

# THE **American**

JANUARY \* 1942

## **WE CAN WIN ON BOTH OCEANS**

With our fighting ships in the thick of the Battle of the Atlantic, and hell ready to pop in the Pacific, the Secretary of the Navy now lays his cards on the table. Fully and frankly he reveals to the American people the stupendous power of our First Line of Defense—the greatest battle fleet in the world



**BY FRANK KNOX**



THE United States, today, has the greatest navy in history. I say this with a salute of respect to the gallant fleets of Britain, which, fighting in the battle line these last 27 months, have suffered inevitable losses during the very time that our enormous building program was beginning to produce results.

In the past, America's naval defense was predicated on the Panama Canal. Our ships, using that canal, could be swiftly concentrated in whichever ocean the attack might occur.

In the future, we shall have a navy so strong that, even if we stood alone against the world, we could meet all attacks in both oceans simultaneously.

At present we do not have this two-ocean navy. But, with the powerful new accessions to our fleet, with the greater range of operations given by our new bases and our hundreds of additional auxiliary vessels, and with the Panama Canal permitting strategic shifts of

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)





**FRANK KNOX**

strength, we are ready to resist threats in both oceans.

For us, the shooting has begun in the Atlantic. In the Pacific the situation continues filled with possible danger. At this time, therefore, the American people are entitled to have a straightforward report, in layman's language, on their Navy, our nation's First Line of Defense.

How, and why, is our Navy the strongest? How do its ships, men, and planes stack up with those of other countries? What are the lessons for us in the battles of Norway and Crete, and in the death struggles of the Graf Spee and the Bismarck? What of the destroyers Reuben James and Kearny? How about morale? Marksmanship? New inventions?

First, let's take a general look at our fighting ships, now in service and under construction.

We have 17 battleships, with 15 more building; 7 aircraft carriers, with 11 more building; 37 cruisers, with 54 more building; 171 destroyers, with 192 more building; 111 submarines, with 73 more building.

The battleship, mightiest fighting engine designed (Continued on page 96) by man, is the backbone of any navy. Thirty or forty thousand tons of steel and machinery, precise as a watch, but sturdy enough to stand up under torpedoes, 2,000-pound bombs, and 16-inch shells.

If some armchair strategist tells you that the battleship has been "outmoded" by the airplane, remind him of this: If the Germans had had a battle fleet superior to that of England, the British Isles would have been blockaded and starved out long ago.

Our United States battleships are, on the average, somewhat slower than those of other nations, but they are also tougher, and can hit harder. In prize-ring language, they are built to take it and to dish it out, without too much regard for fancy footwork.

No warship has everything. For extra speed, you must sacrifice some of your guns or armor. For extra armor, you sacrifice something in guns or speed. For extra guns, you lose something in speed or armor.

Our seagoing officers and battleship designers, for many years, have insisted on armor and gun power.

The new German battleship Von Tirpitz (like the late Bismarck) has armor as strong as ours, but has only eight 15-inch guns compared to the nine 16-inch guns of our new North Carolina and Washington. Thus, the North Carolina can throw more than 20,000 pounds of shells while the Tirpitz is firing only 16,000 pounds.



## BOTH OCEANS

**H**ERE is the question: Were our seagoing officers and designers right in building for guns and armor at some sacrifice of speed?

Looking at the battles of this war, we can see today how right our Navy has been.

In the Mediterranean, the Italian cruiser *Colleoni*, probably the fastest in the world, met the Australian cruiser *Sydney*, slower but with heavier armor. Salvos from *Sydney* cut into the *Colleoni*'s thinner sides, slowed her down to a walk, and then finished her off.

Off Montevideo the *Graf Spee*, Germany's pride, battled three smaller but brilliantly handled British cruisers. They slowed her down with hits on the water line. Unable to escape, she took refuge in harbor and was scuttled by her own crew.

