair, two separate teams were looking at battleship design. One was looking at the “slow battleship,” 27 knot speed with more guns (12) and armor (later incorporated into the Montana Class), and a “fast Battleship” team with fewer guns (9 guns), armor to protect against a 16” gun, and at least 32 knots of speed. Initially, all the designs called for a

![USS South Dakota, 1943 (USN photo)](image-url)

![16” Mark II gun at Washington Navy Yard (USN)](image-url)
ship over 900 feet long and weighing over 50,000 tons. The costs were much more than Congress would approve. It was decided to stick with the 9-gun version, reduce the endurance range from 20,000 miles to 15,000 miles and maintain protection against 16” guns. The United States used an “escalator clause” in the London treaty to increase battleship tonnage to 45,000 tons. The new designs would be limited to that tonnage. On June 2, 1938, the Bureau of Construction and Repair completed the preliminary design for a “fast battleship,” now designated BB-61.

Meanwhile at the Bureau of Ordnance, testing had been completed on a new 16” armor piercing projectile. The 2,700 pound shell had more penetrating power than the previous 2,240 pound AP shell. On the North Carolina and South Dakota class ships with the 16” 45cal guns, these shells could be fired 36,900 yards. But for a 16” 50cal gun that range was increased to 42,500 yards. The decision was made that all new battleships would have either a 16” 50cal gun or 18” gun. The 18” proved to be too heavy. It needed heavier equipment, barbettes support, etc., and would reduce the speed of a ship to 21 to 23 knots. Speed was considered essential, so the BB-61 would have 16” 50cal guns, which would allow the new ships to maintain a 33 knot speed to allow them to keep up with the aircraft carriers. The General Board decided on the 16” 50cal Mark II gun.

The first two ships of the class, BB-61 and BB-62 were authorized by Congress on 17 May, 1938. They would have the following characteristics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Values</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>44,560 tons standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55,710 full load</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterline length</td>
<td>860 feet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max. Beam</td>
<td>108 feet 3 inches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum draft</td>
<td>35 feet 11.5 inches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armament turrets</td>
<td>9 16” 50cal in three 3-gun mounts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 5” 38cal in ten twin-mounts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12 1.1” 70cal in four quad mounts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 0.50cal single machine guns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protection</td>
<td>Against 16” shells</td>
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<tr>
<td>Torpedo resistance</td>
<td>700 pounds of TNT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shaft Horsepower</td>
<td>200,000 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max speed</td>
<td>33 knots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endurance</td>
<td>15,000 nautical miles at 15 knots</td>
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Now the actual design work began. At first it was thought that the new ships would be simply an elongated South Dakota design. But this proved to be more difficult than first thought. The ship had to be much longer and have finer lines to maintain the speed needed. The clipper bow formed down to a bulb to improve water resistance at high speed.

RADM C. H. Woodward, Chief of the Bureau of Construction and Repair, drives the first rivet into USS Iowa (USN photo)
the stern, skegs were used on the inboard shafts to help direct water flow to the inboard propellers and the twin rudders. Once the hull form was completed it was discovered that it would take 212,000 horsepower to maintain the desired 33 knots. The Bureau of Engineering initially designed a very compact plant which used a combination of engine room and fire room similar to the North Carolina and South Dakota class.

Meanwhile, the final plans for the turrets were sent from the Bureau of Ordnance to the Bureau of Construction and Repair. The original plans were for the barbettes to be 37’ 3” using the already designed 16” 50cal Mark II guns. After months of hard work and contract plans almost complete for the ships, the Bureau of Ordnance plans called for a barbette diameter of 39 feet. This increased size would reduce the ship’s speed and increase the weight beyond the 45,000 ton limit. Since the hull form was already too far ahead in the design, the Bureau of Ordnance had to come up with a new design for the gun turrets which met the 37’ 3” barbette specifications. Working round the clock, the Bureau developed a new turret with a new lightweight gun designated the Mark 7. Ultimately the new design saved weight (about 40 tons per turret).

Once contract plans were complete, the manufacturing drawings were drawn up between the Navy and the initial contract shipyard, in this case, the New York Naval Shipyard.

Changes had been made in the process. Displacement went from 44,560 tons to 45,155 tons. The maximum beam was reduced by one foot, and draft reduced to 35 feet 7.8 inches. Armor protection was increased to match the effects of the new 2,700 pound AP projectile and horsepower increased to 212,000.

At this point, the Shipyard and the Bureau made the decision to change the design of the engineering spaces. The combination of
engine and firerooms had led to four spaces 64 feet in length. This alarmed many since a single torpedo penetration at one of the bulkheads would result in the flooding of 128 feet. The New York Navy Yard proposed alternating engine and firerooms, breaking the spaces into eight units 32 feet long. The change made some things like uptake trunking and deck penetration easier, but moved the beam back out to 108 feet 3 inches. Tonnage also grew to 45,873 tons. This would be the last major change in the Iowa Class design.

USS Iowa was laid down on 27 June, 1940. In a simple ceremony at the New York Navy Shipyards, RADM C. H. Woodward, Chief of the Bureau of Construction and Repair, drove the first rivet joining two pieces of the keel. He was surrounded by shipyard superintendents, foremen and chargemen who would lead the yard workers in building what would be called the most powerful ship afloat.

There was an urgency surrounding the shipyard. By now war was raging in Europe and no one was sure what would happen with Japan. Diplomatic efforts were underway to prevent war in the Pacific. But if war came, the men in the shipyard wanted the US to be ready. Already the forms had been made for the new ship’s armor. Within a month, the ship was taking shape. By September the triple bottom was over half complete. By December, the bottom was complete and the bulkheads separating the main engineering spaces had been erected. By early 1941, boilers were installed and the ship’s engines were in place. Already the barbettes were being set in and within weeks the ship’s boilers would become covered by a second deck, never to see sunlight again. Along the sides of the ship, armor was being installed. Iowa would have her armor inside the skin of the ship, not plated on the outside of the hull as in some previous classes. More importantly, most of the hull and plating was welded instead of riveted. This saved weight and added strength. By October of 1941 the barbettes were in place and much of the interior hull was complete. By July of 1942, the main deck had been finished and the superstructure was going up. Only a short time later the first of the ship’s 16” guns was hoisted aboard and placed in its cradle.

It was a warm day on 27 August in 1942. Tens of thousands of people, from shipyard workers to invited guests crowded the slip-
way at the New York Naval Shipyard. Standing before them was, for many, the largest ship they had ever seen. Her bulbous bow was up against a small platform draped in red, white and blue bunting. Two bands were entertaining the crowds; the US Navy Yard Band and the Shipfitters’ Shop Band. At 10:15 am RADM E. J. Marquart opened the simple, yet well attended ceremonies introducing visitor such as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Ralph A. Bard, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and the ship’s sponsor, Mrs. Henry Wallace, wife of the Vice President. The National Anthem was played and a prayer said. At 10:36 am, Mrs. Wallace raised a metal encrusted bottle of champagne. “I christen thee Iowa. May God guard the Iowa and all who sail in her,” she said as she swung the bottle against a piece of steel on the
The bottle broke, spraying the front of the ship. Through the cheers of over 10,000 onlookers, the 45,000 ton ship began to slide down the wooden ways – seven months earlier than originally planned. Within seconds, Iowa’s stern touched water for the first time. The ship surged further into the water of the East River until she floated easily.

For the visitors, the launching of the Iowa offered inspiring assurance of the technical expertise of her designers and the industry of New York Shipyard workmen. But to the thousands of workers watching the launch, it was something quite different. According to the Shipyard public affairs office, to the workers, the launch was something special. As they watched the ship slide into the East River, they could say, “That was my contribution. I have built into her hull enough strength to bear the biggest guns against our enemies. Into her engines I have wrought enough speed to run down the foe and destroy him. Her equipment and armor will function with the same faithfulness I have put into their construction. All this I have done with greater speed than asked of me by my country. I have helped win the war.”

For many of the people there, it comes down to some amazing numbers. Iowa was the heaviest warship ever built until that time. All the design work that had gone into her took 429,000 man days to complete. It took another 4,100,000 man days to complete up till launch. That’s the equivalent of one draftsman and ten mechanics working 6 days a week, 1,374 years. The blueprints weighed 175 tons. That’s a 30” wide sheet 1,100 miles long. The area of all decks and platforms is 418,000 square feet, or 9.5 acres. There are 800 miles of welding and 1,135,000 driven rivets. There are 16 miles of ventilation ducts, 15 miles of various ropes, 250 miles of electric cables, 900 motors, 5,300 lighting fixtures and 1,091 telephones. The ship’s generators can produce enough energy to light 20,000 homes (1943). She requires 400,000 pounds of paint which will cover 7,200,000 square feet or paint a 5’ fence 273 miles long.

