



BATTLESHIP MISSOURI (BB-63)

USS Missouri History 1984-1998

REFERENCES:

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KEY TERMS

Modernization
100 Million
475 Million
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Captain Kaiss
Captain Carney

World Cruise
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Operation Earnest Will
Gulf War
Captain Chernesky

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Khafji
Kuwait
Silkworm
March 31, 1992

1. Modernization:

Word came in early 1984 that the world's most famous battleship was needed once again by her country. The United States was in an arms race with the Soviet Union and had suffered through a series of events in the late 70s that included Soviet adventures in Angola and Afghanistan, plus the seizure of the American Embassy in Teheran, Iran. The Navy's readiness had fallen off in training, ammunition, and supplies as well as manning for ships. The Secretary of the Navy John Lehman under President Reagan had set out to reverse the situation and announced plans to build a 600-ship fleet.

The American Battleships represented what no new ship could, heritage, tradition, and deep pride of past brave service.

Mo arrived in Long Beach May 25th and began her modernization, which would include new missile and automated gun weapon systems, Electronic Warfare capabilities, a complete Combat Engagement Center as well as being reworked to use the newer DFM fuel oil instead of the tar like fuel used previously. Her total renovation would take two years and cost \$475 million. Remember her original cost had only been \$100 million dollars.

Missouri got underway on her own power for the first time following the modernization on January 28, 1986 the same day the space shuttle "Challenger" blew up in Florida.

She was Recommissioned May 10, 1986 with Captain Lee Kaiss in command. USS Missouri would re-enter the fleet with the world's most modern missiles and combat engagement systems. The new systems allowed the ships manning to be reduced by almost 1000 men. Now her crew would consist of 1,515 Navy: 65 officers, 1,425 enlisted, 53 Marines: 2 officers, 51 enlisted. 200 of the men on board were proud former crewmembers brought back to active duty.

That night following the ceremony Mary Margaret Truman - Daniel, presented a plaque by Capt. Kaiss. During the presentation she made a short speech which touched the soul of every man in the room when she stated "Capt. Kaiss and men of the Missouri take good care of my baby".

Capt. Kaiss was diagnosed with heart problems shortly after recommissioning and was relieved by Captain James A "Al" Carney June 20, 1986.

2. World Cruise

Missouri's cruise began September 10, 1986 from Long Beach to Pearl Harbor where Mighty MO and crew paid respects to Arizona and her brave crew. During the voyage she passed the leper colony of Molokai to reenact the 1908 salute the previous Battleship Missouri who took part of the Great White Fleet of Teddy Roosevelt's administration. Remember, "Walk softly and carry a big stick" A Battleship is a very big stick.

During her cruise Missouri would visit Sydney Australia, where a pregnant woman went into labor on the ship causing a problem of what citizenship would the child have, luckily treatment was rendered and the child was not delivered on board after all. Then it was off to Perth, Australia, through the Red Sea and Suez Canal where she was picked up by a Soviet Krivak "tattle tail" and escorted to the Dardanelles enroute to Istanbul Turkey. After Turkey it was off to , Italy just like her cruise 40 years earlier in 1946. Missouri continued east to the island of Mallorca, then on to Gibraltar. Missouri and crew passed through the Panama Canal on her way home. Just as 40 years earlier the ship again scraped the sides of the canal locks, Capt. Carney remarked it sounded like someone scratching a blackboard magnified a thousand times. Then it was on to pier six at Long Beach Naval shipyard.

Most receptions average a 75 percent showing, Missouri is truly a special ship, she had a 100 percent showing in every port to every invitation. Mighty MO was back in action and the world knew.

3. Persian Gulf - OPERATION EARNEST WILL

For the next few years USS Missouri would conduct local operations followed by a deployment to the Persian Gulf in 1987. While there she escorted re-flagged tankers in support of operation "Earnest Will". During these dangerous missions the battleship would provide escort through Iran's Silkworm missile envelopes in the Straits of Hormuz while keeping each site locked into her fire control systems and ready to be engaged at a ' notice. This was a very powerful political statement that was lost on no one.

During this deployment Missouri would go 108 days without touching port demonstrating that everything a battleship needs may be brought to her or her crew can make.

After this extremely successful deployment MO returned home for upkeep and more fleet operations.

4. Gulf War

June 30th 1990 Captain Chernesky was relieved after a rewarding tour by a familiar face to MO, Captain Kaiss. If you remember he had heart problems and was relieved awaiting a medical discharge, however while on limited duty he had undergone an experimental surgery that had completely cured his problem. A note: very few ships ever have the same captain twice, Missouri is proven herself again special, she has had three Commanding Officers return for a second tour of duty all at their own request. At the time he had no idea he would be taking USS Missouri and crew to her last war.

On August 2, 1990, President Saddam Hussein ordered his Iraq forces across the Kuwait border to seize the country. This set the world into motion for what would become known to as operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Mighty MO passed through the Straits of Hormuz on 3 January 1991, and assumed duties of Fire Support Unit Coordinator (FSUC) for the Gulf. As the FSUC she was responsible for coordinating gun engagements against enemy positions as well as tracking ammunition supply efforts. On January 9th the Missouri's EOD or Explosive Ordinance Team went their first of many mines which they successfully detonated with special explosives they attached. These brave men would detonate a total of ten mines during the war.

President Bush had set the deadline for Baghdad calling for a withdrawal of all Iraqi forces by the 15th of January. As the deadline passed Missouri was ordered to her Tomahawk Missile firing position. After setting General Quarters she fired her first of six missiles at 1:40 A.M. on the 17th of January 1991. The crew now knew they were at war as their missiles sped toward Baghdad and there was no way to bring them back. Other ships in the area were also launching their own missiles. Missouri would hear news at three in the morning as the reports started filtering in from CNN's live presentation. The following night Missouri fired 13 more tomahawks and three more over the next few days bringing her total to 28 missiles by January 20th.

