



# USS MISSOURI BATTLESHIP (BB-63)

## USS Missouri History 1941-1950

### REFERENCES:

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- B. Paul Stillwell's book "BATTLESHIP MISSOURI"
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### KEY TERMS

Captain Callaghan  
Commissioning  
Harry S. Truman  
Kamikaze

Launching  
Mary Margaret Truman  
Panama Canal  
Sea Trials

Sponsor  
Ulithi  
Yamato  
Yorktown

## 1. Construction

The fourth *Missouri* (BB-63), the last battleship completed by the United States, was laid down 6 January 1941 in New York at the Brooklyn Naval Shipyard. Launched 29 January 1944, and sponsored by Miss Margaret Truman, daughter of then Senator from Missouri Harry S. Truman, later President; and commissioned 11 June 1944, Capt. William M. Callaghan in command.

## 2. Launching & Commissioning

The USS Missouri was built in Brooklyn Naval Shipyard, in New York as an Iowa Class Battleship with her keel being laid January 6, 1941. This was 11 months and one day before the start of World War II. She was launched on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1944 and was christened USS Missouri by Mary Margaret Truman, Harry Truman's daughter. A junior U.S. Senator then from the state of Missouri, he soon would become President. During the ceremony Senator Truman turned out to be a somewhat of a prophet when he stated that someday soon the Missouri would sail into Tokyo Bay with guns blazing ending the war.

Both Mary Margaret and her father would visit the ship many times in the future. The day of launching was cold and overcast. As what was to become one of the most famous ships in world history splashed into East River, the sun broke through the clouds and the rays shined down on her, almost as if she were being blessed from above.

## 3. World War II

After trials off New York and shakedown and battle practice in Chesapeake Bay, *Missouri* departed Norfolk 11 November 1944, transited the Panama Canal 18 November and steamed to San Francisco for final fitting out as fleet flagship. She stood out of San Francisco Bay 14 December and arrived off Ulithi, West Caroline Islands, 13 January 1945. There she was temporary headquarters ship for Vice Adm. Marc A. Mitscher. The battleship put to sea 27 January to serve in the screen of the *Lexington* carrier task group of Mitscher's TF 58, and on 16 February her flattops launched the first airstrikes against Japan since the famed Doolittle raid that had been launched from carrier *Hornet* in April 1942.

*Missouri* then steamed with the carriers to Iwo Jima where her mighty guns provided direct and continuous support to the invasion landings begun 19 February. After TF 58 returned to Ulithi 5 March, *Missouri* was assigned to the *Yorktown* carrier task group. On 14 March *Missouri* departed Ulithi in the screen of the fast carriers and steamed to the Japanese mainland. During strikes against targets along the coast of the Inland Sea of Japan beginning, 18 March, *Missouri* splashed four Japanese aircraft.

Raids against airfields and naval bases near the Inland Sea and southwestern Honshu continued. *Wasp*, crashed by an enemy suicide plane 19 March, resumed flight operations within an hour. Two bombs penetrated the hangar deck and decks aft of carrier *Franklin*, leaving her dead in the water within 50 miles of the Japanese mainland. Cruiser *Pittsburgh* took *Franklin* in tow until she gained speed to 14 knots. *Missouri's* carrier task group provided cover for *Franklin's* retirement toward Ulithi until 22 March, and then set course for pre-invasion strikes and bombardment of Okinawa.

*Missouri* joined the fast battleships of TF 58 in bombarding the southeast coast of Okinawa 24 March, an action intended to draw enemy strength from the west coast beaches that would be the actual site of invasion landings. *Missouri* rejoined the screen of the carriers as Marine and Army units stormed the shores of Okinawa on the morning of 1 April. Planes from the carriers shattered a special Japanese attacking force led by battleship *Yamato* on, 7 April. *Yamato*, the world's largest battlewagon, was sunk, as were a cruiser and a destroyer. Three other enemy destroyers were heavily damaged and scuttled. Four remaining destroyers, sole survivors of the attacking fleet, were damaged and retired to Sasebo.

On 11 April *Missouri* opened fire on a low-flying suicide (kamikaze) plane, which penetrated the curtain of her shells to crash just below her main deck level. The starboard wing of the plane was thrown far forward, spreading aviation fuel and igniting a fire at frame 165 and forward. Yet the battleship suffered only superficial damage, and the fire was brought quickly under control.