The list goes on. But for the workers there is no statistic for how much sweat went into the shaping of the steel or installing the engines. You cannot count the number of sleepless nights that went into solving technical barriers, the muscle aches that went along with 10 and 12 hour workdays. In building the great ship there was even the blood shed in workplace injuries and deaths. In the searing sunlight they shaped steel hot and painful to the touch. They worked in winter on decks that captured and sharpened the cold. They worked in tiny compartments filled with the...
crash of riveting, in shops harried by the call for “speed, more speed,” and on scaffolds suspended from dizzying heights. Such were the ingredients that went into the building of Iowa.

To the men and women who built her, the completion of Iowa was their own contribution to ending the war. Through this ship, they would take part in every battle she would fight and every victory she achieved. Much still had to be done to get the great ship ready, but on a cold February morning in 1943, as her crew stood at attention on her decks, USS Iowa was commissioned. Workers once again stopped their work to watch the commissioning pennant rise to the top of her mast. There were still more of the new antiaircraft guns to install and a shake-down to be completed, but USS Iowa was now joining the fleet. The ship was born and very much alive. Few knew that nearly 70 years later she would still be serving, not as a fighter, but as a living history for all who built and served in her.

The story of that great event has been told by so many. From the Sailors that survived Pearl Harbor to the Marines at Iwo Jima, and historians from around the world. But there was so many that experienced WW II from the beginning to the end. The young girls and women who were left behind during the war survived and played such an important part in American history that their story needs to be shared as well.

Two women who I have the opportunity to be near weekly experienced the beginning and the end of that war. One, a seven-year-old girl the day Pearl Harbor was attacked living in Hawaii. The other, a beautiful young single woman who worked in an office setting in a New York City skyscraper and witnessed that victorious day when the war ended.

Eba Beatrice (Bea) Toomer was 7 years old on December 7, 1941. Early that morning she was at their home on Oahu decorating their bamboo Christmas tree with her Mother and two sisters while her Father, as a patrolman was working on one of the other islands.

The day was gorgeous as the sun was shining brightly and the skies were clear. As they decorated the tree, the roar of airplane engines filled the air. They were closer than before and her dog, Rascal, a Police Collie was frightened and darted outside to investigate. Bea ran outside after her beloved dog and as she was a distance from the house, her
mother began to yell and motion for her to run back inside. As a 7 year old the confusion of what to do was overwhelming. She knew not to disobey her mother so she grabbed Rascal and ran to her mother waiting for her frantically. As she ran, a Japanese plane dove and began shooting at her. Bea remembers the noise and the dirt flying around her but mostly her mother crying out for her. She made it to safety and the planes disappeared.

It was days later before they knew what had happened when they listened to the President address the country on the radio as the United States entered World War II.

The days ahead made certain changes to their lives and routines. Quiet, chaos, and isolation was the norm. The first month brought total silence in the home. No radio, no visiting with neighbors, and the windows were blackened to prevent being seen from planes or ships at night. Then, there were continual air raid drills, food stamps, and water rationing. Each family member was issued gas masks and everyone wore a government issued name tag. After a month, they returned to daily school which had been relocated to a nearby home so travel was limited and children would be close to their homes in case there were additional attacks.

Today, we can’t imagine one of our children or grandchildren having to experience this type of trauma. Bea is my friend and she lives with these memories every day but she does not dwell on anything negative. Her positive attitude towards life and people are amazing and I believe that experience early on has given her a positive outlook on life.

New York City was an amazing and unforgettable day for a gorgeous young girl in her early 20’s on August 15, 1945. Doris Warmand was working in a typical office environment in a downtown building that warm day. The temperature was in the upper 70’s to low 80’s and business was as usual. There were few men in the work force as New York had over 850,000 servicemen who had been serving our great nation in the war effort. Out of nowhere the normal sound of typewriters, phones, and traffic outside was drowned out by an extreme loud noise. It was the whistles blowing from all of the ship’s in the harbor. What reason would this be happening? Was there an attack on New York? Just the opposite as soon was discovered by Doris and her work companions. The words scrolled across the high tech signs on the buildings--”The
War Has Ended!”
Doris describes it as simply amazing. People were jammed in the streets dancing, singing, kissing, and pride filled the air. Doris, like so many others were throwing a rationed commodity, toilet paper, out of the windows to dangle to the streets below as one would now see colored streamers at celebrity events. Her boss told her she couldn’t do that which she proudly ignored and continued tossing the streamers. There was so much joy and excitement that work immediately ended and it was time to go for cocktails. At a nearby lounge as soon as you walked in you were handed a drink and there was no charge. According to Doris, “New Yorkers don’t give anything away.” There were a lot of free drinks that evening and dancing never stopped. “It was the biggest party I have ever been to,” explains Doris.

