

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Iowa

At noon on the twenty-eighth of March, 1896, the shipyard of William Cramp and Sons at Philadelphia was thronged with spectators — many of them prominent officials from Washington and the State of Iowa. The day was warm, and the sunlight sparkled on the water of the Delaware River and lighted up the keel of a giant ship which, resplendent in red and white paint, rested as if in a cradle at the head of an incline. This was the center of attraction.

There was a word of command, the sound of a saw somewhere below, and the great hull began to move. At this moment Mary Lord Drake, the daughter of the Governor of Iowa, dashed a bottle of champagne against the bow which towered high above her head and, as the sparkling wine ran down the side, said, "I christen thee *Iowa*". Not many heard the words, however, for innumerable whistles



blew a noisy welcome as the keel slipped down the ways and floated out upon the waters of the Delaware, while the thousands of spectators cheered the promise of a new national defender.

Perhaps it was prophetic of the future that, in a poem written on this occasion, S. H. M. Byers included this stanza:

Far better the ship go down  
And her guns, and her thousand men,  
In the depth of the sea to drown,  
Than ever to sail again  
With the day of her promise done,  
Or the star of her glory set,  
Or a thread from the standard gone  
That has never yielded yet.

Thus was born upon the surface of the waters the battleship *Iowa* which had been authorized by an act of Congress on July 19, 1892, with an initial appropriation of four million dollars. Slowly during the months which followed the keel became a warship, bearing upon her sides an armor of plated steel and having within five great boilers and two sets of triple expansion engines which were to give to the empty frame the throb of life.

When finally completed, at a total cost of \$5,871,206.32, the *Iowa* well deserved the title, "queen of warships", which had been conferred upon her by a newspaper correspondent at the time of the launching. Three hundred and sixty feet long — one-fifth longer than the average city block — and over



seventy-two feet wide, the *Iowa* had a displacement of over eleven thousand tons. The lighting plant alone weighed forty-five tons. She carried four 12-inch, eight 8-inch, and six 4-inch guns, in addition to numerous smaller weapons, and was capable of a speed of sixteen knots an hour. An enthusiastic Iowa editor declared: "As an example of the American naval architect's skill she is an achievement of which we should well be proud, and a namesake in which any state might glory."

A crew of about five hundred officers and men, under the command of Captain W. T. Sampson, was assigned to the new battleship and on June 16, 1897, the *Iowa*, equipped with intellect as well as body and life, was put in commission.

On July 19th, the silver service, purchased with an appropriation of five thousand dollars by the Iowa General Assembly, was presented to the ship at Newport, Rhode Island, by C. G. McCarthy, State Auditor of Iowa, whose brief speech included this wish: "While we hope that our navy shall never turn from the face of an enemy, may we not indulge the larger hope that this stately Iowa and the other battleships and the cruisers — armored and unarmored — shall somehow find a place as messengers of peace rather than of war — be heralds of human progress rather than foemen in international strife." The gift was accepted by Captain Sampson.

Less than a year later, however, the *Iowa* was stationed outside the harbor of Santiago, Cuba,



where the Spanish fleet under the command of Admiral Pascual de Cervera had taken refuge. The Cuban situation and the sinking of the *Maine* had at last brought on war between Spain and the United States. In the bottle-like harbor, shut off from view by high cliffs, were the Spanish warships which had crossed the Atlantic, like the Armada of old, to combat Anglo-Saxon civilization. While American cruisers patrolled the ocean, and seaboard cities began to talk of possible bombardment, the Spanish fleet had slipped into the harbor and a squadron of the United States navy was watching the entrance, lest the enemy's ships again escape to threaten American cities and commerce.

An attempt had been made by Richmond P. Hobson and seven sailors to so block the harbor that the Spanish fleet could not come out, but the plan did not prove entirely successful. There was still a passage way, and the American warships, stationed in a semi-circle about the harbor — like huge cats patiently watching a mouse hole — were doubtless hoping that the enemy would venture out.

The morning of July 3, 1898, was clear and calm. On board the American ships preparations were being made for inspection and religious services, for it was Sunday. At the extreme eastern point of the crescent formed by the blockading squadron was the *New York*, the flagship of Rear Admiral Sampson who had been the first captain of the *Iowa*. Far to the west was the *Brooklyn*, one of the fastest of the



American ships, flying the pennant of Commodore W. S. Schley, the second in command. Between the two from east to west lay the *Indiana*, the *Oregon* — just in from her trip around South America — the *Iowa*, and the *Texas*. Smaller craft hovered about. The *New York* was just starting eastward to Siboney where Admiral Sampson was to have a conference with General William R. Shafter.

