

Genevieve Trask and the Double Christening of the USS *South Dakota*

“Battleship X,” “Old Nameless,” “HMS *Black Prince*,” “BB57,” “Big Bastard,” and “SoDak”—the USS *South Dakota* was a battleship with many names. Before sailing into World War II naval history, the *South Dakota* received a special double christening on the ways of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation dockyards at Camden, New Jersey. The unusual ceremony in June 1941 was a result of the efforts of Genevieve Trask, who had saved the gift of a bottle of champagne for a special occasion. The story of her thirty-year wait and the events surrounding the battleship’s christening provide insight into one woman’s persistence as well as American efforts to ready the country for the conflict that would become World War II.

The battleship *South Dakota* was not the first naval vessel named in honor of the state. The armored cruiser USS *South Dakota* (ACR-9, or Armored Cruiser No. 9), christened at its launching on 21 July 1904 by Grace Herreid, daughter of Governor Charles N. Herreid, holds that honor. The cruiser *South Dakota* was one of six designated as “California class,” weighing 13,400 tons with a length of 502 feet and beam of 70 feet. It had a top speed of twenty-two knots and carried a complement of 822 crewmen. Commissioned on 27 January 1908 and attached to the Pacific Fleet, the cruiser *South Dakota* searched the South Atlantic for German raiding ships and convoyed troop transports across the North Atlantic during World War I. In 1921, its name was changed to the USS *Huron*, and it subsequently became the flagship for the Asiatic Fleet. Officially decommissioned in 1928, the cruiser was sold for scrap in Seattle, Washington, in 1930.¹

1. “USS South Dakota,” Vertical Files, H84-042, State Archives Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre. In 1903, the South Dakota Legislature appropriated five thousand dollars for the creation of a sterling silver service for the cruiser. Produced by the Gorham Silver Company of Providence, Rhode Island, the thirty-two-piece set

After the First World War, construction began on a new “South Dakota” class of large armored battleships, but treaties limiting the size and number of ships countries could manufacture and maintain brought about their cancellation.² The buildup of German, Italian, and Japanese military forces in the 1930s, however, brought about the emergence of a more modern and powerful United States Navy. The Naval Parity Act of 1934 called for the construction of over one hundred warships and one thousand aircraft over the next five years. Almost immediately, the navy began plans to build two new battleships, one aircraft carrier, thirty submarines, and sixty-five destroyers. The battleships would be more compact, with an emphasis on anti-aircraft protection, thicker armored decks, and the incorporation of radar technology.³

The battleship *South Dakota* (BB-57, or Battleship No. 57) was authorized for construction on 21 March 1934, and its keel was laid on 5 July 1939 at the yards of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation in Camden. “South Dakota” was also the name for a new class of battleship designed for increased firepower and maneuverability. In addition to the USS *South Dakota*, others in this class of shorter, faster ships

included a large punch bowl and ladle, tureen, candelabras, sugar and creamer, and two dozen cups. The items are embellished with ranch and farm scenes, bison and steer heads, elk, eagles, artesian wells, hunting and mining scenes, and the seals of South Dakota and the United States Navy. A silver tray features an engraving of the armored cruiser. Today, the set resides in the Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society in Pierre.

2. The three major treaties were the Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 and the London Naval treaties of 1930 and 1936. See Thomas Hone and Trent Hone, *Battle Line: The United States Navy, 1919–1939* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2006), pp. 5–18, 189–92; George Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890–1990* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), pp. 104–18; Joel Davison, *The Unsinkable Fleet, The Politics of U.S. Navy Expansion in World War II* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press), pp. 9–11. The signing of the 1922 treaty halted construction on six battleships, including a new *South Dakota*, which was scrapped when 38 percent complete. Samuel Eliot Morris, *The Two Ocean War* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1963), pp. 24–25; Kennedy Hickman, “US Navy: South Dakota-class (BB-49 to BB-54),” www.thoughtco.com/south-dakota-class-bb-49-54-2361270/; “South Dakota Class (BB-49 through BB-54) 1918–1919 Building Programs. Construction Cancelled in 1922,” *Naval History and Heritage Command*, www.history.navy.mil/.

3. Morris, *Two Ocean War*, p. 6; Paul H. Silverstone, *US Warships of World War 2* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1989), pp. 14–15, 28–30.

included the *Indiana* (BB-58), *Massachusetts* (BB-59), and *Alabama* (BB-60). Gone were the days of battleship-to-battleship engagements. By the end of World War II, the main role of the battleship was one of aircraft-carrier protection and pre-invasion bombardment.⁴

At the beginning of 1941, the United States Navy counted seventeen battleships in service.⁵ Between 1940 and 1945, writes Robert Connery in his work on the Navy's mobilization during the war, "additions to the fleet totaled 10 battleships, 18 large aircraft carriers, 9 small aircraft carriers, 110 escort carriers, 2 large cruisers, 10 heavy cruisers, 33 light cruisers, 358 destroyers, 504 destroyer escorts, 211 submarines and 82,028 landing craft of various types." Expenditures during the same period, Connery reported, were "over 19 billion dollars . . . to construct and equip ships, 4½ billion to provide them with armament and ammunition, 4 billion dollars for radar equipment and 8 billion for ship construction and repair facilities."⁶ Between 1940 and 1945, naval personnel grew from 160,000 to 3.4 million.⁷

At 1:20 p.m. on 7 June 1941, South Dakota First Lady Vera Bushfield readied a bottle of Cook's Imperial American champagne to smash across the waiting prow of the United States Navy's newest battleship, the USS *South Dakota*. Sitting patiently in the enthusiastic crowd of government officials, navy representatives, South Dakota dignitaries, and hundreds of dock workers was Pierre resident Genevieve Trask. Given the length of time Trask had waited to see her special bottle of champagne used, at last, for the appropriate occasion, the fact that the ceremony had been delayed by more than a half hour was not likely especially bothersome.

