

SOS

SAVE OUR SHIPS

SEA CLASSICS
invites news contributions to this
"Save Our Ships" column. Send to: SOS,
9509 Vassar Ave., Unit A, Chatsworth, CA 91311-0883

After years of wrangling with potential sites and budget problems, it looks like the battleship Iowa will be permanently berthed at the former Mare Island Naval Shipyard near Vallejo — if her sponsors can raise \$20 million to satisfy the Navy

BY MERRILL CHAPMAN

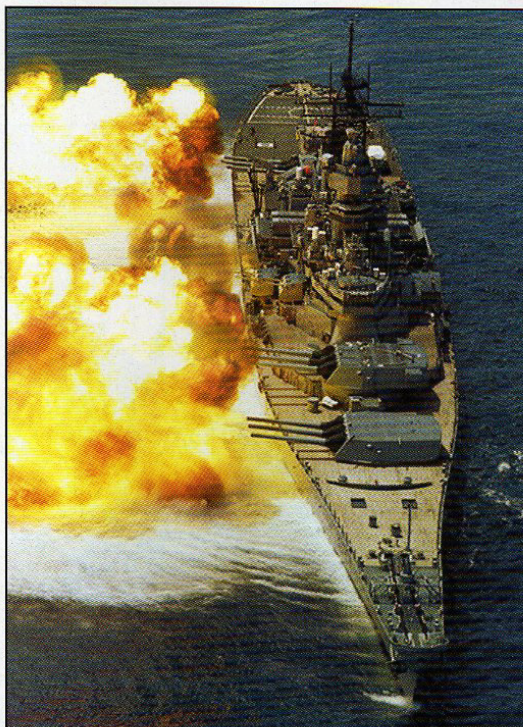
USS IOWA

(BB-61)

FINDS A HOME... MAYBE!

As the well-meaning members of HSMPS (Historic Ships Memorial At Pacific Square) have found out, it's no easy matter to save a 48,000-ton battleship. After years of competing against several other equally dedicated organizations hoping to secure possession of America's last uncommitted historic battleship, HSMPS appears to have won the bidding — that is if, and it's a very big IF, they can come up with the \$18- to \$20-million funding demanded by the Navy.

After recently receiving a letter of intention from the Navy that theirs is the only application still viable, the HSMPS knew that its true work had just begun for petitioning to acquire a battleship is one thing, but promoting the money to satisfy the Navy that they mean business is an equally challenging task. As it stands, if HSMPS, which was specifically founded in 1996 to acquire the USS *Iowa*, plans to permanently berth the 861-ft Goliath at a dock at the former Mare Island Naval Shipyard



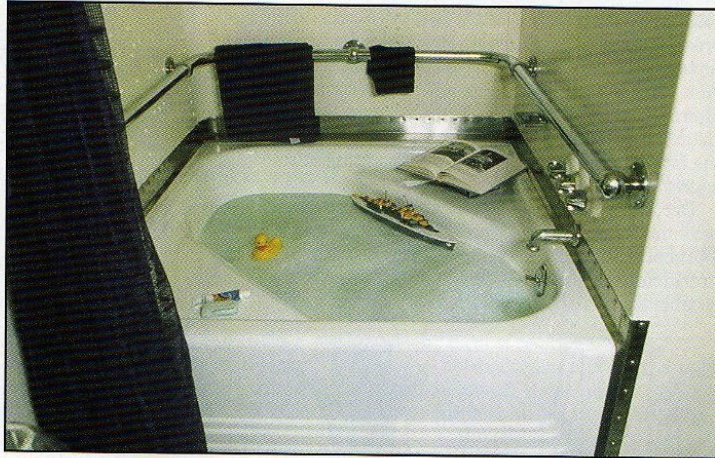
Iowa fires a nine-gun 16-in broadside to demonstrate her awesome firepower. She and sister *Wisconsin* (BB-64) are the only two battleships in existence which could conceivably be returned to duty in a national emergency. Sisters *Missouri* (BB-63) in Hawaii, and *New Jersey* (BB-62) in New Jersey, have been too heavily modified for museum display to readily be made seaworthy

near the city of Vallejo. This appears to be a win-win situation for everyone for everyone knows the key to success is location, location, location. And Mare Island has just that. Vallejo is a large, well-run city that is a major link to sprawling San Francisco Bay with its enormous population and popularity as a worldwide tourist attraction.

Although the 30-mi distant city of San Francisco spurned *Iowa*'s supporters largely on political issues, no one can argue that this sprawling west coast city isn't a magnet for vacationers who are curious about the romantic city by the sea and therefore should be more than capable of financially supporting the class leader of America's last battleships. What is ideal about Mare Island which in itself is a popular historic attraction is that it is expansive, close to a large bay-side city and has deep water facilities more than equal to accommodating a vessel of *Iowa*'s enormous size.