Doris’ eyes lit up when I asked her what that day meant to her. She said to me with a grin, “It meant we were going to have men around again.” Although she was totally serious, she also told me that she had never felt the pride that she felt that day. Everyone was proud of each other as they had all made it through the war which demanded a great deal from not only our service-men fighting around the globe, but those at home who contributed greatly to the war effort.

Living history is our greatest tool. These lady’s live in my community and they are just two of many. I am so blessed that I get to speak and hear stories from our greatest generation frequently. The woman who was in the Marine Corps, Merchant Marines, Air Force Radar Operators, and a woman named Rozy I met who worked in the Portland Shipyards during the war, and so many more. Look in your community and seek this history and hear it first hand. The real story is there and available to record.
Looking Back…
World War II and serving aboard USS Iowa
By Seth Klinehoffer (Grandson of Henry Coburn)
and reviewed by Mrs. Hilda Coburn

Henry Elton “Curly” Coburn was born on September 12, 1921. He enlisted in the US Navy in January of 1942 in Jacksonville, Florida and served his basic training in Norfolk, Virginia. Following service school graduation as a Signalman, 3rd Class from the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, he was then assigned duty at Pier 92 in New York City.

Some months later, on Labor Day of that year, he met the love of his life, Hilda Ibbers, a German immigrant, at the roller rink at Coney Island. However, their time together was short. Curly was soon assigned to the USS Leedstown (AP 73), a troop transport ferrying soldiers to North Africa to combat the Nazi troops of Erwin “The Desert Fox” Rommel. On 9 November 1942, the Leedstown was attacked first by a squadron of Luftwaffe “Junkers” and then torpedoed by U-Boat U-331. The second attack led to the ship sinking with eight sailors out of a crew of five hundred lost.

Curly abandoned ship with his fellow crewmen and like most navy signalmen of World War II, he had crafted his own personal signal flags and sewn them himself. He carried his flags with him at all times, and they were in his pocket as he went over the side. They, along with Curly and his fellow crewmen, floated at sea and were eventually picked up by the British HMS Samphire a Flower-Class corvette of the Royal Navy. He would carry those flags with him throughout the war.

After the loss of USS Leedstown, Curly was assigned to the Brooklyn Naval Yard and to the USS Iowa, the first battleship in a new class of the same name and as the ship prepared for it’s shake-down cruise. After reporting aboard, the Iowa set out for Newfoundland to search for the German battleship Tirpitz which was supposedly operating in Norwegian waters. When Iowa returned she then gathered escorts for a truly major historical assignment: that of carrying President Roosevelt and his large wartime staff to a conference in Tehran.

It was on this trip that Curly would experience one of the marque moments of his naval career. The president, confined to a wheelchair, spent long hours on the deck and Curly recalled those occasions where the president would ask “Flags, what kind of weather are looking for tomorrow?” And on a given night, he would look up to the sky and say with assurance... “Mr. President, I’d say we’re going to be in for some fair weath-
Curly also had a good friend whom he called “Smiley”, and who had served aboard the destroyer USS William D Porter, but had later transferred to the Iowa. Then, on Nov. 14th, the infamous torpedo incident occurred between USS Iowa and USS William D. Porter. During a drill eagerly anticipated and watched by President Roosevelt, the #3 torpedo on the William D Porter was accidentally discharged, fully armed, and toward the Iowa. The incident was further escalated when, due to mandatory radio silence, the message warning about the torpedo launch could not be relayed. Curly recalled that a light signal was used but the transmission was not understood. Curly also said that he was unable to assist because his signal flags would have been of little use in this fast developing situation. Radio silence was eventually broken to relay the message, and the Iowa turned in time to avoid the torpedo.

Smiley and Curly would often comment about this major incident over the years, and about how it was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Curly rarely spoke in detail of his time in the Navy during the war. One incident that did stand out though, and that was both positive and humorous, was his “Shellback Ceremony” in which all sailors suffered through upon their first crossing of the equator.

Upon returning the president home, the Iowa was soon deployed for her longest mission to the war in the Pacific in January of 1944. The ship, along with her sister ship USS New Jersey, passed through the Panama Canal, and being so wide (108.3”) that only inches were left to spare on either side of the canal as the huge battleships passed through. Iowa would be designated part of Admiral Lee’s Battleship Division 7 to combat the Japanese. Curly was aboard Iowa as she crossed the pacific as part of the “island hopping” campaign taking him to places like Truk, the Marianas, and eventually to the Philippines. Curly could proudly look back at his ship, USS Iowa, being part of the force battled the Japanese and aided General MacArthur leading to his return to Leyte.