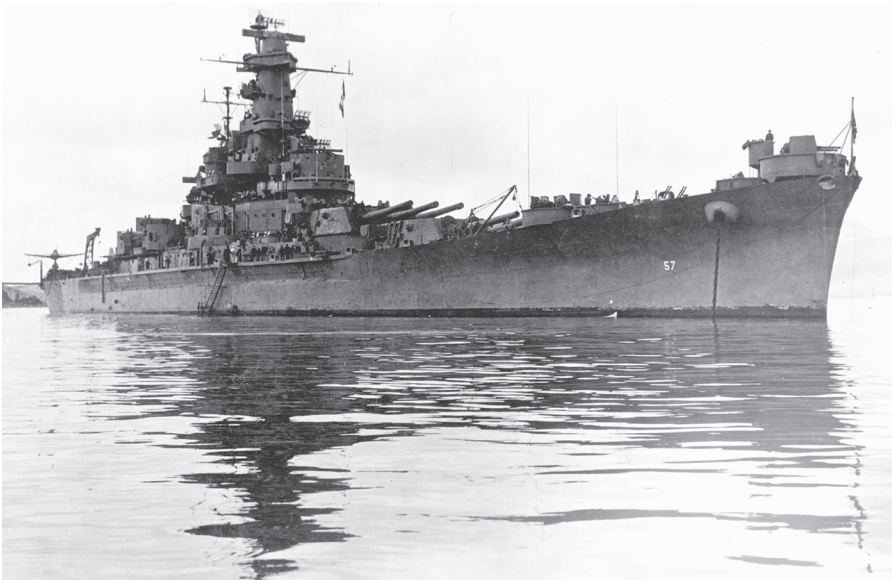
Genevieve Trask was born Amy Genevieve Babel on 2 September 1891 to Gideon and Hettie Babel at Naperville, Illinois, where she later majored in music at North Central College. In 1908, the Babel family moved to Blunt, South Dakota, twenty miles northeast of the state cap-

4. Hone and Hone, *Battle Line*, pp. 15–16; *The True Story of BB-57, U.S.S. South Dakota: The Queen of the Fleet* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: BB57 Book Committee, 1987), p. 7.

5. Ibid.

6. Connery, *The Navy and the Industrial Mobilization in World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 3.

7. Ibid., pp. 32–33.



Pictured here off the coast of Iceland in 1943, the USS *South Dakota* was one of a faster class of battleship with greater firepower than its predecessors.

ital of Pierre. On Thanksgiving Day 1912, Howard E. Trask presented his sweetheart Genevieve with a half-bottle of Cook's Imperial American champagne, vintage 1905. Soon the young couple married, but they decided to put the bottle of champagne away to save for some special event in the future. The Trasks lived in Blunt until 1933, when they moved to Pierre, bringing the keepsake with them. Howard Trask served as a Hughes County commissioner for sixteen years and was an officeholder in the South Dakota County Commissioners Association. Genevieve played and sang at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Pierre. She also worked for the draft board during World War II and in the Hughes County treasurer's office for twelve years.⁸

On 7 April 1941, Genevieve Trask wrote to Congressman Francis H. Case, sending duplicate copies to Congressman Karl E. Mundt and Senators John Chandler ("Chan") Gurney and William J. Bulow, with an offer she hoped they could not turn down:

8. "Genevieve Trask," "Howard Trask," Biographical Files, State Archives Collection.



Genevieve Trask, a longtime resident of the Pierre area, posed for this portrait not long before she attended the christening festivities.

Dear Sir;

The information that Mrs. Bushfield is to christen the new battleship "South Dakota" has been received with much pleasure, especially by those personally acquainted with her. No need to tell you how proud South Dakotans are to have such a charming First Lady. My reason for writing to you may sound a bit unusual and if irregular will you forgive me for being presumptuous. I have a bottle of champagne that I should like to have used for the christening service. This bottle has quite a history. It was presented to me on Thanksgiving Day 1912. The years passed and prohibition came into being; the champagne was still in

my possession and I awaited a special occasion to warrant the opening of the bottle. When the Missouri River Bridge, connecting Pierre and Fort Pierre, was dedicated I offered the champagne for the christening, but Governor [Carl] Gunderson, a bone dry governor of a bone dry state, refused to accept the offer because of political reasons. . . . I shall feel highly honored if you accept my humble offering for this memorable occasion.

Respectfully Yours, Mrs. Howard E. Trask.⁹

Her diary entry for the day noted, “Wrote to our Congressmen offering my bottle of champagne for the christening of the new battleship ‘South Dakota.’”¹⁰

Various communications flowed between South Dakota’s representatives, United States Navy officials, and the New York Shipbuilding Corporation until 28 April, when Trask received the answer she had long awaited. It came from Governor Harlan Bushfield:

Dear Mrs. Trask:

Several days ago you wrote to Senator Chan Gurney with reference to the use of a bottle of champagne at the christening ceremony of the new United States Battleship South Dakota. Senator Gurney forwarded your letter to me for such action as I cared to take. I have delayed writing you about this, because of my desire to contact the navy officials with reference to your suggestion. They have now advised me that it is satisfactory to them if we use your bottle of champagne for this purpose, and on behalf of Mrs. Bushfield I want to say we will be very glad to do so, if you will it.

Sincerely Yours, Harland J. Bushfield, Governor.¹¹

9. Trask to Hon. Francis Case, 7 Apr. 1941, Genevieve Trask Scrapbook, USS *South Dakota* christening, H84-037, State Archives Collection. Trask created a scrapbook filled with correspondence, newspaper clippings, and photographs detailing the story of her champagne bottle and the christening of the USS *South Dakota*. The scrapbook and her diaries (H2012-096) covering the years 1934 to 1977 were later donated to the South Dakota State Historical Society.

10. Genevieve Trask Diary, 7 Apr. 1941, State Archives Collection.

11. Bushfield to Trask, 28 Apr. 1941, Trask Scrapbook.



Miller Studio of Pierre recorded Trask's formal presentation of her champagne bottle to South Dakota Governor Harlan Bushfield.