Once *Iowa* opens to visitors her success will be virtually assured by word of mouth, if nothing else. Several high powered sponsors will help guarantee her success, among them the influential Roosevelt Foundation. Visitors will be amazed as they walk the near 46,000-sq-ft of decks and take in the might of the 16-in guns that could throw a projectile the size of a Volkswagen more than 23-mi. Guests will be able to inspect her still-unrepaired #2 turret, her armored citadel with its elaborate fire control apparatus, not to mention *Iowa*'s enormous engine rooms which developed more than 200,000 shaft hp to drive her at 33-kts and the large galley where millions of meals were

served to her 3000 crewmen three times a day around the year. Tours will be self-guided and docent-guided and overnight programs and reenactments will help make her history come alive. An emotional learning experience everyone in the family can share, their visit to this most enduring warship will be an unforgettable experience. "It's a last chance to save irreplaceable floating history," reminds an enthusiastic HSMPS spokesman.



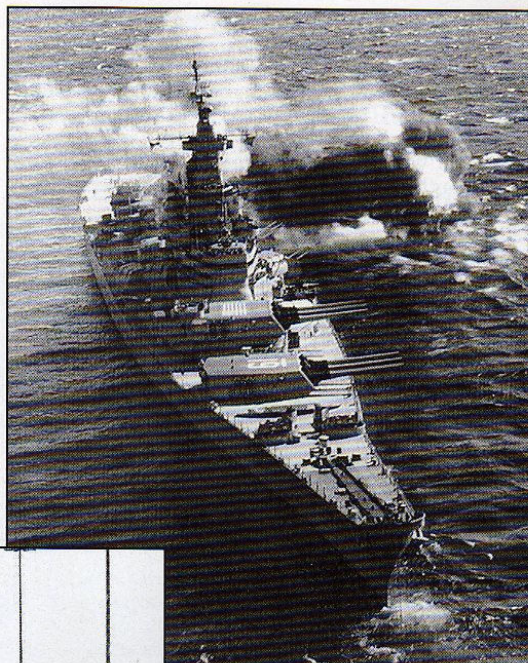
Iowa visitors are treated to a rare sight — the only bathtub ever installed in a battleship — this for President Franklin D. Roosevelt who sailed aboard *Iowa* to his historic Tehran Conference meetings in French Morocco in November 1943.



It can be done — Don Brooks restored this Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress from a pile of wreckage. The extensive restoration was done to honor his father — who was a WWII B-17 gunner. Photographed during April 2008, the B-17 (piloted by Don Brooks and Ray Fowler) passes over the mothball fleet with the *Iowa* being under the bomber's right wing. Although a much bigger task, the *Iowa* can also be saved for future generations. (Michael O'Leary)

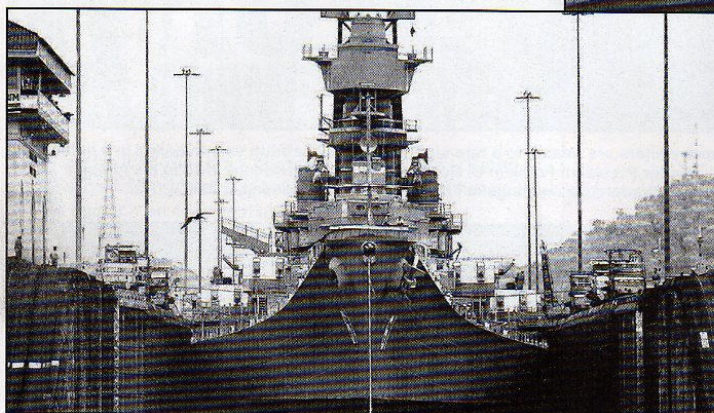
The last of America's most-classic warships, *Iowa* was towed from Newport, Rhode Island, to San Francisco in 2001 when it was decided she would be stored with the reserve fleet in San Francisco's Suisun Bay where she was placed for disposition. Class leader of four vessels, *Iowa* was appropriated in 1939 and launched 27 August 1942. The first of her class to be commissioned, she had the honor of taking President Roosevelt to French Morocco for the critical Tehran conference in November 1943. As such, *Iowa* was fitted with a special bathtub for the handicapped president, the only battleship so equipped and an item certain to be a top tourist attraction. Boasting nine 16-in guns, 20 5-in guns in dual mounts and a tremendous anti-aircraft battery of 40mm and 20mm guns, *Iowa* and her sisters, *New Jersey*, *Missouri* and *Wisconsin* were among the largest warships afloat in WWII earning in the aggregate more than 30 battle stars.

