

Battlewagon Iowa becoming 'Big Stick'

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The battleship Iowa, being refitted in a shipyard at Pascagoula, Miss., is getting new armaments and new equipment, including air conditioning.

She also may be getting a new nickname: "The Big Stick."

That's the name the crew has hung on the giant ship, one of only two battleships in service in the world today. The other is the U.S.S. New Jersey. The Iowa will not be ready for sea for almost a year, but every day brings more progress from the shipyard crew doing the refitting.

Capt. Gerald Gneckow, 45, who will command the Iowa, acknowledged in a telephone interview last week that the logical nickname for the battleship probably is "The Big I." So how come "The Big Stick?"

Remembering Teddy

"We were going through some things in the records and we found a

tape recording of a nationwide radio broadcast made in 1944," said Gneckow. "This commentator was telling the audience about the new battleship Iowa, and he said her power and might reminded him of the old saying by President Theodore Roosevelt — speak softly and carry a big stick.

"We really like that. I am sure it will stick and become our motto."

That's assuming that the 1,500 enlisted men and about 60 officers who eventually will be assigned to the Iowa like the name "Big Stick."

Chances are they will. In the military, once the word gets around that the commanding officer likes something, everyone likes it.

Gneckow's command now covers only about a dozen Navy officers and

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Iowa only warship with bathtub

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men. The first contingent of 500 crew members is scheduled to arrive about Oct. 1, said the skipper. In the meantime, he said, he goes aboard the ship every working day to see how the refitting work is going.

"Every day I am flabbergasted," said Gneckow, a native of Grand Island, Neb., who grew up in Idaho. "It is not only her size but the quality. I am just amazed that they could have built her as quickly as was done and still have the quality. She's a tough ship."

Fulfilling a Dream

Gneckow's Navy record includes command of a destroyer and a cruiser. But he acknowledged that every officer dreams of having command of a battleship.

He said many enlisted men and lower ranking officers share the same feeling about battleships. Why?

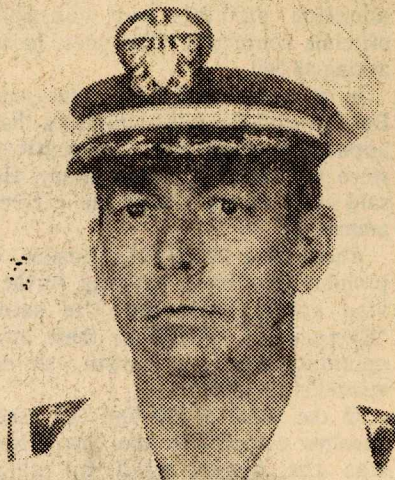
"I think it is the big guns and the prestige of being on a ship that can deliver that much firepower. A ship like that draws crowds wherever she goes. You feel important being a member of the crew."

Gneckow said when news got out that the Iowa was coming back into service the Navy heard from 4,000 retired Navy men or reservists who wanted to serve on the battleship.

Gneckow said one thing being considered is to pick an all-Iowa unit of recruits ready for boot camp and have them go through training with the idea of being assigned to the Iowa.

The big ship has been drawing crowds and attention since her commissioning on Jan. 23, 1942. Four "Iowa class" battleships were put in service by the United States in World War II — the Iowa, the Wisconsin, the New Jersey and the Missouri.

The Iowa was a giant at the time. From keel to the top of the mast measures the same as an 18-story building. She is 887 feet long and weighs 45,000 tons. Her nine 16-inch guns have 68-foot-long barrels that fire shells that weigh as much as Volkswagens. Those shells can carry 23 miles and hit with a force that



Capt. Gerald Gneckow
"You feel important"

would penetrate 60 feet of rock. The solid steel walls of the command turret on the ship's bridge are 17.2 inches thick.

Absorbing Punishment

Japanese planes, loaded with gasoline and explosives, have smashed against the six-inch armored decks of Iowa-class battleships without doing more than scorching the paint.

Such ships are really platforms for the huge guns. Critics have said battleships are relics of old wars and that is why no nation other than the United States has any these days. Missiles and airplanes have taken the job of the battleship and in fact, say critics, the battleship might be quite vulnerable to attack by such weapons.

The Navy shrugs off such criticism, pointing out that the new Iowa will be equipped with new weapons, including 32 Tomahawk missiles and 16 Harpoon missiles.

The cost of refitting the Iowa is estimated at \$500 million. It cost only \$114 million to build her 41 years ago. Despite being middle-aged, the Iowa has been in service only 12 years. The rest of the time the ship was mothballed.

The Iowa cruised the North Atlantic in her early service. President Franklin Roosevelt was a

passenger aboard the Iowa when he went to the Teheran Conference. It was on that trip that one of the escorting American destroyers took part in a mock torpedo attack. But by mistake a live torpedo was fired and it bore down on the Iowa. Warned, the ship dodged the torpedo, which exploded in its wake.

Later, when the Iowa went to the Pacific, her gun tubs scraped the walls of the Panama Canal as she went through. She earned 11 battle stars in action against the Japanese. The ship returned to active service during the Korean War, was decommissioned in 1958 and mothballed until 1982.

New Fuel System

Gneckow said the work going on right now includes structural changes to take care of the new armaments. In the bowels of the ship workmen are installing a new fuel system that will allow the burning of marine diesel fuel, a lighter, cleaner burning liquid than the old Navy standard fuel oil. Pollution controls include tanks to store sewage at times the ship is within three miles of any shore or in any port. The original sewage system discharged sewage both in the open sea and in port.

Air conditioning is being added, primarily to make sure that the ship's extensive system of computers will be operated in the proper temperature. One obvious side benefit of this will be that the crew will live in air-conditioned quarters.

If the schedule goes as planned, the Iowa will be re-commissioned on July 14, 1984. Prior to that, the ship will go out for sea shakedown.

When the ship returns to active duty the state of Iowa will surrender a 43-piece silver service now on display in the state Historical Museum in Des Moines. The set was provided to the first battleship Iowa in 1896, then was used on the present Iowa and on the cruiser Des Moines. The state will keep a creamer, coffee server and sugar bowl — duplicates in the set going back aboard ship.

Perhaps at that time Captain Gneckow can try out the bathtub in his inboard cabin. It is believed to be the only bathtub on a warship. It was installed in 1943 specifically for the use of President Roosevelt.