A 2 May 1941 Associated Press article in the *Pierre Daily Capital-Journal* provided details on Trask's donation. After recounting the bottle's history, including former Governor Gunderson's refusal to use it for the bridge dedication, the reporter continued:

The bottle aged another ten years, and Mrs. Trask defended it from attempts to consume it in purely household celebrations. The bottle was to go for some "very special" purpose, she said. Last month she started the campaign to see her bottle used in launching the new *South Dakota*. She wrote her congressmen—all of them. Congressman Case relayed her offer to the New York Shipbuilding Company, which the navy informed him was in charge of the launching ceremonies. The shipbuilders reported the choice of christening fluid lay with the sponsor, Mrs. Bushfield, and Mrs. Trask wrote the first

lady. Her husband the Governor, tried the navy department, found the state's first lady had the choice and Mrs. Bushfield accepted Mrs. Trask's offer. Mrs. Trask smiled, happy that the bottle she had so carefully preserved will be smashed to bits after 30 years of work climaxed by a busy month of correspondence with officialdom.¹²

Trask would be able to attend the christening ceremony in person, thanks to the generosity of the American Wine Company of Saint Louis, Missouri, the producers of her bottle of champagne. She had written the company about the pending use of their product, and in a letter dated 28 May 1941, company vice president Emil C. de Leuw replied: "My associates as well as I enjoyed tremendously reading the very touching story of a bottle of COOK'S IMPERIAL which you have kept, nursed and defended for almost 29 years! . . . We feel that you hardly could have found a better occasion for this bottle of COOK'S IMPERIAL than to be used in the christening ceremonies of the *USS South Dakota*! . . . The American Wine Company is glad to enclose here a check of \$200.00 to enable you to attend the launching of the *USS South Dakota* on June 7 in Camden, New Jersey and we wish you a very enjoyable and happy trip." The company had just one stipulation: "We assume that you kindly will allow us to use the story you have presented to us for advertising and publicity purposes, for we feel that with the fate of this bottle of COOK'S IMPERIAL a real interesting story of human life is connected. . . . You may be convinced that we will only make the best use of your story which we really think is a very interesting one."¹³ With that, Trask had the funds for a trip to witness the use of her cherished bottle at last.

Workers had completed the *USS South Dakota* four months ahead of schedule. A few days before its christening, on 2 June 1941, the *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* ran an Associated Press story highlighting the newest addition to the navy fleet: "The \$52,794,000 sea fortress with her

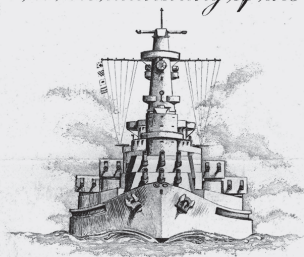
12. *Pierre Daily Capital-Journal*, 2 May 1941. Clippings from the newspapers cited in this article are also included in Trask's scrapbook.

13. de Leuw to Trask, 28 May 1941, Trask Scrapbook. "I had a thrill when the mail came bringing me a check for \$200.00 from the American Wine Company to defray my expense to Camden," Trask wrote in her diary entry for 31 May 1941.

sister ships *Washington* and *North Carolina*, bring the navy's battleship strength to 18 when they join the fleet. . . . The three new dreadnaughts will be the world's most formidable in shooting power. Ranking naval officers, government officials and representatives of the state of South Dakota for whom the ship is named will attend launching ceremonies." The ceremonies were to begin at noon, and the christening, a long-held naval tradition, was scheduled to occur promptly at 12:45 p.m. in the yards of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation in Camden, New Jersey, on 7 June 1941.¹⁴

14. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 2 June 1941.

*The New York Shipbuilding Corporation
Camden, New Jersey
requests the pleasure of your company
at the launching of the*



*U. S. S. South Dakota
on Saturday, the seventh of June
nineteen hundred and forty one
twelve o'clock noon, Daylight Saving Time*

*Sponsor
Mrs. Harlan J. Bushfield*

South Dakotans selected to attend the launch on 7 June 1941 received formal invitations courtesy of the shipbuilding company and the state's first lady.



Governor Harlan Bushfield and First Lady Vera Bushfield hold the champagne bottles destined for the christening ceremony. The official at right is unidentified.

Trask's diary entries provide the itinerary for her trip East. On 4 June, she left Pierre on the 4:15 a.m. train bound for Washington D.C., accompanied by Henry Reed of Pierre. They entered Chicago the next day amidst rain and thunderstorms. After meeting a friend at Union Station and walking downtown to buy a rain jacket, Trask boarded the 3:15 p.m. Pennsylvania Railroad "Liberty Limited." Arriving in Washington on 6 June, she stayed at the Continental Hotel in a room with a window facing the Capitol. The rest of the day was spent touring the city's various monuments and other sights.¹⁵

The next day, busses took Trask and large group from South Dakota to Camden for the christening ceremony. Fred Cornell, a shipyard official acting as master of ceremonies, announced that the christening

15. Trask Diary, 4–6 June 1941.

would be delayed because the Delaware River tides were too low to receive the huge battleship. Finally, at 1:05, Cornell shouted, “Ready!” Vera Bushfield took the red, white, and blue-wrapped champagne bottle and, as noted in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, “settled into a Joe DiMaggio stance at the prow” waiting for the ship to begin its slide into the water, but nothing happened. Further delays ensued. The newspaper noted that several times the first lady appeared on the verge of swinging, and each time the crowd held its breath. The USS *South Dakota*, however, refused to budge. The tallow on the ways, which was supposed to expedite the ship’s slide, had hardened during the wait for the rising tide, and workmen scurried to scrape it away.¹⁶

The newspaper got directly to the point: “In plain, unvarnished English—the ship stuck. The launching trigger, stripping away the last blocks from beneath the ship, was pulled. Nothing happened. The *South Dakota*, nestling comfortably with her bulbous bottom in launching cradles fore and aft, just wouldn’t go. Hydraulic presses were thrown into action, but it took four mighty jabs against the cradles before the ship started to move. ‘There she goes,’ the crowd screamed. Down came Mrs. Bushfield’s tiring arm, the bottle crashed against the bow, and above the roar came her clear, soprano voice, crying exultantly: ‘I christen thee South Dakota.’”¹⁷

