

This Day in History... June 11, 1944

USS *Missouri* Commissioned

On June 11, 1944, the USS *Missouri* was commissioned into the US Navy, giving America one of the most powerful battleships ever built. Within 15 months, the ship known as “Mighty Mo” would help fight the last major battles of World War II and host the ceremony that formally ended the war.

The *Missouri* was an Iowa-class battleship, the last class of battleships built for the US Navy. These ships were designed for speed as well as firepower. They could escort fast aircraft carriers and still deliver heavy bombardments against shore targets. *Missouri* measured more than 887 feet long, displaced about 45,000 tons, and could make more than 30 knots. Her main battery included nine 16-inch guns mounted in three turrets. Each gun could fire a shell weighing nearly a ton.

Construction began on January 6, 1941, at the New York Navy Yard in Brooklyn. The ship was named for the state of Missouri and became the third US Navy vessel to carry that name. It was launched on January 29, 1944. Her sponsor was Margaret Truman, daughter of Missouri Senator Harry S. Truman. A few months later, on June 11, the battleship was officially commissioned. Captain William M. Callaghan became its first commanding officer.

After trials and training in the Atlantic and Caribbean, *Missouri* headed for the Pacific. By early 1945, it had joined the fast carrier forces operating against Japan. Its role was to protect aircraft carriers from enemy planes and add its big guns to shore bombardments.

Missouri's first major World War II action came during the campaign for Iwo Jima in February 1945. The island was important because it could provide emergency landing fields for damaged B-29 bombers returning from raids over Japan. *Missouri* screened carriers as their planes struck Japanese positions. It also helped support the invasion force during one of the hardest battles of the Pacific war.

Next came Okinawa, the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific campaign. *Missouri* arrived off the island in March 1945. For weeks, it helped defend the fleet against Japanese air attacks, including kamikaze planes. On April 11, 1945, a Japanese Zero struck *Missouri*'s starboard side below the main deck. The crash damaged the ship, but it did not put it out of action. The crew later recovered the body of the Japanese pilot, and Captain Callaghan ordered that he receive a military burial at sea. It was a striking act of respect during a brutal campaign.

Missouri also took part in attacks closer to Japan itself. In July 1945, its 16-inch guns bombarded industrial targets on the Japanese home islands. These operations showed how close Allied naval power had come to Japan by the final weeks of the war.

Missouri's most famous moment came after the fighting stopped. On September 2, 1945, *Missouri* lay anchored in Tokyo Bay. Representatives of Japan and the Allied powers gathered on the ship's deck to sign the formal Instrument of Surrender. General Douglas MacArthur spoke first as Supreme Allied Commander. Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu signed for the emperor, followed by General Yoshijirō Umezū for the Japanese military. Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz signed for the United States, and representatives of other Allied nations followed. The ceremony lasted just 23 minutes. When it ended, World War II was officially over.

Missouri's career did not end there. It remained active after the war and later served during the Korean War. Its big guns bombarded enemy positions along the Korean coast and supported United Nations troops ashore. It was decommissioned in 1955 and placed in reserve at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Washington.

Three decades later, *Missouri* returned to service as part of the Navy's 1980s buildup. It was recommissioned on May 10, 1986, after receiving modern weapons, including Tomahawk cruise missiles. In 1991, during Operation Desert Storm, *Missouri* fired Tomahawks at Iraqi targets and used its 16-inch guns against enemy positions in Kuwait.

The Navy decommissioned *Missouri* for the final time on March 31, 1992. Its name was removed from the Naval Vessel Register in 1995. In 1998, it arrived in Hawaii, where it began a new life as a memorial ship. The Battleship *Missouri* Memorial opened to the public on January 29, 1999, at Ford Island in Pearl Harbor. Today, it rests near the USS *Arizona* Memorial. Together, the two ships mark the beginning and the end of America's direct involvement in World War II.



Issued in 2019 for the ship's 75th anniversary.



Missouri first saw combat at the Battle of Iwo Jima.



This stamp was originally going to picture the atomic bomb, but after public outcry, it was changed to depict President Truman announcing Japan's surrender.



When the *Missouri* was placed at Pearl Harbor, some worried the massive battleship might overshadow the quieter USS *Arizona* Memorial. Instead, it was docked with its bow facing the *Arizona*, a symbolic gesture often described as “Mighty Mo” standing watch over the sunken battleship and the 1,177 men lost there.



Missouri earned one of its three WWII battle stars at Okinawa.



Missouri earned five of its eight battle stars for Korean War service.

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