Suddenly, at nine-thirty-five, the Sabbath calm which lay over the scene was broken, when the *Iowa*, stationed directly opposite the mouth of the harbor, fired a shot from a small gun and raised the signal, "The enemy is attempting to escape". The same signal soon flew from every ship and the *Brooklyn* — the flagship in the absence of the *New York* — signalled, "Clear for action".

It was no false alarm: the Spanish ships were steaming out of the harbor. At the head, flying the Admiral's pennant, came the *Infanta Maria Teresa*, the red and yellow flag of Spain showing vividly against the green of the sloping Cuban shore. Behind her were the *Vizcaya*, the *Cristobal Colon*, and the *Almirante Oquendo*, followed by the smaller destroyers *Pluton* and *Furor*.

The signal from the flagship was hardly needed. With one accord the American sailors hurried to their places, literally throwing themselves down the ladders in their eagerness to reach their stations, while deep in the holds the engineers and firemen worked frantically to start their engines, for the

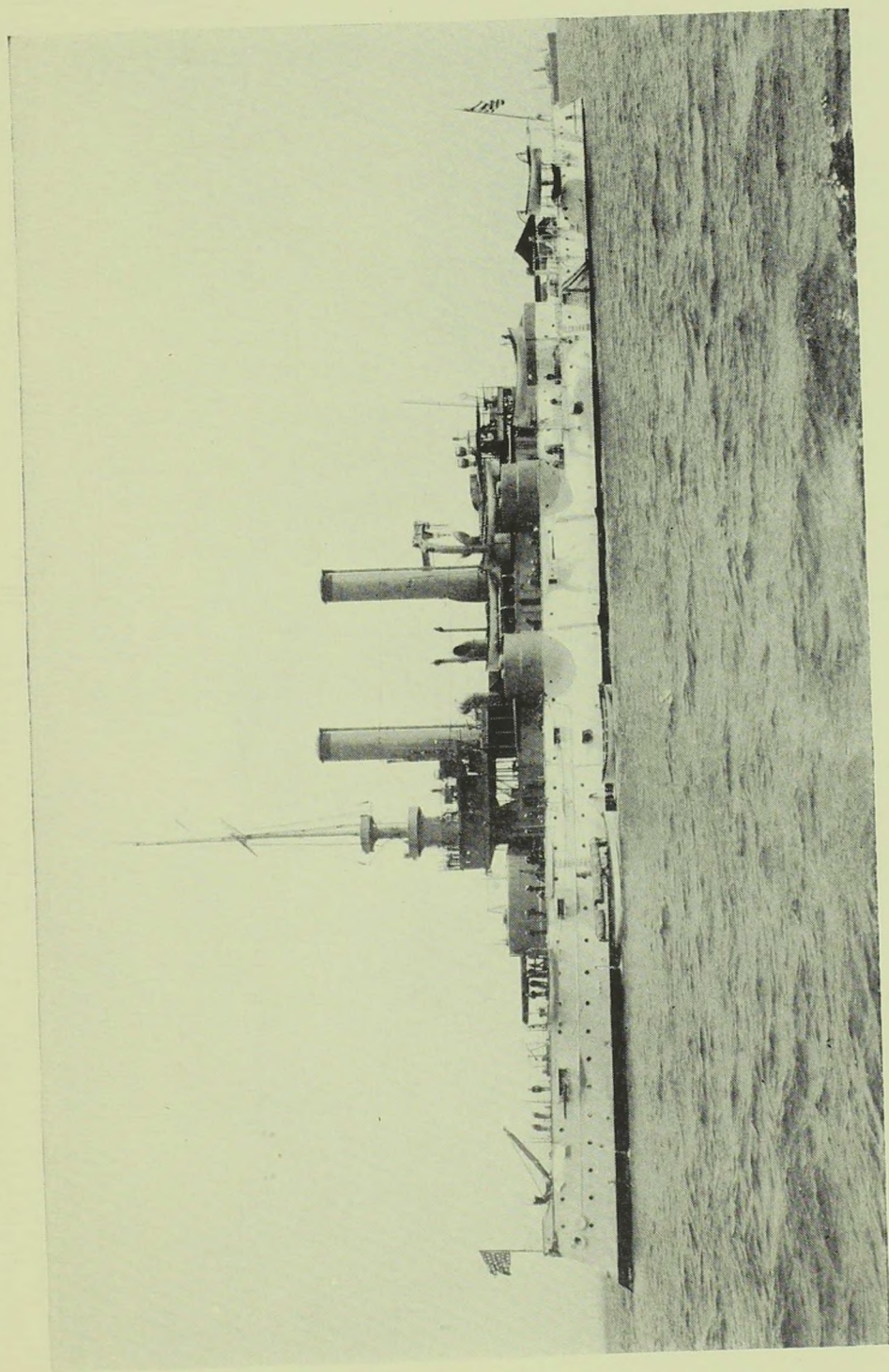


American cruisers were, of course, at rest. Almost as one ship the American fleet got into action, the faster warships like the *Brooklyn* and the *Oregon* leading the way. Under a vast cloud of smoke from the guns and smokestacks and later from fires on board the ships, the American squadron pursued the fleeing Spanish cruisers westward along the coast, pouring a rain of shot into whichever of the enemy happened to be within striking distance.

The Spanish ships were supposed to be faster than those of the United States, but the American sailors were enthusiastic and well prepared while the Spanish crews hoped at best for escape and not for victory. One by one the enemy ships, overwhelmed by the accuracy of the American gunners, turned in toward the shore, hoping at least to give the remnants of their men a chance to escape from the fire and shot-swept wrecks.

Nearest the harbor lay the smaller boats, the *Pluton* and *Furor*, and west of them were the burning hulks of the *Maria Teresa* and *Oquendo*. The *Vizcaya* — not long before an official guest in the harbor of New York — and the *Colon*, which had been protected to some extent by her sister ships, continued their desperate flight along the coast, still hoping to outdistance the slower American battle-ships and escape. There was no escape. The *Vizcaya* was soon on fire and American sailors were risking their lives to rescue the enemy from the burning wreck. The *Colon* continued a little farther