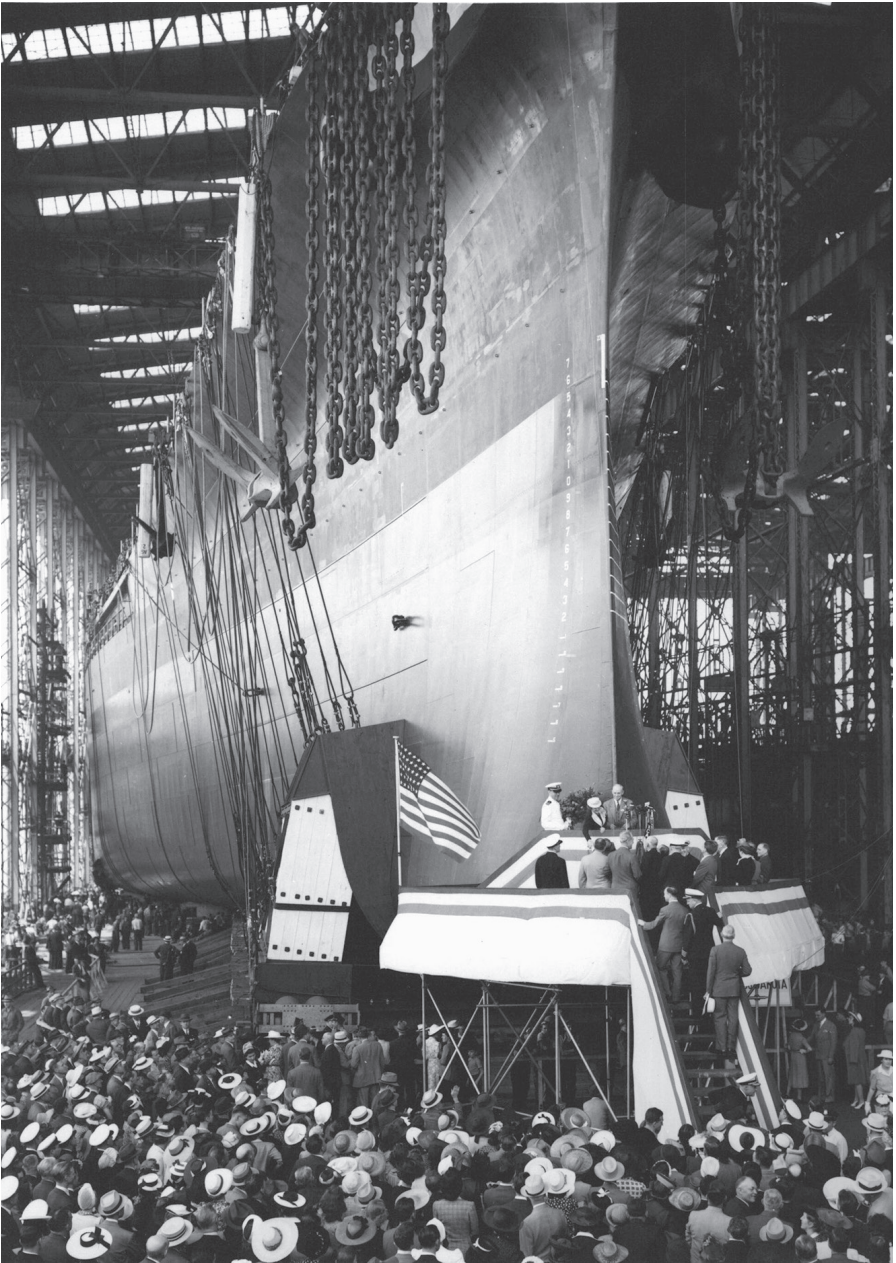
The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* offered additional details. Vera Bushfield, “wearing a blue dress trimmed in white, smashed a bottle of domestic champagne across her bow with a resounding thwack, just a split second after she started moving.” The first lady took her healthy swing at 1:20 p.m. Seconds later, the *South Dakota* received a second christening, this time from Genevieve Trask’s bottle. “This could not be the official bottle,” the news story stated, “but it was arranged for an aide to smash it over the prow.” The ship then slid into the water with a huge splash.¹⁸

Why two christenings? An article in the 28 July 1941 issue of the liquor industry magazine *Tap & Tavern* offered additional insight. After telling the tale of Trask and her champagne, the writer related:

16. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 June 1941.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.



The giant battleship dwarfed the officials and spectators who gathered to witness the launching at the Camden, New Jersey, shipyard.



After delays due to low tides and sticky ways, Vera Bushfield smashed the first bottle of champagne across the bow of the USS *South Dakota*.

At the last minute came disappointment. The bottle which she so carefully wrapped and dispatched for the christening was only a “half bottle” and officials in charge of the christening were afraid it might not break properly. But with the wisdom of Solomon, one of the officials solved the problem. Why not give this great ship the finest christening a ship ever had? Why not use two bottles of champagne? No sooner said than done! Another bottle of Cook’s was quickly purchased—this time “full size!” And as the mighty *South Dakota* slipped down the ways, both bottles were smashed across its towering bows. And standing in the crowd that watched the impressive ceremony, was Mrs. Trask, proud that her cherished bottle has been preserved for such a glorious destiny.¹⁹

19. *Tap and Tavern: Journal of the Liquor Industry*, 28 July 1941, n. p.

The *New York Times* reported further that “since the shipbuilding corporation already had arranged for an official bottle for the sponsor, Harry Heins, an attaché of the company, was pressed into service to whack Mrs. Trask’s wine bottle against the port side of the bow at the instant the Governor’s wife did her duty directly before the microphone.”²⁰

The *Evening Bulletin* elaborated on the actual launch: “The battleship started down the ways—incidentally there were four of them instead of the usual two—at terrific speed. But her weight eased her down so that she settled gracefully when she struck the water and was easily nudged around by tugs before she went beyond midstream. She broke out all flags as the Washington High School Band, of Sioux Falls, S.D., blared out with ‘Anchors Aweigh.’ Planes zoomed overhead and the cheers, especially from the workmen clustered on cranes and on top of trucks and platforms, were not much less than deafening.”²¹