Decommissioned at the end of WWII, *Iowa* briefly recommissioned for the Korean War but was again mothballed in 1958. Recommissioned in 1984 for President Reagan's "600-ship Navy," *Iowa* wrote a highly notable third chapter in her lengthy career. Early



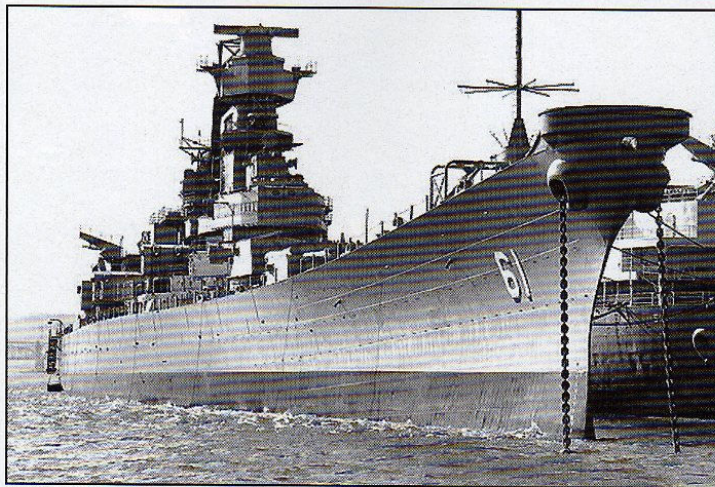
Despite an unfortunate turret explosion in turret #2 in 1989 which killed 47 sailors and knocked that mount out of action, *Iowa* deployed on schedule to meet her NATO commitments. The accident altered the way gun crews handled big-gun ammunition. To date the turret is still inoperable.

Under tow from east to west coast, the *Iowa* barely squeezes through the Panama Canal locks at Miraflores in April 2001. The lock is 110-ft wide, *Iowa* 108.2-ft. The tow was otherwise uneventful.



nicknamed "the Big Stick" she won eleven battle stars for WWII and Korean War duty. A tragic explosion in turret number two in April 1989 killed 47 sailors and left the turret totally inoperative. As a result, she was decommissioned on 16 October 1990 and placed in the national reserve.

Several promising endeavors by a number of groups attempting to acquire *Iowa* failed for a variety of reasons, lack of sufficient financing being the most prominent. Others proved to be her size and the associated costs of dredging riverine areas deep enough to accommodate her. Now down to the wire, it is time for everyone to come forward and support the effort to save this most-treasured national asset. SOS — SAVE OUR SHIP *IOWA*. This is her last chance at perpetuity. To help, write or call the HSMPS today: PO Box 361, Vallejo, California 94590; 415-905-5700; or E-mail: info@battleshipiowa.org



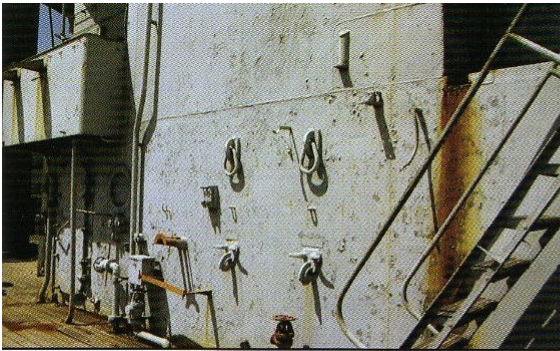
USS *Iowa* (BB-61) as she appeared in 2007 at her new home with the reserve fleet in Suisun Bay, California. Shod of her radar and much minor equipment the Navy insists that she and sister *Wisconsin* shall be kept in a state of readiness which would allow her to quickly be returned to active duty. As it is, *Iowa* has suffered the sad neglect of having been virtually abandoned the last 7-yrs.



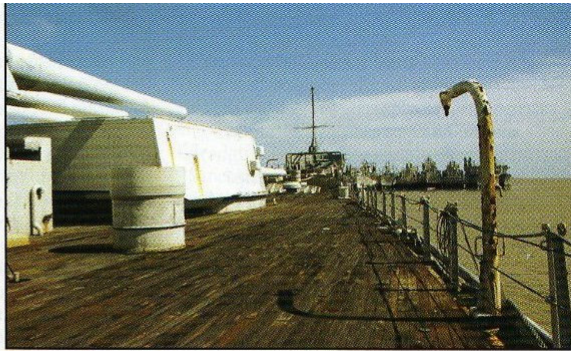
An overhead view of the *Iowa* in Suisun Bay adjacent to Benicia, California. The Reserve Fleet has upwards to 75 ships that are being preserved. A few at the east end are older than the author and should be scrapped. Not the author, the ships!