Last spring the mighty British battle-cruiser, the *Hood*, fought the new German battleship *Bismarck*, similar in size but with heavier armor. It was all over in a few minutes. A shell from the *Bismarck*'s second salvo found a weak spot in the *Hood*'s armor, crashed through to an ammunition magazine, and literally blew the *Hood* to pieces.

The British fleet did a masterly job in tracking down and finally sinking the *Bismarck*. When the *Bismarck* had apparently made her escape, it was an American-built long-range patrol plane which spotted her again.

But note this: Before she sank at last, the *Bismarck* had been hit by a number of torpedoes, aerial and marine, and had endured the fire of several hundred of the heaviest shells. It is an extraordinary example of how much punishment a well-armored battleship can take. It is another proof that our naval designers have been on the right track.

The *Bismarck* is also a valuable warning for America. What if Germany is ever given a breathing spell, with the time and resources to build *Bismarcks*, not singly, but by the dozens? That is one more reason why the American Navy, having now entered the Battle of the Atlantic, is in it to the finish.

Taking them all around, I think it is fair to say that our battleships are the strongest and toughest fighting machines of their day. Our new ones, soon to be coming along, are far better than their older sisters.

**N**EXT, let's see how our Navy stands on the question of air power versus sea power.

It is clear from this war that one of the toughest jobs a fleet can have is to operate in narrow waters under the bombardment of a cloud of shore-based aircraft. The British Navy took a terrible pounding from enemy bombers off Norway in 1940 and off Crete in 1941. They lost a lot of ships, including many destroyers and several cruisers. On another occasion the fast new aircraft carrier *Illustrious* was put out of action and badly damaged, but not sunk.

But the British battleship *Rodney*, equipped with strong deck armor, was little damaged, although hit squarely by a bomb of the heaviest caliber.

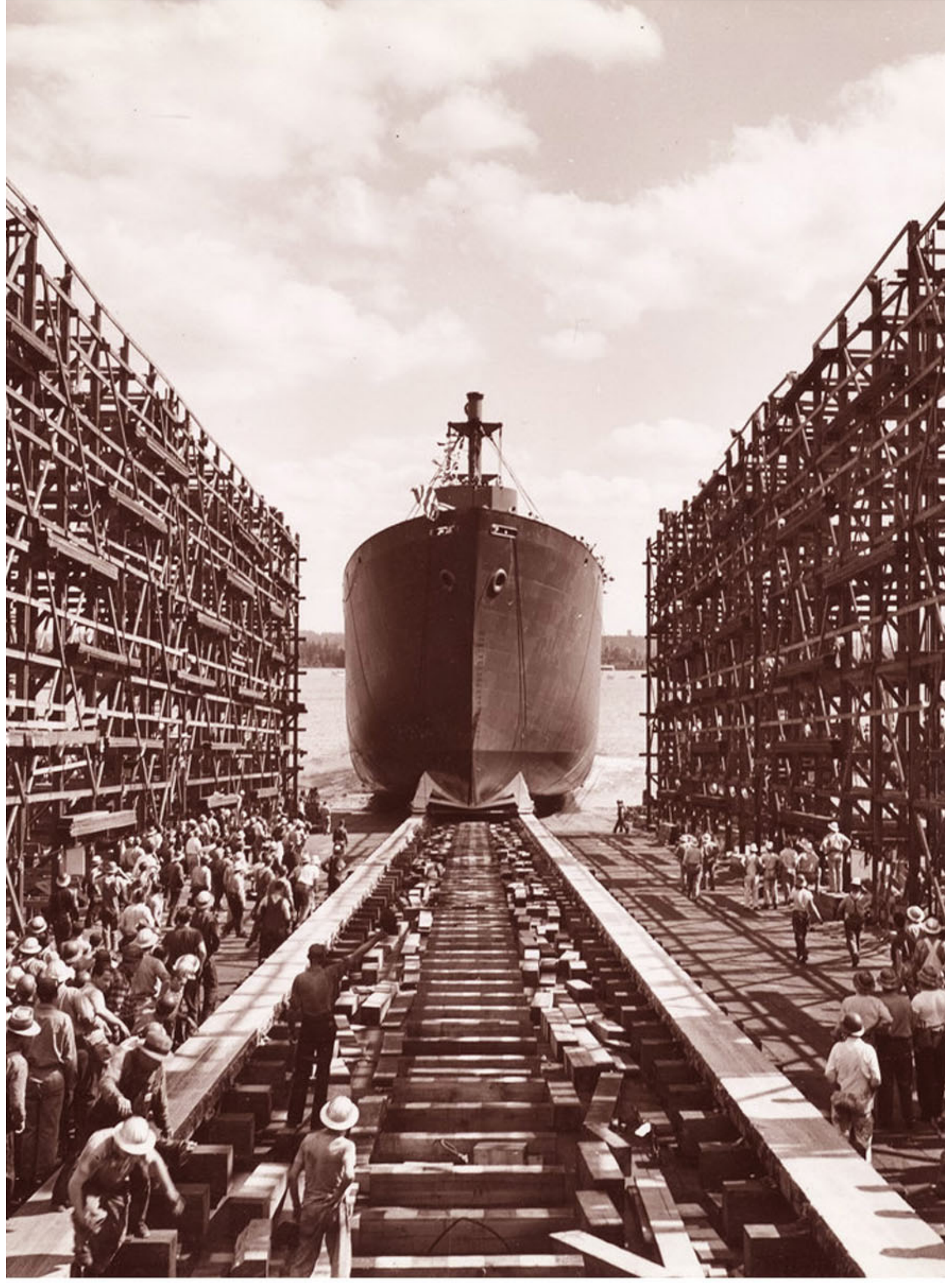
This confirms the ideas of our Navy, which has been a leader in the thickness of deck armor.