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along the coast, and then she too yielded to the combined attack of the *Oregon*, the *Brooklyn*, and the *Texas*. It was a quarter past one.

During the entire battle the American fleet lost only one man killed, and one seriously wounded. The enemy's loss was estimated at 323 killed, 151 wounded, and about 1800 prisoners.

The *Iowa*, having given the alarm, first attacked the *Teresa* in which she lodged two 12-inch shells that wrecked the steam pipes of the vessel and killed a number of the crew. Unable to handle the ship or work the guns in the face of the scalding steam and the fires which were soon raging as shell after shell found the target, the crew of the *Teresa* beached their ship and the *Iowa* for a time turned her guns upon the two destroyers which the converted yacht *Gloucester* was engaging. The smaller boats were soon put out of commission: the *Furor* was sunk and the *Pluton* was driven ashore not more than five miles from Santiago. Before long a shell penetrated one of the boilers of the *Pluton* and a vast geyser-like column of steam rose hundreds of feet in the air.

Leaving the wrecked destroyers, the *Iowa*, with some other battleships, concentrated upon the *Oquendo* and then upon the *Vizcaya*. When it was apparent that these Spanish ships were doomed, the *Indiana* was ordered back to the harbor, lest the *Alvarado* or the *Reina Mercedes* which had remained in the harbor should raid the transports to



the east; the *Iowa* was given permission to remain near the *Vizcaya* to help in the rescue of the crew; and the other ships went on in pursuit of the *Colon*.

Thus it happened that the *Iowa* received on board some two hundred and fifty Spanish prisoners from the sinking *Vizcaya*, including Captain Antonio Eulate. As the Spanish officer was lifted over the side of the *Iowa* the guard presented arms, the officer of the deck saluted, and the Spanish prisoners already on board stood at attention. Captain Eulate slowly rose to his feet, unbuckled his sword belt with some difficulty — for he had been wounded — kissed the hilt of his sword, and presented it to Captain Robley D. Evans, who declined to take the sword, but accepted the surrender and shook hands with the Spanish captain. The crew of the *Iowa*, stripped to the waist, blackened with powder, and covered with perspiration, broke into cheers.

As Captain Eulate was being conducted below for medical attention, he turned toward his wrecked and burning ship, stretched out his hand in farewell, and exclaimed, "Adios, *Vizcaya*". As the words left his lips the magazine of the *Vizcaya* exploded and there rose a column of smoke and steam which was seen fifteen miles away.