About 2305(11:05pm) on 17 April, *Missouri* detected an enemy submarine 12 miles from her formation. Her report set off a hunter-killer operation by carrier *Bataan* and four destroyers that sank Japanese submarine *I-56*.

*Missouri* was detached from the carrier task force off Okinawa 5 May and sailed for Ulithi. During the Okinawa campaign she had shot down five enemy planes, assisted in the destruction of six others, and scored one probable kill. She helped repel 12 daylight attacks of enemy raiders and fought off four night attacks on her carrier task group. Her shore bombardment destroyed several gun emplacements and many other military, governmental, and industrial structures.

*USS Missouri* arrived back at Ulithi 9 May and then proceeded to Apra Harbor, Guam, 18 May. That afternoon Adm. William F. Halsey, Jr., Commander Third Fleet broke his flag in *Missouri*. She passed out of the harbor 21 May, and by 27 May was again conducting shore bombardment against Japanese positions on Okinawa. *Missouri* now led the mighty Third Fleet in strikes on airfields and installations on Kyushu 2 and 3 June. She rode out a fierce storm 5 and 6 June that wrenched off the bow of cruiser *Pittsburgh*. Some topside fittings were smashed, but *Missouri* suffered no major damage. Her fleet again struck Kyushu 8 June, then hit hard in a coordinated air-surface bombardment before retiring towards Leyte. She arrived at San Pedro, Leyte, 13 June, after almost 3 months of continuous operations in support of the Okinawa campaign.

While in Leyte, she prepared to lead the Third Fleet in strikes at the heart of Japan from within its home waters. The mighty fleet set a northerly course 8 July to approach the Japanese mainland. Raids took Tokyo by surprise 10 July, followed by more devastation at the juncture of Honshu and Hokkaido 13 and 14 July. For the first time, a naval gunfire force wrought destruction on a major installation within the home islands when *Missouri* closed the shore to join in a bombardment 15 July that rained destruction on the Nihon Steel Co. and the Wanishi Ironworks at Muroran, Hokkaido.

During the night of 17-18 July *Missouri* bombarded industrial targets in the Hichiti area, Honshu. Inland Sea aerial strikes continued through 25 July, and *Missouri* guarded the carriers as they struck hard blows at the Japanese capital. As July ended the Japanese no longer had any home waters. *Missouri* had led her fleet to gain control of the air and sea approaches to the very shores of Japan.

Strikes on Hokkaido and northern Honshu resumed 9 August, the day the second atomic bomb was dropped. Next day, at 2054 *Missouri's* men were electrified by the unofficial news that Japan was ready to surrender, provided that the Emperor's prerogatives as a sovereign ruler were not compromised. Not until 0745, 15 August, was word received that President Truman had announced Japan's acceptance of unconditional surrender.

Adm. Sir Bruce Fraser, RN (Commander, British Pacific Fleet) boarded *Missouri* 16 August, and conferred the order Knight of the British Empire upon Admiral Halsey. *Missouri* transferred a landing party of 200 officers and men to battleship *Iowa* for temporary duty with the initial occupation force for Tokyo 21 August. *Missouri* herself entered Tokyo Bay early 29 August to prepare for the formal surrender ceremony.

High-ranking military officials of all the allied powers were received on board 2 September. Fleet Adm. Chester Nimitz boarded shortly after 0800, and General of the Army Douglas MacArthur (Supreme Commander for the Allies) came on board at 0843. The Japanese representatives, headed by Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu, arrived at 0856. At 0902 General MacArthur stepped before a battery of microphones and the 23-minute surrender ceremony was broadcast to the waiting world. By 0930 the Japanese emissaries had departed.

The afternoon of 6 September Admiral Halsey transferred his flag to battleship *South Dakota*. Early next day *Missouri* departed Tokyo Bay to receive homeward bound passengers at Guam, thence sailed unescorted for Hawaii. She arrived Pearl Harbor 20 September and flew Admiral Nimitz' flag on the afternoon of 28 September for a reception.

#### **4. Peace & Training**

The next day *Missouri* departed Pearl Harbor bound for the eastern seaboard of the United States. She reached New York City 28 September and broke the flag of Adm. Jonas Ingram, Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet.