Another principle of our Navy is to use, besides the various smaller rapid-fire guns, plenty of very powerful anti-aircraft guns to keep the enemy bombers high. Thus, we put 5-inch anti-aircraft guns on our cruisers when others were using 3- and 4-inch guns.

One of the new developments we are proud of is our 5-inch "dual-purpose" gun. The details of its performance are a military secret. I can say, however, that it has a barrel nearly 16 feet long, that it is extremely quick-aiming and quick-firing for its size and power, that it can be used against either vessels on the surface or planes in the sky, and that it has a reach higher than any bombing planes now operating. Our new battleships carry up to 20 each of these hell-blowers.

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)





Originally, our Navy overlooked one important point in defense against planes. They did not put enough protection around the men who handle the anti-aircraft guns. Off Norway the British found that the first German attack, while not badly damaging the ship, could put the A.A. gun crews out of action with machine-gun bullets or bomb splinters. The next Nazi wave, finding the ship nearly defenseless, could then dive in low and finish her off. Acting on this information, we have hastened to repair our error, and put good armor-plate protection around our anti-aircraft crews.

And that is one good example for those who think our aid to England has been a one-way affair. The British, by putting their information at our disposal, by permitting our observers to follow every action from plane, ship, or submarine, have given us the priceless opportunity to keep thoroughly up-to-date in all the rapidly developing science of war.

When I speak of heavy deck armor and anti-aircraft guns, I leave out the most important defense against enemy planes: our own naval aviation.

Our Navy has pioneered in the air ever since we sent officers to train with Glenn Curtiss in 1908. Our Navy plane, the NC-4, was the first to fly across the Atlantic in 1919. We developed the first efficient catapult for launching planes from ships, the first aerial torpedoes, the best long-range scouts and bombers.

Our naval fliers, ten years before the war, developed the first dive bombers, later copied by the Germans in their dread "Stukas." I think our boys are still ahead of them in steepness of dive and bomb accuracy, but the Germans have the advantage of wide battle experience.

With the addition of the newly commissioned, 20,000-ton Hornet, we now have a great fleet of aircraft carriers. England has 8 carriers, Japan has 9. We have only 7 carriers, but those 7 can handle some 500 planes.