But the *Iowa* was to receive a still more distinguished guest that day. Early in the afternoon Admiral Cervera, his son, and a number of other officers were brought on board the *Iowa*, escorted by Commander Richard Wainwright of the *Gloucester*.



The marine guard of eighty men paraded, the officers and crew of the *Vizcaya* were grouped on the quarter deck, while the crew of the *Iowa* clustered over the turrets and superstructure. As the Spanish commander stepped upon the deck, the American sailors manifested their admiration for the bravery of the Spaniards by cheering repeatedly, while Admiral Cervera, scantily clad, bareheaded, and barefooted, just as he had been rescued from the *Teresa*, stood bowing his thanks.

On board the *Iowa* there was nothing to mar the victory. Although she had been in the thick of the fight and had been struck several times by small projectiles and by two 6-inch shells, one of which started a small fire, not a single member of the crew had been killed or even seriously wounded.

The next twenty years in the career of the *Iowa* were uneventful: there was the usual routine of cruising, with frequent periods out of commission. In 1899, when the Iowa delegation met the Fifty-first Iowa Infantry on its return from the Philippine Islands, they attended church services on board the *Iowa*, then commanded by Captain C. F. Goodrich and anchored in the harbor at San Francisco.

A report of the ship for 1901 shows an expenditure of \$431,173.53 for maintenance during the year, about half of which was for the pay of officers and men. In 1907, the *Iowa* was in the squadron assembled off the Virginia coast in honor of the James-



town Exposition, but when the fleet left for its triumphal cruise around the world in December of that year the *Iowa* was left behind: already a new generation had supplanted her.

During the next decade the *Iowa* was on duty only part of the time. In July, 1912, for example, she was sent on a cruise with the naval militia — a warrior turned pedagogue. For several months just preceding the entrance of the United States into the World War, the old *Iowa* was used as a receiving ship, and during the war she was assigned to coast defense.

Finally in 1919, a little more than twenty years after the victory at Santiago, even the name "Iowa" was erased from the records and the old battleship was designated merely as the "B S 4". About this time, the silver service, the gift of the Commonwealth for which the ship had been named, was removed to the Philadelphia navy yard where it still remains. In 1920 the former "pride of the navy" was used as a target for bombing planes, but suffered comparatively little damage.

The final chapter in the career of the *Iowa* was recorded in the Bay of Panama on the twenty-third of March, 1923, almost exactly twenty-seven years after the ship was launched. The veteran battleship had sailed for the last time down the Delaware River from her birthplace at Philadelphia, she had voyaged southward along the coast, and had passed



through the Panama Canal to the waters of the Pacific, where the spring maneuvers of the united American fleet were to be held.

There, surrounded by the new dreadnaughts, the *Iowa* made the supreme sacrifice for the sake of the American navy. Divested of her name, her crew, and her flag, the old warship was sent out under radio control as the target for the guns of the *Mississippi*, the new "queen of the navy"—a practical use for an old ship, perhaps, but unpleasantly suggestive of the treatment accorded aged or injured wolves by the pack. The officers of the fleet, the sailors, and a delegation of civilians, including high officials of the navy and about one hundred Senators and Representatives, were interested spectators.

The faithful *Iowa* responded to the control by wireless "as if the ghost of 'Fighting Bob' [Evans] might be on her bridge, and the spirits of those who manned her at Santiago standing at their battle stations." The sailors on the surrounding ships cheered as the shells, fired at a range of from eight to ten miles, found the target; and the officers watched through their field glasses as the lonely ship dodged and twisted as if conscious of her impending fate. Great water spouts rose where the projectiles struck and dashed over the battered ship. About four o'clock, when it was evident the *Iowa* could not remain afloat much longer, the *Mississippi* commenced using regular service shells at short



range. At last a shell smashed the *Iowa's* wireless attachment and the mortally wounded ship heeled over and began to sink.

The echoes of the big guns died away. The cheers of the sailors on the watching dreadnoughts were hushed; and, as the *Iowa* turned over and her smokestacks disappeared beneath the blue waters of the Pacific, the band of the *Maryland* played the Star Spangled Banner very slowly. Fifteen thousand men of the fleet snapped into salute, while the Secretary of the Navy and the other civilian spectators stood with bared heads. The last bars of the national anthem sounded across the waters just as the waves closed over the *Iowa* and at that moment the *Maryland* fired the first of a salute of twenty-one guns, the final honor to the old battleship. "She was a good ship," said Admiral Hiliary Jones, as he wiped his eyes, "and that was good shooting."

RUTH A. GALLAHER