

# **The Battleship Navy: History Made**

## **By Rear Admiral Stuart F. Platt SC, USN, Ret.**

Our unmatched Aegis class warships and our great nuclear carriers are at sea more days than they are in port, the level and intensity of their operations has increased dramatically in the post 9/11 era. At home, our veterans and our de-commissioned memorial ships are symbols and reminders of our past and of our future. They are a visible and tangible connection to both.

Each such ship, from "Constitution" in Charlestown MA to our own beloved "Iowa" berthed in Suisun Bay near San Francisco, from "Nautilus" in Groton, Connecticut to the "Yorktown" in South Carolina, and more than 200 others in between, all are part of our national treasure.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sailed aboard the IOWA on his journey to meet Churchill and Stalin in Tehran in the closing days of 1943. By this time, FDR was quite frail and, still unknown to most Americans, gravely ill. In as dignified a manner as possible the President was carried aboard and a journey into the history books was begun.

It was due to the foresight and will of FDR that the ship existed in the first place. In 1936, the treaty, which had virtually eliminated construction of capital ships for more than 10 years, was scrapped. With war drums beating on the European horizon, and relations with the Japanese deteriorating, the massive rebuilding of the U.S. Navy began and it included in its plans for the IOWA CLASS. However, the efforts of his predecessor and fifth cousin, Teddy Roosevelt, set the stage for FDR to travel in the relative comfort and safety of the great battleship on his journey to Tehran. Between the departure of Teddy's Great White Fleet, (the "big stick" of Roosevelt's foreign policy) in December of 1907 and the end of the First World War, American Naval power grew in strength to become the second most powerful fleet in the world. Only the British Navy of the day could compare. It was during his presidency that America first rose to the challenges it would face in the 20th century.

The significance of the Great White Fleet, the furious battles of WWII and of subsequent actions should not be lost on our nation. Just as the USS Constitution led to the Great White Fleet which in turn led to the IOWA class battleships, so the USS IOWA led the

way for the USS George Washington (CVN 73) and USS Shoup (DDG 86) today. They are the modern battleships of the most formidable Navy in the world. Britannia no longer rules the seas, the USA does.

I had a substantial role in the re-commissioning of the Battleships in the early 1980's; their new long-range strike capability provided by Tomahawk Cruise Missiles was a significant addition to the gigantic shells of her 16" guns. Today I am extremely proud of the small role I played in the life and history of this great ship. The ultimate glory however is reserved for those who served aboard her and for those who awaited her safe return.

FDR left us much to emulate, much to be thankful for and much to ponder. In 1941, months before the Day of Infamy of December 7th, in a particularly pointed "fireside chat" FDR laid out the awful truth of what the country was facing. The date was Sept. 11th. The date and the words have a certain resonance today that I find striking.

"I assume that the German leaders are not deeply concerned, tonight or any other time, by what we Americans or the American Government say or publish about them. We cannot bring about the downfall of Nazi-ism by the use of long-range invective. But when you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, you do not wait until he has struck before you crush him."

In closing, he went on to say..."The American people have faced other grave crises in their history -- with American courage, (and) with American resolution. They will do no less today. They know the actualities of the attacks upon us. They know the necessities of a bold defense against these attacks. They know that the times call for clear heads and fearless hearts."

American courage and American resolution are embodied in the USS IOWA.

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**About the Author: Rear Admiral Stuart F. Platt SC, USN Ret.** - The author of "*THE ARMAMENT TIDE – Rearming America*" was appointed by President Reagan as the Navy's first Competition Advocate General. Platt led an historic reform program to improve the methods by which the Navy buys ships, aircraft and weapon systems. Rear Admiral Platt completed a distinguished military career, and has followed it with a successful executive career in business, principally in the technology and defense sectors. He is Chairman of the Historic Ships Memorial at Pacific Square in San Francisco.

His list of published articles and Distinguished Speaker engagements totals well over 150 including Fortune Magazine, Barron's, Defense News, Harvard Business Review and the U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings. He has spoken before several United States government Commissions, at Oxford and at the Greenwich War College in the U.K., and has provided testimony at numerous Congressional Hearings. He has also lectured or given addresses at The Harvard JFK Government School and the Naval Post Graduate School. He has been widely quoted in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times and many other newspapers and magazines.

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