In 1944, the ship was set to return to the US but on December 18, 1944, was caught up Typhoon Cobra, a major calamity for the ships of Halsey’s 3rd Fleet. Many of the other ships in the group were damaged, and three destroyers were lost. Records show that 790 sailors were lost aboard USS Spence, USS Hull and USS Monaghan. The Iowa, by comparison, was a lucky ship, she received minimal damage.

Upon his return to San Francisco, Curly was given a thirty day shore leave, and he quickly found a train to New York to meet with Hilda for a proper honeymoon.

The leave was short-lived, and Curly had to return to San Francisco for his assignment.
to Shore Patrol duty. Hilda returned to New
York to her parent’s home, and in February
of 1945, she used the small savings accrued
during Curly’s time in the Pacific and to
travel to California to be with him. She rode
an antiquated train for two days to reach San
Francisco and only to find that Curly was not
there. The Traveller’s Aid Society helped her
get to the base, only to discover that Curly
had left word that he had been deployed
to Long Beach to the Small Craft Training
Center. Travellers Aid assisted her in getting
to San Pedro and where she finally located
Curly. They found an efficiency apartment
(rent: $25/month) and they stayed there for
nearly seven months.

Curly was soon assigned to a mine-sweeper,
the YMS-417. (He had now been on the
largest ship, the Iowa, and one of the small-
est, a mine-sweeper). They were sent to Ha-
waii, with a lieutenant who had neither been
in command nor even been at sea previously.
Halfway to Hawaii, they had engine trouble.
It took some time for the mechanic to get the
engine semi-functional. The officer solicited
Curly for advice, asking if he felt they should
go on or return home. Naturally, Curly want-
ed to go home, so he suggested it. The officer
decided to agree, and they did so. Needless to
say, the lieutenant was in hot water upon their
arrival, but it was too late.

During the ordeal, Hilda decided to re-
turn to Brooksville, pregnant with their first
daughter, Elsie, named after Hilda’s sister.
Curly finally was allowed to return home,
receiving an Hardship honorable discharge so
he could assist with the family farm.

The couple arrived in Brooksville and
moved into Lenora’s old home for a few
years until they decided to buy land on Jas-
mile Drive, where they would live for the
rest of Curly’s life. All that was there was
what was left of an old army barracks, which
Curly and Hilda’s father, who had come to
live with them following her mother’s pass-
ing in New York, converted it into a home.
They built a tool shed and even had a lathe,
where Hilda’s father, a gifted craftsman,
could continue to work with metals and build
his beloved steam engines. (All of these were
built by hand, right down to the bolts, and
dozens of them are still in full working order
to this day, including a scale replica of a com-
plete workshop with functioning drill presses
and all).

Curly became a butcher and even owned
his own shop for a time. He then spent a brief
period working for the Sunbeam Bread Com-
pany in Lakeland FL. He then met a man
named Pat Brewer whom he would have a
lifelong friendship with. Mr. Brewer owned a
funeral home, and Curly
would work in the fu-
neral business for many
years before selling his
stake in the funeral busi-
ness to go on to work
for the transportation
department of Hernando
County.
Curly would participate in many civic organizations, including the Scottish Rite; Egypt Temple Shrine of Tampa; the Brooksville Lion’s Club, of which he would serve as president. Curly also was master of the Hernando County Masonic Lodge #97 and helped form the Brotherhood Lodge #375. He would also spend time as assistant secretary for the US Iowa Veterans Association.

On September 20, 1986, Curly Elton Coburn passed away. He left behind three children, seven grandchildren, and a legacy that continues to inspire awe and amazement to this day. He saw things, places, and events that most would only dream of. He was a part of that “Greatest Generation” and lived a life befitting of that name. In October of 2012, his great grandson Connor would hold his worn signal flags and look on them in amazement. Connor’s mother, the wife of one of his grandsons, incidentally, is from Leyte, born there just over forty years to the day after the Iowa was there for General MacArthur’s landing on Leyte. He held those flags, which had been near that very island so many years before. His mother, and millions of her fellow Filipinos, would grow up in a free land that was once defended by the ship and the man who carried those very flags. Our liberties we prize, our rights we will maintain.

Curley’s signal flags. (Coburn photo)

Mock Training Ships
By Walter Alexander
1957 Company 137, NTC Bainbridge

“Lookouts, what type ship is that? Note single 3 inch gun mount on the foredeck, 3 deck superstructure, single mast, and single smoke stack. Is that an American destroyer escort (DE)? USS Commodore was a wooden mock training ship at Naval Training Center Bainbridge in Port Deposit, Maryland, (on the eastern bank of the Susquehanna River) where I went for Recruit Training (boot camp) in 1957. The base was known as Naval Training Station Bainbridge during World War Two. Used for lessons in line handling and other seamanship skills, this wooden landlocked mock ship was known by recruits as USS Never Sail. It never occurred to me until this year while looking at this postcard from my NTC Bainbridge collection that this was a DE.”

That is how I began an article for the December 2011 issue of the Virginia chapter of the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association’s newsletter. There are dozens of photos of recruits training aboard USS Commodore TDE-401B in my Company 137 yearbook

Curry’s signal flags. (Coburn photo)

USS Commodore DE-401B, NTC Bainbridge, Maryland (From the postcard collection of Walter Alexander)

“The Compass”. USNTC Bainbridge was commissioned on October 1, 1942. Did other
Recruit Training Commands (RTC) in operation during NTC Bainbridge’s service time (1942 - 1976) also have mock training ships? (Notes: By Executive Order in April 1944, all Naval Training Stations (NTS) were redesignated as Naval Training Centers (NTC). From 1943 to 1945, 543 destroyer escorts were built for the US Navy. Of these, only two are still in existence, one in Albany, and one in Galveston.)

From 17 September 1942 to 10 March 1945, the Navy had a Recruit Training Command at Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, on Lake Pend Oreille where 293,381 recruits were trained. The property is now Farragut State Park.

Gayle E. Alvarez, Secretary of the Idaho Military History Museum and coauthor of the book “Images of America – Farragut Naval Training Station”(2), stated in an email to me that she has asked a former “boot” about a mock ship, and “He does not recall any such ‘ship’ at Farragut. This and the fact that no other former ‘boots’ have said anything about such a ‘ship’ and no photos of one have surfaced, it is safe to say that Farragut NTS did not have one…..Apparently not all (NTS’s) did.” In 1998, I visited my sister-in-law in Coeur d’Alene and drove around the lake. I had no idea that the state park we drove through on the southern tip of the lake had been a Naval Base!

On 1 June 1923, Naval Training Station San Diego was commissioned. Jennifer A. Garvey’s book “Images of America – San Diego Naval Training Center” states that “Construction of USS Recruit TDE-1 began in 1949 with sheet metal over wood framing on a concrete foundation. The ship began as a two-thirds model of a destroyer escort but was modified once in 1954 for overhaul and repairs, and again in 1982 when based on the training needs of the sailors and newer technologies, USS Recruit was converted into a training guided missile frigate. USS Recruit measured 225 feet from bow to stern, with a beam of 24 feet, 4 inches and a height of 41 feet from tip of the mast to the asphalt. In 1982 the overall length was increased to 233 feet…..(she was) decommissioned in 1987.”(1) USS Recruit (TDE-1 / TFFG-1) observed traditional naval shipboard procedures like all other vessels. The ship was painted haze gray.

There was a Recruit Training Command in Norfolk, Virginia, at the Naval Operating Base (NOB) prior to World War Two. In December 1942, recruit training at NOB was abolished since it was now more suitably equipped for advance training for men going directly to the fleet. I have found no photos or reference to any mock training ship in Norfolk.
NTC Orlando, Florida, was a recruit training command from 1968 to 1991. USS Blue Jacket was a replica of a 1940’s destroyer escort. Bluejacket was christened May 3, 1969, and she was 240 feet long.\(^4\)

NTS Sampson on Lake Seneca in Seneca County, New York, was a recruit training facility from 17 October 1942 until the base closed 1 October 1946. In an email dated 1/22/2012 from Russ Padden, webmaster for the NTS Sampson website, he states “I am not aware that one (mock ship) was built at Sampson – only of a scale bridge. I also see no reference to it on any of the Sampson maps.” The scale bridge was named USS Kidd and was in a classroom building.

Theresa Gonzalez’s book “Images of America – Great Lakes Naval Training Station” covers a pictorial history of the base which was commissioned on 1 July 1911. There are no references or photos to a mock ship in the book. My wife’s brother, Robert Vaughn, was in Recruit Company 393 in 1957. He has no recollection of a mock training ship, nor does his Company 393 Yearbook “The Keel” have any photos of a mock ship.

Although outside the scope of mock ships during the time of NTC Bainbridge, it should be noted that in February 2007, USS Trayer BST-21, a 210 foot long, ¾ scale mock-up of an Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer, in 90,000 gallons of seawater, was completed as a training simulator inside of building USS Iowa at NTC Great Lakes.

I have researched RTS’s/RTC’s at Bainbridge, Farragut, San Diego, Norfolk, Orlando, Sampson, and Great Lakes \(^5\). If the reader knows of any other locations of Recruit Training Commands, other mock training ships, or has memories of experiences on the above ships, please inform the author at DE585@cox.net or call (540) 345-5826.