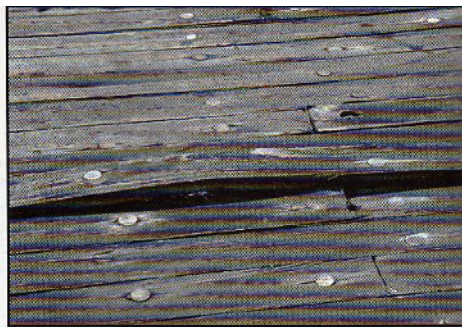
Aft deck on the *Iowa* which shows the degradation of the teak, and severe rust along the superstructure. The contract to repair these areas was stopped before the workers could get to them.



An exterior bulkhead that show the effects of direct sunlight, and weather on the superstructure. Rust, peeling coats and coats of paint tell the story of "lick and a promise" maintenance.

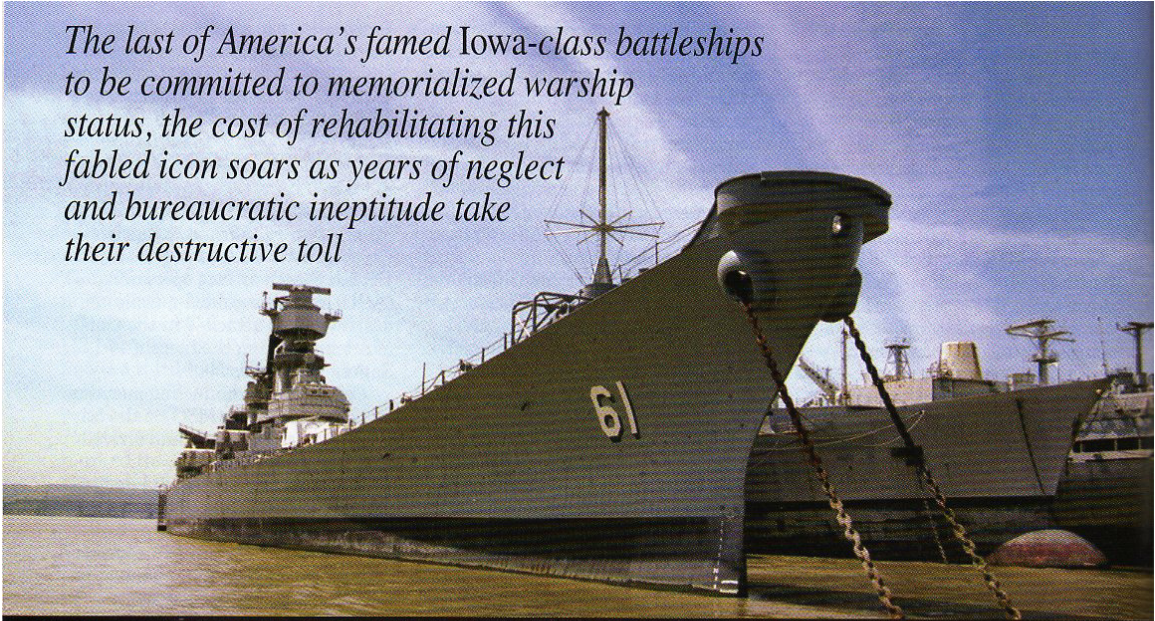


On the deck of the *Iowa* looking forward. The deck planking and paint are obviously in bad shape. A lot of money and elbow grease are necessary to repair the ship.



The Burmese teak deck which is peeling up in locations all over the main deck of the *Iowa*. It all must be replaced with a new type of wood. The estimated cost is \$5 million.

The last of America's famed Iowa-class battleships to be committed to memorialized warship status, the cost of rehabilitating this fabled icon soars as years of neglect and bureaucratic ineptitude take their destructive toll

A photograph of the USS Iowa (BB-61) in a harbor. The ship is dark grey with the number '61' on its bow. It is moored with thick chains. The sky is blue with some clouds.

USS IOWA'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE: A VICTIM OF NEGLECT



Tugs moving battleship Iowa into the reserve basin at Suisun Bay, California, on 21 April 2001. Photograph © and through the courtesy of our member Larry Cote. The photograph is looking east from the Benicia-Martinez Bridge, where the tugs have just rotated the ship 180 degrees to enter the channel leading to Suisun Bay anchorage. While the House Armed Services Committee recommended in 2005 (in reviewing the proposed FY 2006 budget) that the Iowa be transferred to the city of Stockton, California, as a permanent memorial and museum ship, some private individuals argued before the U.S. Congress at the same time that both battleships still on the Navy list should be reactivated to provide gunfire support for littoral operations. The U.S. Navy strongly opposed reactivation, however.