Mighty MO conducted her first 16-inch fire on 3 February 1991, one day after the Iraqi's had taken the border town of Khafji. This was the first time the Mighty Mo had fired her primary weapons against a hostile force since March 25th, 1953 in the Korean War.

On the second night the Iraqis had dug and were well camouflaged. The only movement the RPV picked up was a truck. Master Chief Fire Controlman Mark Snedeker, in main battery plot, decided to have the drone follow the truck as it traveled down the Iraqi - Kuwait highway. It turned out to be a chow truck bringing food to Iraqi placements. The picture back at the ship showed the truck stopping and setting up to distribute food at different locations over the next two hours. When the truck would stop the Missouri's plot it would plot the enemy positions. When it appeared the truck was headed home, it was time for Missouri to let go on. You can imagine his surprise of the driver as the rounds started falling around his truck.

The fire missions lasted for three days, after which she had to re-supply. Missouri returned to the firing line off Khafji less than a week later and continued to engage shore targets with her massive 16 inch guns. Targets included Infantry battalions, Command bunkers, Artillery batteries, and Mechanized units. During engagements the Iraqis fired what was believed to be 40mm rounds that landed near the bow of Missouri. Although they didn't hit the ship it definitely got the crew's attention that saw them.

On February 13th Missouri headed north with the mine counter measures force to provide bombardment support for a possible amphibious landing on Faylakah Island. This island was just off the Kuwait harbor mouth and occupied by Iraqis.

On the morning of the 18th, during the transit north, USS Tripoli who was the group commander in charge of 31 coalition ships struck a land mine, which crippled her communications. Missouri was tasked with assuming tactical command of the forces for a few hours. Later that day Missouri's EOD would destroy two more mines bringing their total to ten.

It took five days for the mine counter measure ships to clear a lane six miles long and one thousand yards wide so the battleship could get close enough to fire at Kuwaiti area targets.

On the eve of more shooting February 23rd, Missouri steamed in close to the crippled Tripoli and the Group Commander Captain Peter Bulkeley and staff moved aboard the battleship. As Missouri got close to the Kuwaiti coast chemical alarms went off and the ship was placed at MOPP "Mission Oriented Protective Posture" level four, which requires full chemical suits and gas masks.

Missouri began engaging the enemy in an elaborate plot to make the Iraqis think we were staging a landing force attack. Intelligence soon showed that the ruse had paid off as the Iraqis started moving forces and material into the area.

On February 24th Coalition forces began their ground war to recapture Kuwait. Around five o'clock that morning MO began firing into occupied country to support the ground assault. The following day General Schwarzkopf directed a feint on Kuwait with Missouri as the centerpiece. Missouri was directed to pose as two battleships to make the ruse more believable. Captain Kaiss ordered firing to begin at three o'clock with a round being shot every 15 seconds. MO was doing too good of a job and was called by Bulkeley's staff and told to slow down. That morning Missouri would fire 133 rounds in a two hour period.

It was this morning that the Iraqis launched a Silkworm missile toward the Missouri. Captain Kaiss was one of the first to see and identify the missile as it roared in from astern. He had the word passed "**Missile inbound all hands brace to shock**". Captain Bulkeley was in CEC and noted how smoothly the CIWS operators brought up weapons system to full auto and began the chaff decoy launches. Panic is a very contagious disease that can spread rapidly. It was would later be noted that the calm confidence of the officers and men would be equally contagious and that professional warrior response was the best description of how Missouri's crew responded that day. As the missile came closer it crossed astern, from starboard to port and appeared to be coming up the port side. Witnesses then saw two fire bolts appear from the HMS Gloucester. The Sea Darts successfully destroyed the missile with a great flash of roaring light. During the engagement Missouri did receive damage however from the USS Jarrett's CIWS as it attempted to engage the chaff launched by Mo. The 20mm rounds sprayed the side of the ship some came through with one missing a crewmember head a mere 6 inches. The bullet hit a steam pipe that sent out a fragment that hit the man in the ear. The only crewmember wounded, during the war, was from friendly fire.

Following the attack the RPVs were flown down the bearing from which the missile had come. They located another active missile site fully manned with a control truck in place. Missouri destroyed the site with her 16-inch guns as the missile crews were observed running for their lives on the RPV video feed.

As the war continued the Missouri would remain at general quarters most of the time for the next four days passing intelligence from the RPV for coordinate strikes on tank columns and engaging ammo dumps, missile batteries and AA sites. All told, Missouri fired 611 rounds of 16 inch in a four-day period, bringing her total to 759 rounds for the war.

The Coalition forces had been so dramatically successful in their war of mobility, slashing across the desert and cutting off the enemy forces that Missouri's job was done and it was time to return home.

5. Decommissioning

Missouri arrived in Long Beach on May 13, 1991. She had been gone for six months and one day and would return to a crowd that was so enthusiastic that it would require a chain of sailors linking arms to hold them back. Once the ship was moored the first onboard were fifty-some new children of Missouri crewmembers that had been born during the deployment and war.

Missouri was decommissioned - March 31st, 1992 and once again mothballed in Bremerton. However her service was not over, she herself would start one more war before she reached her final resting-place. That war was waged in Washington DC with Senators from three states and half a dozen organizations bidding for her.

Missouri arrived in Pearl Harbor on 22 June 1998 and was moored at F-5.

NOTES: