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American Battleship at War: USS New York

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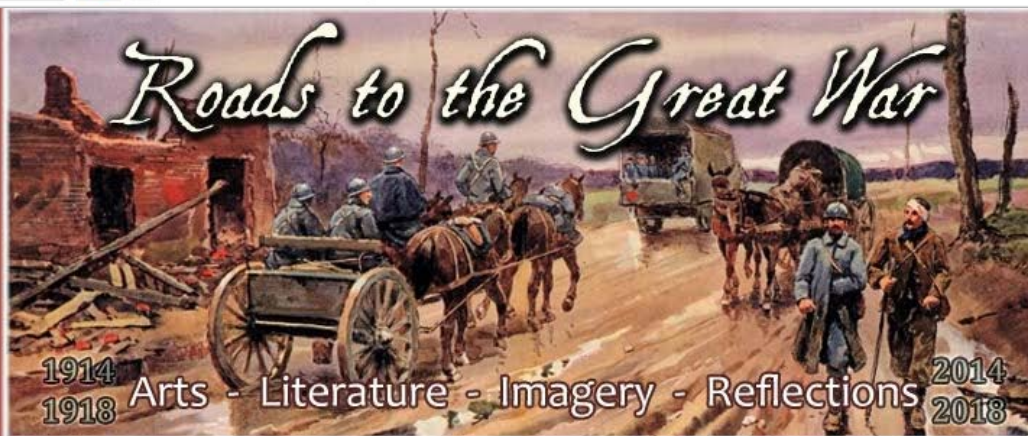
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*Now all roads lead to France and heavy is the tread
Of the living; but the dead returning lightly dance.*

Edward Thomas, *Roads*

Wednesday, January 4, 2017

American Battleship at War: USS *New York*

By Keith Muchowski

The United States went on a naval building spree in the decade prior to the Great War. By no means did the build-up reach the levels of the concurrent maritime arms race between Germany and Great Britain, but it was significant nonetheless. President Theodore Roosevelt, a former assistant secretary of the Navy, set forth the Great White Fleet in December 1907, the commander-in-chief challenging a recalcitrant Congress to fund the return of the convoy once he had sent it halfway around the world. The 16 battleships returned in February 1909 in the waning weeks of Roosevelt's administration. The Great White Fleet was a political and diplomatic triumph, but it also exposed weaknesses in America's naval capabilities.

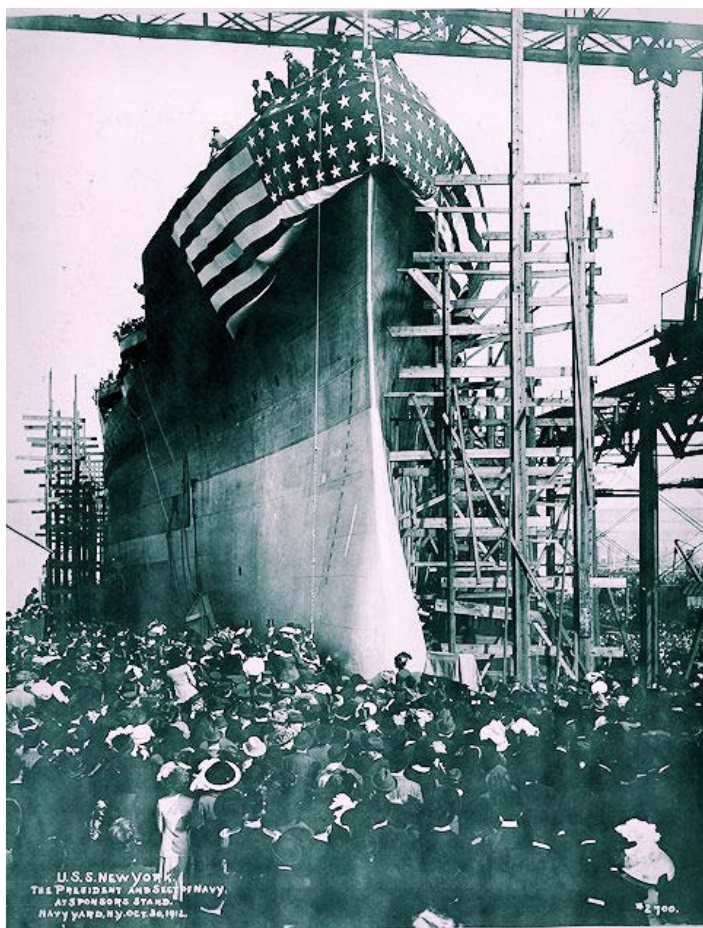
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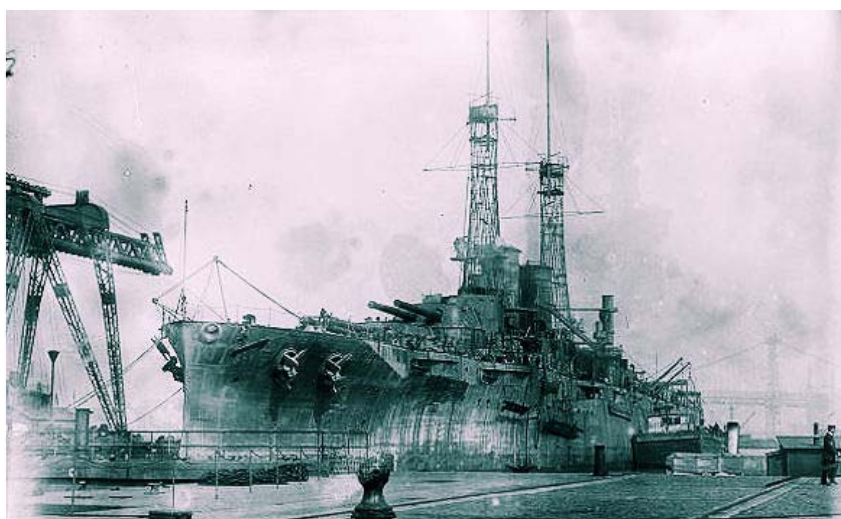
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USS New York Launched with President Taft Present

Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, understood the importance of a stronger naval presence as much as anyone. For one thing, American ships would be integral to enforcing the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Compounding that, construction of the Panama Canal was proceeding, and when the new locks were operational they would be essential for protecting American interests in the Caribbean and the once remote Hawaiian and Philippine Islands. From the laying of the keel of the USS *South Carolina* in December 1906 through the end of the Great War, the United States averaged two new ships annually, most of these in the new dreadnought classes. Begun in an era when veterans of the Indian Campaigns were still in the ranks, these craft eventually served in Wilson's blockade of Mexico, against the Kaiser's High Seas Fleet, in the Caribbean occupations of the 1920s and 1930s, and against Hitler and Imperial Japan until those that remained were decommissioned in the new Atomic Age.



Ralph Vaughan Williams

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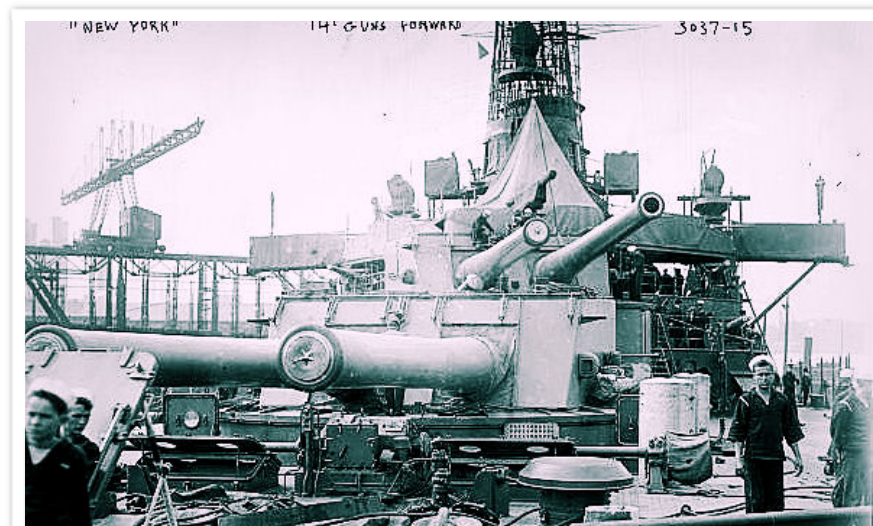
Editors & Contributors

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New York Dockside

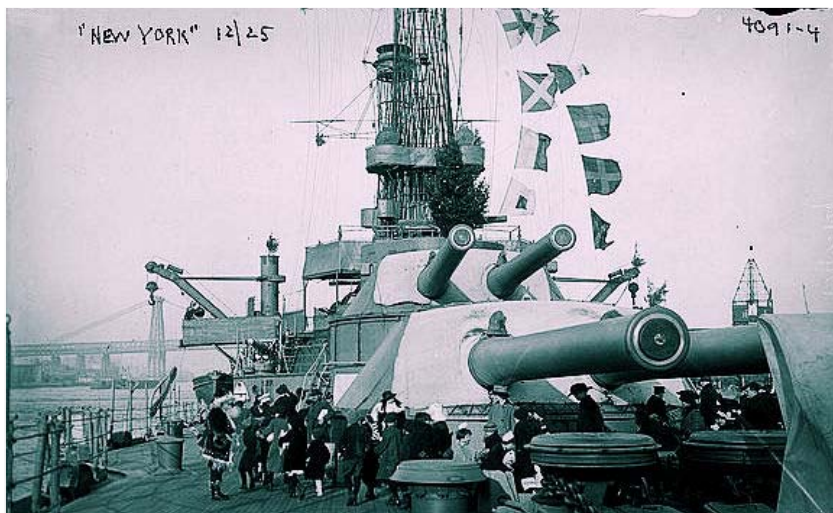
With her sister ship the *Texas*, the USS *New York* comprised the U.S. Navy's fifth dreadnought class. Her keel was laid down at the Brooklyn Navy Yard on 11 September 1911. On 30 October 1912—one week before the presidential election pitting the incumbent Taft against Democrat Woodrow Wilson, Progressive Theodore Roosevelt, and Socialist Eugene Debs—President Taft, Secretary of the Navy George von Lengerke Meyer, Governor John A. Dix, Mayor William J. Gaynor, and 40,000 others attended the *New York's* launch. She was commissioned on 15 April 1914, just in time to be sent to Veracruz as part of the Atlantic Fleet that July. Events in Europe were reaching the breaking point at this same time, and once back from Mexico the *New York*, along with the other dreadnoughts of her era, were destined to play major roles in the Great War. The *New York* arrived at Scapa Flow, headquarters of the British Grand Fleet in Scotland's Orkney Islands, on 7 December 1917. The *New York* was the flagship of Battleship Division 9, Rear Admiral Hugh Rodman commanding. Rodman's division was put under the command of the British Grand Fleet as the Sixth Battle Squadron and would remain thus attached until 1 December 1918.

Like their Doughboy counterparts in the trenches, American sailors had a steep learning curve; the ships of the squadron scored poorly in shooting in the initial months after their arrival, though the *New York* with her 14-inch guns seems to have performed at least proportionally better. Eventually the Americans found their rhythm and effectively performed their primary task of containing the German High Seas Fleet. Despite the occasional run-in with a U-boat or two, life aboard the *New York* was fairly routine. To levy the boredom the men played sports and held boxing tournaments, complete with weight categories and championships, contested between the British and American sailors.



Forward Main Batteries with Turret Covers Off

As the flagship of the Sixth Battle Squadron the *New York* became a natural locus of diplomatic activity. King Albert and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium inspected the sailors on deck. Crown Prince Hirohito, then an admiral in the Imperial Japanese Navy and his country's heir apparent, inspected the dreadnought on 3 November 1918. After the men of the *New York* witnessed the surrender of the German High Seas Fleet on 21 November, King George V came aboard to shake Rodman's hand and thank the men. Admiral Sir David Beatty, commander-in-chief of the Grand Fleet, appeared on 1 December, the last day of the dreadnought's service in the Grand Fleet. Admiral Beatty beamed that "apparently the Sixth Battle Squadron was the straw that broke the camel's back" against the Germans and invited the Americans to return whenever they wanted. Before going home the USS *New York* had one final task—escorting Woodrow Wilson to the Paris Peace talks. On 13 December President Wilson was aboard the *George Washington* as that ship was escorted by the *New York* and other craft to the French port city of Brest. Her Great War over, the *New York* turned around and sailed for home with the other ships of the Atlantic Fleet.



Visitors Day on the USS New York

Admiral Hugh Rodman and the 5,000 men of the Atlantic Fleet received a naval review from grateful New Yorkers on 26 December 1918. Secretary of War Newton Baker and Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels were present. Also there was Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Nineteen years later Commander-in-Chief Roosevelt would send the now-retired Admiral Rodman to England as an American representative to the coronation of King George VI, whose father had thanked Rodman aboard his flagship after the German High Seas Fleet surrender. On 20 May 1937 Rodman and the *New York* took part in George VI's Coronation Fleet Review. Emperor Hirohito's forces struck at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, 24 years to the day after the *New York* had arrived at Scapa Flow. In the Second World War the *New York* saw long service with the Atlantic Fleet and and later helped defeat the Imperial Navy of the onetime crown prince at Iwo Jima and Okinawa among other places.

The *New York* was back in Brooklyn briefly after the Japanese surrender but soon returned to the Pacific. In July 1946 she was part of Operation Crossroads, the atomic bomb testings on the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. She suffered some damage but did not sink. In July 1948, spent after 30 years of service in the Great War and beyond, the USS *New York* was dragged 40 miles southwest of Pearl Harbor to be used for target practice. In a poignant gesture the U.S. Navy invited some of the *New York's* old crew dating back to her days at Scapa Flow and elsewhere to attend. Several hours of naval and aerial bombardment later, she rested on the ocean floor.

Our contributor, Keith Muchowski, produces an outstanding blog that looks at American history from a New Yorker's viewpoint. Visit Keith's Blog, [The Strawfoot](#), for more interesting insights on the history of the First World War.

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3 comments:



Doug Fisher January 4, 2017 at 12:07 PM

Very interesting tale! Thanks

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David Schleeter January 4, 2017 at 1:22 PM

A sad end for a noble ship.

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Rex Passion January 4, 2017 at 6:16 PM

I expect many Naval Academy graduates got their first sea time on the New York as on the Texas.

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