Footnotes:
2. “Images of America – Farragut Naval Training Station” may be purchased from the Idaho Military History Museum, and will include a 4-page index of those named and pictured in the book. http://museum.mil.idaho.gov/farragut.html
3. Used with permission of NTS Sampson webmaster.
5. See also “Images of America – US Naval Training Center, Bainbridge” by Erika L. Queensbery, and “Images of America – Great Lakes Naval Training Station” by Therese Gonzales.
In my Opinion...

By Captain Larry Seaquist

If we only had a battleship or two in the Navy today. Never has there been a time when The Big Stick and her sisters could be more useful.

Our Navy is about to emerge, once again, as America’s front line service. As the Army (and a lot of Marines) pull out of Afghanistan, our ships will stay on patrol around the globe. As the Air Force (and CIA) fly more and more drones from their home base laptops, our sailors and Marines will once again be the friendly human face of America in many of the world’s trouble spots.

And trouble spots there will be. Likely stretching decades ahead is an era of political and economic tumult. America’s democracy and our globally-engaged businesses are going to need a way to exert high impact leverage in any number of places. Never was a true capital ship – something with the political-military oomph of an IOWA-class battleship more needed than it is needed now.

What is a “capital” ship? And why would IOWA be so useful if she were somehow back leading the fleet today?

A capital ship is one the president keeps track off – one of the big pieces on the international chess board.

Why would a BB and her battle group work so well on that chess board today? A combination of factors add up to “capital,” factors now pointing strongly to capital ships.

Let’s put ourselves in the President’s seat in the White House situation room. We have some kind of international crisis or region of instability. We want to back up the diplomats’ words. We need a big stick which we can brandish, as Teddy Roosevelt said, softly, flexibly in a way which keeps us in control.

Consider the options.

We could put in the Army, a ground force with real firepower. There is no doubt that inserting a brigade or a division would be a big move on the chess board. We’d definitely get everyone’s attention. But there are two problems: first, it is hard to get the Army in there. After getting the local government’s permission – or using the Navy-Marine Corps team to fight your way in – it takes lots of shipping and flights to install a fully ready ground force. And second, it is hard to get
the unit back out once the job is done. After a decade plus in Iraq and Afghanistan, neither the American president nor the American public is going to be much interested in using ground forces as a crisis management tool.

Okay, you say, use the Air Force. They don’t need to be in on the ground, they can just fly over from an air base in a nearby friendly country or even from home bases in the U.S. They can fly in but in political-military crisis an airplane overhead doesn’t get you much leverage with the local folks. If they even know the planes are there, the locals know that our plans soon have to fly back home. So by itself, air power isn’t “capital” in the way that Navy’s carriers are and BB-like ships could be again.

If we could wave a wand, I think we would want to restore our beautiful IOWA and her sisters to active service as a top priority of our post-Afghanistan, downsizing military. Here’s my list of reasons; I’m sure my shipmates will have more good reasons of their own.

First, the BBs have extra “oomph.” These beautiful, impressive ships get attention just by showing up. Just the look of the ship signals serious. As we used to say about ourselves, “IOWA is the Hallmark Card – when you care enough to send the very best.”

Next is the political flexibility of naval forces. Presidents don’t have to ask anyone to place a ship or a battle group in international waters off someone’s coast. With naval forces we keep control, able to dial up or dial down as the situation changes. But the marker on the chessboard has to be serious enough
to command attention by the local public and their leaders ashore and by the international press. That’s why we in the Navy have to be able to furnish the president a truly Big Stick.

Beyond the impressive look, two factors make a ship capital – firepower and staying power.

The firepower part is obvious. The BBs’ combination of long range, land attack missiles and drone reconnaissance aircraft added to those magnificent, long range 16” inch guns was instantly understandable to anyone, sailor or civilian, American or foreign visitor. Ask any BB sailor who went ashore on any port visit anywhere.

What moves the firepower from tactically awesome to strategically important – capital – is the BB’s staying power: the ability to stay on station for a very long time. Unlike the plane that needs to get back to base today, a capital ship is here for a lot of tomorrows. And that staying power is more than two million gallons of fuel. It comes from all the shops on board. From the get-go back in the 1930s the IOWAs were designed, as we used to say, “to take a licking and keep on ticking.” In Battleship IOWA we restored more than 20 self-repair shops to full service and added some new high-tech repair capability.