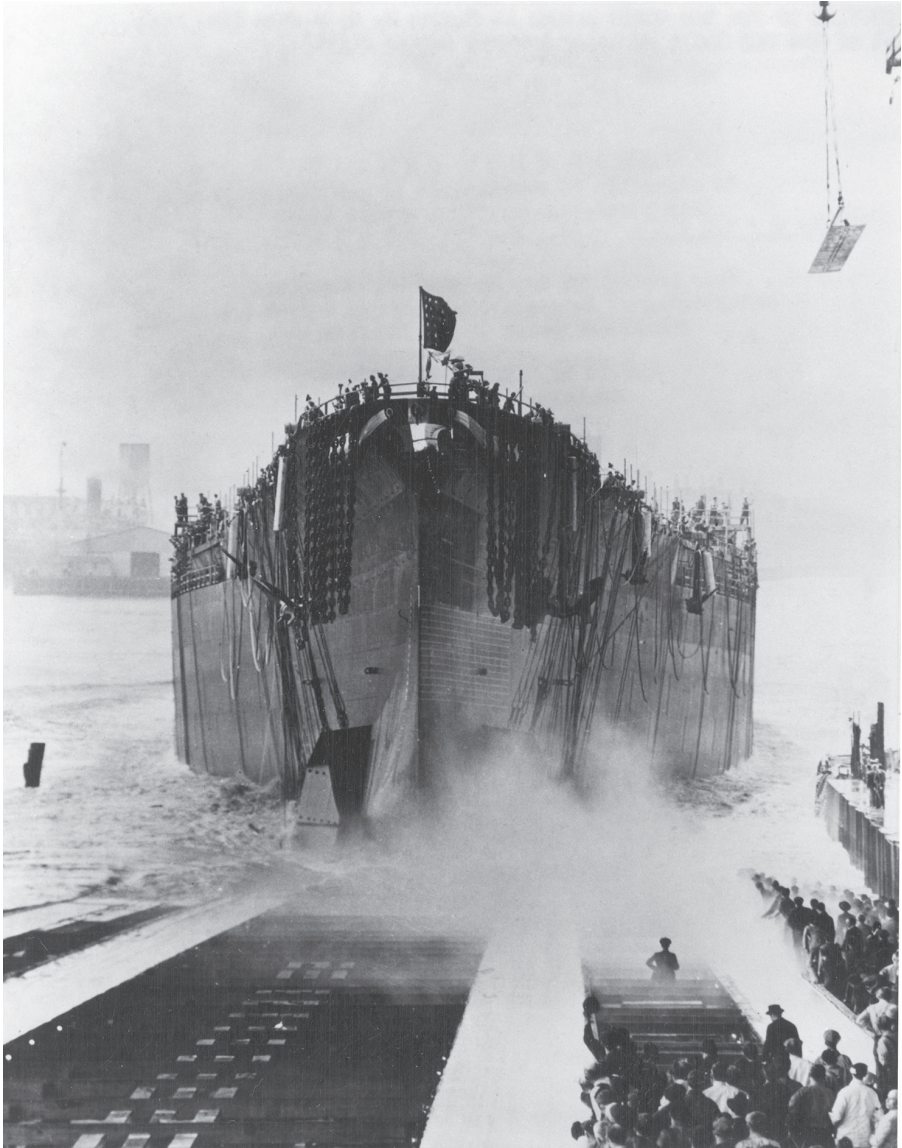
Immediately following the launch, Secretary of the Navy William Franklin Knox, who headed a large naval delegation at the ceremonies, offered a few remarks. “There are fewer stirring views, nor moving sights, than that which you just witnessed,” he said. “To see a great battleship . . . take to her native element and to know that great ship will make a tremendous contribution to the safety of our country and all the people in it, is a moving thought. . . . We are living through a period when the first concern of every American citizen who loves his country and cherishes its institutions. . . . is for the defense of that country and those institutions. And this great ship that was just taken to the water will make a magnificent contribution to American sea power.”²²

Knox went on to compliment the eleven to twelve thousand ship builders and dock workers present, all of whom had been given an additional lunch hour to watch the launch, for the speed with which they had built the USS *South Dakota*. In particular, he expressed his appreciation for “the object lesson you have given us, in having in the air on a crane, at the very moment when the *South Dakota* was taken to the water, the first member of the keel of the cruiser *Santa Fe*. I can think of

20. *New York Times*, 8 June 1941.

21. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 7 June 1941.

22. Transcript, USS *South Dakota* christening ceremony, 7 June 1941, H75-244, State Archives, South Dakota State Historical Society.



The USS *South Dakota* slides down the ways into the Delaware River, while the keel for the USS *Santa Fe* dangles from a crane at upper right.

no way in which you men here, in tandem, could so completely emphasize and epitomize the most important thing about defense, and that is the important element of time.”²³

Secretary Knox concluded by underscoring the importance of the United States’s military position in the world: “Unhappily, we seem to be living in a time when affairs are moved by force, when destinies are controlled by force,” he said. As a result, “We Americans must have that force, which is first essential to protect us in our security and safety and finally to support those elements and those ideals in humanity and civilization that will bring finally peace to this war in the world. On your behalf I say, to the good ship *South Dakota*, God go with you, because after all, your mission, the mission for which we built you, is not war, but the prevention of war as God wills.”²⁴ Within minutes of the ceremony’s conclusion, a signal sounded, and workers dashed into the recently emptied dock to lay the keel for the ten-thousand-ton battle cruiser USS *Santa Fe*.²⁵

A report in the *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger* provided some specifics on the USS *South Dakota*: “Its statistics: length, [680] feet; beam, 108 feet; draft, 26 feet. Armor: 16-inch plates on sides; 10-inch plates on decks. Armament: Nine 16-inch rifles on triple-mounted turrets, firing 2100-pound armor-piercing shells 17½ nautical miles; twelve 5-inch secondary guns and eight anti-aircraft guns.” The new battleship, “one of the most powerful warcraft afloat,” was also the first to be launched from the Camden yards since the christening of the USS *Colorado* on 22 March 1921.²⁶

Disaster had almost consumed the *South Dakota* during construction. The *Evening Public Ledger* recounted three separate fires that threatened the battleship before it even set sail: “The first occurred on October 11, 1939, when fire damaged shoring timbers surrounding the keel. The second and worst blaze was that of November 20, 1940. Sparks from a rivet heater set fire to a rubber hose and waste in the forward hold. Eight men were carried from the hold unconscious and

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*, 7 June 1941.