On 27 October, *Missouri* boomed out a 21-gun salute for Navy Day ceremonies. President Truman visited the ship while in port and while sitting at the surrender table stated, "This is the happiest day of my life."

One of the biggest events while in Norfolk was the installation of the Surrender Plaque. Three different plaques had been created, by three different organizations. Captain selected the plaque that was forged by the shipyard's foundry because he felt that it had the most substantial lettering and would last the longest. The plaque was to be installed in the deck marking the spot where the table sat while the documents of surrender were being signed. During the installation Marines had to stand guard so that none of the workers would take any of the pieces of teak that was being removed. The chips of wood were regarded as property of the crew and should go to those serving on board.

After overhaul in the New York Naval Shipyard and a training cruise to Cuba, *Missouri* returned to New York. The afternoon of 21 March 1945 she received the remains of the Turkish Ambassador to the United States, Melmet Munir Ertegun. She departed 22 March for Gibraltar and on the 5th April anchored in the Bosphorus off Istanbul. She rendered full honors, including the firing of a 19-gun salute during both the transfer of the remains of the late Ambassador and the funeral ashore.

*Missouri* departed Istanbul April 9 and entered Phaleron Bay, Piraeus, Greece, and the following day for an overwhelming welcome by Greek government officials and people. She had arrived in a year when there were ominous Russian overtures and activities in the entire Balkan area. Greece had become the scene of a Communist-inspired civil war, as Russia sought every possible extension of Soviet influence throughout the Mediterranean region. Demands were made that Turkey grant the Soviets a base of seapower in the Dodecanese Islands and joint control of the Turkish Strait leading from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean.

The voyage of *Missouri* to the eastern Mediterranean gave comfort to both Greece and Turkey. News media proclaimed her a symbol of U.S. interest in preserving Greek and Turkish liberty. With an August decision to deploy a strong fleet to the Mediterranean, it became obvious that the United States intended to use her naval sea and air power to stand firm against the tide of Soviet subversion.

*Missouri* departed Piraeus 26 April, touching at Algiers and Tangiers before arriving Norfolk 9 May. She departed for Culebra Island 12 May to join Admiral Mitscher's 8th Fleet in the Navy's first large-scale postwar Atlantic training maneuvers. The battleship returned to New York City 27 May, and spent the next year steaming Atlantic coastal waters north to the Davis Straits and south to the Caribbean on various Atlantic command training exercises.

*Missouri* arrived Rio de Janeiro 30 August 1947 for the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Hemisphere Peace and Security. President Truman boarded 2 September to celebrate the signing of the Rio Treaty, which broadened the Monroe Doctrine, stipulating that an attack on one of the signatory American States would be considered an attack on all.

The Truman family boarded *Missouri* September 7<sup>TH</sup>, to return to the United States and debarked at Norfolk September 19<sup>TH</sup>. The USS Missouri was in New York (23 September to 10 March 1948) for an overhaul followed by refresher training at Guantanamo Bay. The summer of 1948 was devoted to midshipman and reserve training cruises. The battleship departed Norfolk 1 November for a second 3-week Arctic cold weather training cruise to the Davis Straits. The next 2 years *Missouri* participated in Atlantic command exercises ranging from the New England coast to the Caribbean, alternated with two midshipman summer training cruises. She was overhauled at Norfolk Naval Shipyard 23 September 1949 to 17 February 1950.

**5. Chronological List of Significant Events**

- 6 January 1941 ~ USS Missouri keel laid at Brooklyn Naval Shipyard
- 29 January 1944 ~ USS Missouri launched
- 11 June 1944 ~ USS Missouri commissioned
- 7 April 1945 - Yamato sunk by carrier aircraft
- 11 April 1945 - Missouri struck Stbd side frame 165 by Kamikaze
- 2 September 1945 ~ USS Missouri hosts Japanese surrender ceremony ending WWII
- September 1945 ` Installation of the Surrender Plaque in Norfolk Navy Yard
- 27 October 1945 - Truman visits Missouri in New York Harbor
- 5 April 1946 - Delivers remains of the Turkish Ambassador Melmet Munir Ertegun to Istanbul.
- 7 September 1947 - Truman family rides Missouri back to states from Rio de Janeiro.
- 17 January 1950 ~ USS Missouri ran aground due to navigational error
- 1 February 1950 ~ USS Missouri refloated; ready for Korean War service

**NOTES:**