The real staying power comes from the remarkable crew. Our shipmates were the most skilled, experienced hands in the Navy. (I don’t know about the other BB crews. I suppose they were okay, above fleet average but no one ever touched the IOWA crew for sheer sea-going talent! If it was broke they could fix it and keep the mission going. Even better they kept things so well tuned and maintained that ship readiness was extremely high – our fleet commanders, and our president, could count on us.)

One more item rounds out my list of reasons why BBs would be capital in today’s Navy – the school of the ship. It is clear that our American military is, once again, going to do some serious downsizing, including in shore training installations. With our superb cadre of leaders in the Chiefs’ Mess and all the experienced LDOs and Warrants in the Wardroom, with the full range of rates and specialties aboard a truly capital ship, a modern BB would be a seagoing finishing school for tomorrow’s Navy leaders. I always thought that was our most important role:
giving young sailors a start in a ship where
everything is done right by experts.

Okay, I admit that no matter how good
my list of reasons, IOWA is not going to be
back in service tomorrow. But at the very
least, when we old salts are sitting around
chewing on the directions the Navy is taking
and watching today’s sailors deploy on long,
demanding deployments, let’s remember that
IOWA and her sisters could be playing a stra-
tegic role today and way into the future.

Looking back at the fleet vs. fleet battles
of old, some naval historians have said that it
[Footnote: If the case for the battleships is
so strong, why were they sent back to moth-
balls? The short answer: the BBs had been
recommissioned in the 1980s as part of the
final build up of a Cold War navy. When the
Cold War ended in the Fall of 1989, the BBs
were swept out the door as part of a major
downsizing. The door was locked when land
forces performed so well in the First Gulf
War. The Pentagon, mistakenly in my view,
did not see coming the disorderly world we
now live in – a disorderly world where U.S.
Navy ships and sailors operate year after
year as America’s front line forces. We should
have kept all four battleships on duty; we
should have started thinking about how to
build successors for their invaluable contri-
butions as capital ships.]

was a shame the beautiful IOWAs were built
one war too late. That’s not my view. Con-
sidering their remarkable characteristics –
and their remarkable crews – I say the IOWA
class was not built twenty years too late.
They were built eighty years too soon!

Now and in the several decades ahead we
are going to see American presidents play
the naval card over and over. They and our
country would be so much better if they held
a hand of truly capital ships, ships modeled
by the IOWA and her sisters.

The Big Stick has not gone out of style.

After enlisting in the Navy Reserve in 1962 and getting a
commission in 1964, Captain Seaquist commanded four war-
ships in his 32 year career including Battleship IOWA (April
’86 to May ’88). After retiring, he and his wife, Carla, a writer,
settled in Gig Harbor, Washington, a fishing village on Puget
Sound. Larry was recently reelected to his fourth term in the
Washington State Legislature where he chairs the Higher Edu-
cation Committee. Captain Seaquist has also written for The
Jerseyman.

CMC Tom Helvig, USN/Retired

A flash from the past. What ever happened to Santa and his
sleigh? I hope he didn’t fall in.
Remembering Pearl Harbor

Pearl Harbor survivors, from left, Clark Simmons, of Brooklyn, N.Y.; Aaron Cahbin, of Bayside, N.Y.; Armando Chick Galella, of Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.; Chaplin William Kalaiedjian, and Daniel Fruchter, of Eastchester, N.Y., during ceremonies at the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum in New York, commemorating the 71st anniversary of the attack at Pearl Harbor, Friday, Dec. 7, 2012. (USS Intrepid photo)

A cartoon and two posters urging Americans to support the efforts in WWII. One is from Bethlehem Steel and the other from the National Cash Register Company. Right: a stamp to seal envelopes.
Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Iowan History Letter for 2013. We have dedicated ourselves to providing an informative and often nostalgic look back on our ship and her times each quarter for your enjoyment. In each issue we want to provide another glimpse at the history of our ship and the experiences of those aboard. To do that we need your help.

Sometimes I get frustrated when a family member tells me, “My father served on the Iowa, but he never did tell us about when he was aboard.” What a waste! I understand that there may be some things that are painful, but to not share your time on one of the greatest warships ever built leaves a vacuum both with your family, who wants to know and your shipmates who remember you and your time aboard.

I realize few of you have ever written much that might be published, but this is your chance. We need your experiences, in your own words, to make this letter meaningful. Sure, you may think that one person’s remembrances don’t mean much, but remember - you shared those experiences with up to 2,000 other people!

When you write something, others will remember the same times and same places. Our children and their children will be able to hear about it for the first time. It’s then that our ship becomes more than a hunk of steel that floats. She becomes a living, breathing thing that involved you.

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.

Disclaimer:

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