26. Ibid.

12 others were partially overcome. The third fire, on March 20 of this year [1941], was caused by a short circuit in an electric welding torch two levels below the main deck.”²⁷

Following the christening ceremony, Trask and the South Dakota delegation were bussed back to Philadelphia, where they again boarded the special train to Washington, D.C.²⁸ On 8 June, Trask attended vesper service at the Washington Cathedral and later that night went to the steps of the Capitol for a concert by the Washington High School band of Sioux Falls, which had traveled with the South Dakota delegation. The next day, she toured the Capitol, the Smithsonian Institution, the Pan-American Building, and the Mellon Art Gallery before boarding the train at 11:40 p.m. Trask visited family in Chicago and Iowa for several days and returned to Pierre on Monday, 16 June.²⁹

Shortly after arriving home, Trask wrote to Emil de Leuw of the American Wine Company to thank him for sponsoring her trip to the event. “I shall never be able to express to you how grateful I am for your very generous gift,” she stated. “My trip was a thrilling adventure, one I have long wanted to make but never dared give serious consideration. My vocabulary will not permit me to adequately thank you, but I very sincerely do. . . . If the world does not know it was COOK’S IMPERIAL American Champagne that was used at the christening the announcer is not to blame, he told not once but several times.” Trask went on to describe the breaking of the bottles and the impressive “giant of the waves” as it “slipped into the water.” She concluded, “Again let me tell how I appreciate your kindness. I confess the letter and check was such a surprise I nearly fainted. If at any time you pass through Pierre I shall be glad to have you call at my home.”³⁰

Trask would receive another surprise in July when a letter and package arrived in Pierre. Inside was a note from Fred Cornell of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation: “Dear Mrs. Trask, We are today shipping you, in a suitable mahogany case with a glass top, the broken bot-

27. Ibid.

28. Trask ended her diary entry for the day, “Tired but more than happy” (Trask Diary, 7 June 1941).

29. Trask Diary, 9–16 June, 1941.

30. Trask to de Leuw, 17 June 1941.



The American Wine Company later used the story of Trask and her bottle of Cook's Imperial American champagne in a publicity brochure.

tle you so aptly supplied. The brass plate thereon bears the inscription: Souvenir Christening, U.S.S. South Dakota, For Mrs. Howard Trask, June 7, 1941.”³¹ Trask also noted the arrival of the broken bottle in her diary entry for the day: “My ‘Cook’s Imperial’ was returned in a lovely mahogany casket with a metal plate engraved.”³²

In both her diary and correspondence, Trask recounted the ordeal of the Washington High School band of Sioux Falls, which performed at the christening ceremony. The thirty-eight boys and thirty-seven girls, directed by Arthur R. Thompson, were initially barred from playing at the launch due to regulations stipulating that only a professional band of card-carrying union musicians could perform during a radio broadcast. The *Philadelphia Record* of 8 June 1941 covered the drama in detail:

The powerful American Federation of Musicians waived an ironclad national rule yesterday to make 80 high school horn tooters happy. And small wonder! For the issue of whether the Washington High

31. Cornell to Trask, 30 June 1941.

32. Trask Diary, 5 July 1941.



Trask received this mahogany box with the remnants of her champagne bottle as a memento of the double christening.

School band of Sioux Falls, S.D., broadcast or didn't broadcast at the launching of the *U.S.S. South Dakota* was all tuned up to the volume of a national controversy. The 80 young musicians—and not a union card among 'em—went on the air as scheduled. They played the “Star Spangled Banner” and “Anchors Aweigh.” But it took two U.S. Senators and a Governor, a transcontinental phone call and intervention by William Green himself to turn the trick. The tempest in a radio mike began when James C. Petrillo, boss of the American Federation of Musicians, said the kids couldn't broadcast because they were non-union. Senators Gurney and Bulow and Governor Bushfield, all of South Dakota, got Green, American Federation of Labor president, on the phone and by the ear personally. They told Green the youngsters were travelling 4000 miles for the big moment when the battleship honoring their native State would slide down the ways to their music. They told him rules were rules, but this was different. After a moment, Green agreed. From his Washington, D.C. office, he phoned

Petrillo, attending an A.F.M. convention at Seattle, Wash. There was another pause. Then an okay. Green hurried the good news to Thomas Mallon, Pennsylvania A.F.L. representative and Romeo Cella, vice president of the Philadelphia A.F.M. local. The *South Dakota* was launched to South Dakota music. And 80 youngsters had their big moment.³³

The *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader* provided a full accounting of the band's itinerary. The fifteen-day cross-country trip began with performances in Minneapolis and Chicago and a stop in the nation's capital. On the day of the christening, the band members left Washington, D.C., aboard a special Baltimore and Ohio Railroad train whose twelve cars carried a delegation of six hundred South Dakotans, including the senators and Genevieve Trask. Busses escorted by Philadelphia motorcycle police next conveyed the contingent to the Delaware River bridge, where they were picked up by a New Jersey escort to the shipyards in Camden. The newspaper reported that after the launching ceremonies the entire South Dakota delegation, including the band, enjoyed lunch at the Grand Crystal Tea Room on the ninth floor of the John Wanamaker Department Store in Philadelphia, where the band also performed. The next day, they returned to Washington for a performance on the Capitol steps. Following a train ride to New York City, the band played on the steps of city hall on 11 June after being received by New York Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia. Next came Boston and a concert at city hall for Mayor Morris J. Tobin and a performance for a local radio station. The group then crossed the border into Canada for sightseeing in Montreal and concerts at Mount Royal and La Fontaine Park, followed by stops in Ottawa and Toronto. Making their way home via Niagara Falls, they played in Detroit, Chicago, and Ames, Iowa. The band arrived back in Sioux Falls on 20 June.³⁴

South Dakotans who could not attend the christening in New Jersey were able to hear the ceremonies on the radio, although somewhat circuitously. Station WCAU in Philadelphia, which had broadcast the program, transcribed it onto two lacquer disks and sent them by air-

33. *Philadelphia Record*, 8 June 1941.

34. *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 2 June 1941.

mail express to station WNAX in Yankton, which played the half-hour recording at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, 8 June. Program director Arthur Smith and other representatives of WNAX then traveled to Pierre and presented the disks to the governor and first lady on 17 June.³⁵

Immediately after the christening, the USS *South Dakota* crossed to the other bank of the Delaware River for the completion of its fitting out at the Philadelphia Naval Yards. The vessel was constructed as a fleet flagship, with extra offices and an additional bridge, and carried nine 16-inch guns, sixteen 5-inch guns, and twenty-eight 1.1 inch anti-aircraft guns. The *South Dakota* had a full-load displacement of 42,900 tons, an overall length of 680 feet with a beam length of 108 feet, 2 inches, and 18 inches of armor. Four General Electric geared turbines powered the battleship, which had a design speed of twenty-seven knots. The total cost, including construction and armaments, was \$72.9 million. By the end of the war, it accommodated 160 officers and 2,113 enlisted men. Captain Thomas L. Gatch commanded the ship, which the United States Navy put into commission on 20 March 1942.³⁶

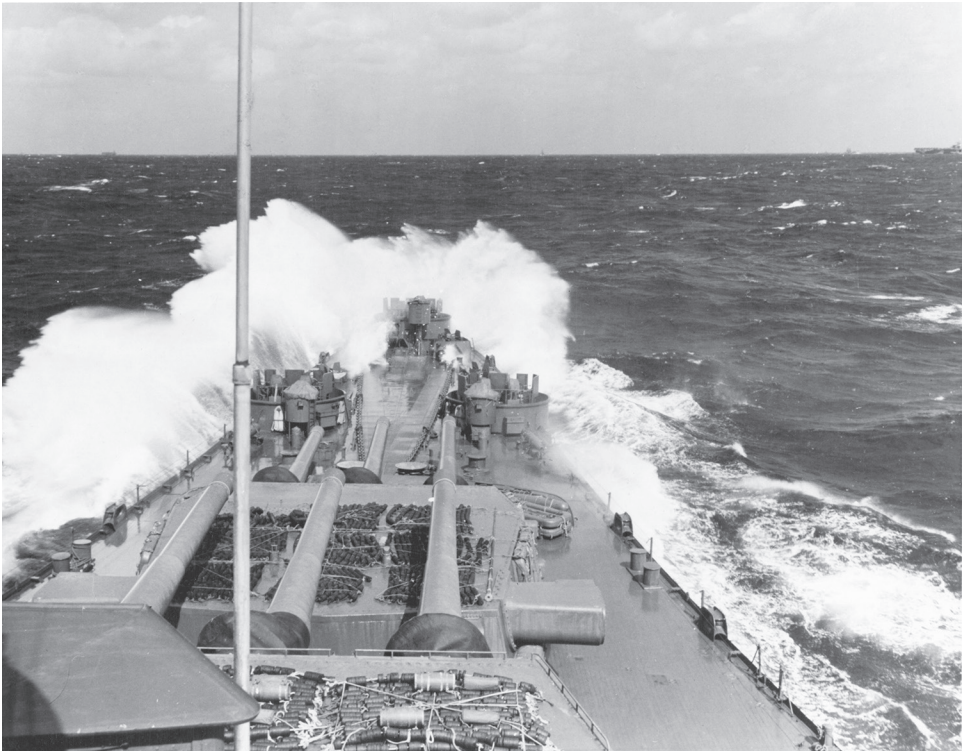
The USS *South Dakota's* journey into World War II history began with a shakedown cruise through the Panama Canal to join the Pacific Fleet in the Tonga Islands in August of 1942. On 6 September, while sailing through the Lahai Passage, it struck an uncharted coral pinnacle, later named "South Dakota Rock." The battleship suffered major damage to its hull and left for Pearl Harbor's dry docks to undergo repairs and the addition of several anti-aircraft guns, both 40 and 20 millimeter, which would prove pivotal in future naval engagements.³⁷

The new guns and trained crew were quickly put to use in two major naval engagements in the Pacific. The Battle of Santa Cruz on 25–26

35. Ibid., 6 June 1941; *Pierre Daily Capital-Journal*, 17 June 1941. The disks were later transferred to the State Archives Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society. The recording is now available in digital format in the South Dakota Digital Archives. Visit <https://sddigitalarchives.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/> and use the search term "launching" to access the file.

36. Paul Stillwell, *The USS South Dakota* (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: USS *South Dakota* Battleship Memorial Foundation, 1972), pp. 3–4, 6; *True Story of BB-57*, p. 7.

37. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 4–5; *True Story of BB-57*, pp. 7–12. For more on the battleship and its role in World War II, see David B. Miller, "Life Aboard 'Battleship X': The USS *South Dakota* in World War II," *South Dakota History* 23 (Summer 1993): 142–65.



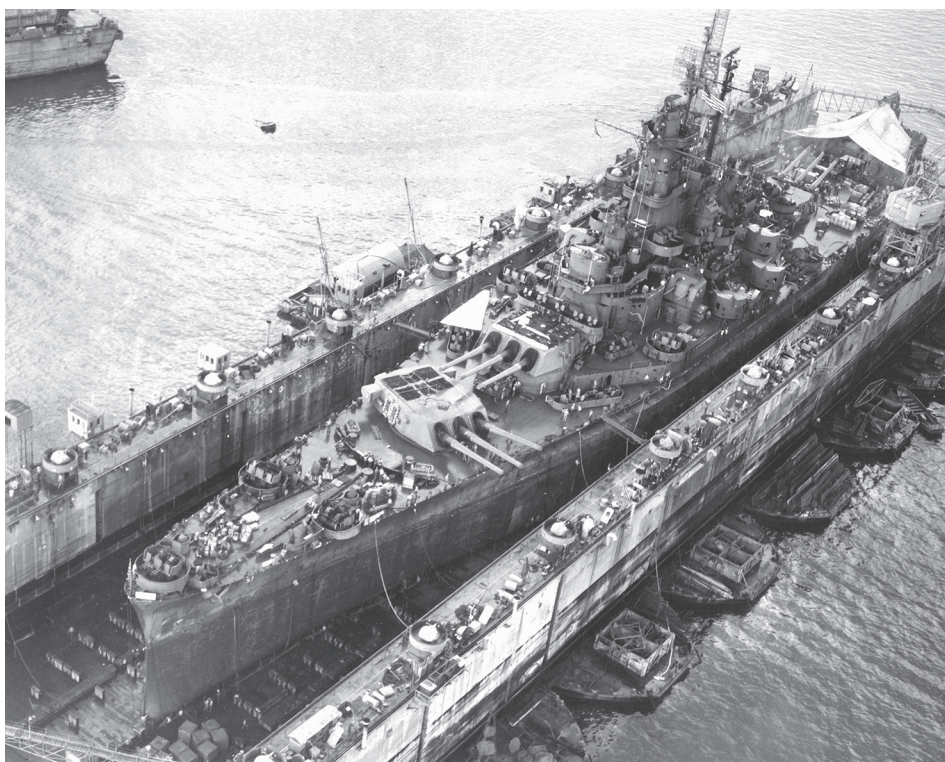
Six of the battleship's nine sixteen-inch guns are visible in this photograph of the USS *South Dakota* cruising through heavy seas.

October 1942 saw the *South Dakota* and its task force turn back an onslaught of Japanese battleships, heavy and light cruisers, submarines, and an aerial assault of both dive and torpedo bombers. The well-armed *South Dakota* defended the aircraft carrier *Enterprise*, shooting down 32 of the 110 Japanese airplanes destroyed in the engagement, which tremendously weakened the Japanese naval air fleet. Roughly three weeks later, on 14–15 November, the Battle of Guadalcanal featured engagements between the American and Japanese fleets, without the presence of aircraft carriers, near Savo Island. The technical superiority of the two new American battleships *South Dakota* and *Washington* helped to win the day. Assisted by the use of radar, they sank the Japanese battleship *Kirishima* and took out a number of support vessels. As

a result of both of these sea battles, the Japanese navy turned from an offensive threat into a naval fleet on the defensive.³⁸

Following repairs at the New York Navy Yard from December 1942 to February 1943, the *South Dakota* took a brief sojourn to the North Atlantic, where it joined Commander Task Force 61 accompanying the battleship *Alabama* and five destroyers. In June, the task force joined the British Home Fleet, operating off the coasts of Norway, Iceland, and Greenland with the battleships *King George V* and *Duke of York*. The task force searched for the German battleship *Tirpitz*, stationed in Norwegian waters. Although the *South Dakota* never engaged the *Tirpitz*, the presence of the task force enabled other British ships to sail

38. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 7–12; *True Story of BB-57*, pp. 14–16.



One of the most heavily damaged battleships of World War II, the *USS South Dakota* rests in dry dock for repairs.

south to the Mediterranean to assist with the Allied invasion of Sicily. The *South Dakota* then sailed back to the Pacific to assist in the final push toward the Japanese homeland.³⁹

It was the battleship's job to protect the aircraft carriers and provide firepower for bombarding land targets. The *South Dakota* joined the Pacific Fleet in September 1943 and would take part in assaults on the Gilbert Islands, Makin, Tarawa, Nauru Island, Kwajalein, Truk, Mariana Islands, and the Western Carolina Islands. From April to June of 1944, the island-hopping continued with strikes launched at New Guinea, Humboldt Bays, and Ponape Island before a return to the Mariana Islands. In mid-June, the ship operated in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, referred to as the "Marianas Turkey Shoot," resulting in the loss of three hundred Japanese aircraft.⁴⁰

After repairs at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in July 1944, the *South Dakota* returned to the Pacific Theater, joining in the various engagements of the Philippines, Okinawa, and Formosa from October to December 1944. By January of 1945, the *South Dakota* was attached to the task force assigned to infiltrate the South China Sea, where the battleship supported the Allied landing efforts on Iwo Jima and Okinawa and defended aircraft carriers sending sorties to Tokyo. The *South Dakota* was ordered to Guam in May of 1945 for repairs.⁴¹

By mid-July, the battleship returned to action with a task force that bombarded the Kamaishi Steel Works on Honshu Island, Japan, and a salvo from the *South Dakota* became the first fired from an American navy warship to hit the Japanese mainland. The task force continued with carrier air support and bombardment of the cities of Honshu and Kokkaido. The *South Dakota* supported carrier strikes on the city of Tokyo and entered victoriously into Tokyo Bay on 29 August 1945. The formal surrender of the Japanese forces on 2 September brought an end to the Second World War.⁴²

The USS *South Dakota*, flagship of the victorious Third Fleet, received the first-ever Navy Unit Commendations (Santa Cruz and Gua-

39. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 14–15; *True Story of BB-57*, pp. 23–24.

40. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 19–21; *True Story of BB-57*, pp. 24–25.

41. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 21–23; *True Story of BB-57*, pp. 25–28.

42. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 23–25; *True Story of BB-57*, pp. 29–30.

dalcanal), thirteen Asiatic-Pacific Campaign battle stars, the Navy Occupation Service Medal, World War II Victory Medal, Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation, and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon. The battleship tallied three sunken ships, sixty-four airplanes shot down, and action in nine bombardments. It traveled a total of 246,970 miles, crossing the equator and the International Date Line thirty times and the Arctic Circle twice.⁴³

On 20 September 1945, the USS *South Dakota* left Tokyo Bay and made a grand return to the United States. Traveling with a convoy of the American Fleet, the battleship carrying Admiral William F. (“Bull”) Halsey sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge and into San Francisco Bay. After an overhaul at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, the *South Dakota* was attached to the Atlantic Fleet in June of 1946. On 31 August, the battleship was officially decommissioned and added to the reserve fleet.⁴⁴

The *South Dakota* remained at the Philadelphia Navy Yard as part of the mothball fleet for fifteen years until 1962, when the navy sold it for scrap. When a group from Sioux Falls expressed interest in preserving the battleship’s memory, the navy agreed to donate various items to the people of South Dakota. The USS *South Dakota* Foundation formed and began selling “admiralships” at a cost of one hundred dollars to cover the price of transporting battleship artifacts to the state. The City of Sioux Falls donated land at Twelfth Street and Kiwanis Avenue for the construction of a memorial, and the South Dakota Legislature appropriated one hundred thousand dollars toward the building of a museum. Other fundraising efforts culminated in the dedication of the museum on 7 September 1969. Among the dignitaries in attendance was former first lady Vera Bushfield, who lit an eternal flame at the memorial site.⁴⁵

The memorial features a full-size outline of the battleship along with its anchor, mast, and bell. At its center stands the museum, housing the ship’s compass, wheel, and steering mechanism as well as a

43. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, p. 1; *True Story of BB-57*, p. 7.

44. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 26–29; *True Story of BB-57*, p. 34.

45. Stillwell, *USS South Dakota*, pp. 29–32; *True Story of BB-57*, pp. 34–35.

model of the USS *South Dakota*. The ceiling is made of teakwood from the battleship's deck. The museum also holds an extensive collection of photographs, documents, and other artifacts detailing the history of the battleship and those who served aboard it. In a special display case rest two broken bottles of Cook's Imperial American champagne: the full-sized bottle swung by First Lady Vera Bushfield against the prow of the battleship and the half-sized bottle kept secure by Genevieve Trask for thirty years and ultimately used for a special occasion.

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On the covers: Through posters and other appeals, the American Red Cross called on women to volunteer their talents to aid the Allied effort in World War I. In this issue, Lisa Lindell looks at the war experiences of Brown County women through their letters home, many of which appeared in the Aberdeen newspapers. Artwork by Haskell Coffin (front) and Thomas Tryon (back).

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