At present our Navy has some 5,000 planes, including trainers. New combat planes of the finest design are beginning to come along fast, with a goal of 12,000 combat planes, plus about 3,000 training planes.

But the heart of naval aviation lies less in figures and numbers than in co-ordination, understanding, and teamwork between the planes in the air and the ships on the surface. And it is right here, in marrying the air arm to the fleet, that we have admittedly gone farther than any other nation.

Lack of this quality, the British freely confess, gave them a good deal of trouble early in the war. Certain functions, handled by our naval aircraft, were in England handled by men trained as land fliers. R.A.F. men, skillful and brave as they were, did not



## BOTH OCEANS

always know enough of the sea, of ships, and of naval tactics to operate efficiently. The British are now working toward our system.

We feel that the sea is a separate element. A man who has not had naval training cannot be a first-class naval flier. To a landsman, a distant cruiser is easily mistaken for a battleship, or a small fleet with supply ships and auxiliaries for a merchant convoy. Such mistakes can change the course of a battle. This is why I have steadfastly opposed any move toward a unified or independent air force which would divorce the Navy from its own planes.

**T**HE physical and mental requirements for entry into our Navy are higher than for any other navy. The officers have the unsurpassed training of Annapolis, followed in special cases by further study at our finest engineering and technical schools. Morale in the Navy is tops. Men who enlist always find the equipment ready for them, the whole training organization prepared. They settle down at once to the task of learning a complicated, enthralling, and arduous profession. There are 55 skilled trades in the Navy. Those who show special aptitude are sent to the Navy schools for advanced training, where they may win higher rating and pay.

This process, over the years, has built up in our Navy a magnificently skilled and intelligent body of petty officers and non-commissioned specialists.

For commissioned officers we can draw not only on the trained reserve and the retired Annapolis men, but on a new type, the so-called "V-7 midshipmen." These are made up of thousands of college men, of good standing in mathematics and other subjects. They go to training school for forced-draft courses in naval science for four months. Then, if they can pass the stiff final examination, they go directly into the fleet, as ensigns of the Naval Reserve, assigned to hard, active service.

The American Navy has always been noted for its marksmanship, its gunnery. Every year, as ranges lengthen, this becomes more complex. Suppose you are on a battleship, firing at an enemy ship which, 20 miles away, is hardly more than a speck on the horizon. Your own guns move with your ship, which simultaneously rolls and pitches.

You must allow for your own speed and direction, the enemy's speed and direction, the force and direction of the wind and other atmospheric conditions—to mention just a few of the variables.

To keep our supremacy in this we must have the help of our scientists in providing ever better metal, explosives, and instruments. We have the constant advantage of our intelligent and highly competitive personnel. And we strengthen this by more actual target practice than any other navy. That is expensive, but worth it. One trouble with the Italian Navy was that it could not afford to "waste" powder in practice firing.

It is a curious fact that the American Navy burnt up more ammunition during the first year of the war than did the British Navy. The reason, of course, was that British vessels, on wartime patrol, might go for months without firing a shot, while our ships were busy with their peaceful target practice.

**S**OME day a book will be written about the new scientific inventions which are strengthening our Navy at this critical time. If such a book were written now it would be worth several billion dollars, cash money, to one A. Hitler. You will see, then, why I cannot say much about our new inventions here.

I am proud of this Navy of ours. Every American has a right to be proud of it, to know that it is, up to now, the greatest navy in history. But we cannot afford to be complacent about it. It is still not the navy which our country needs and which our fighting men in the ships deserve.

Consider two destroyers, the Reuben James and the Kearny. The Reuben James was hurriedly built at the time of the last war. She was fast, but she was not so sturdy

**OldMagazineArticles.com**



**BOTH OCEANS**

as our modern destroyers. Recently she was torpedoed and sunk.

The Kearny is a modern destroyer. She represents years of study by our designers, in stronger metals, in sturdier frame, in greater compartmentation. A torpedo struck her in a vulnerable spot. It was a blast which would have blown an older destroyer in half. It tore heavily into the Kearny and flooded two of her compartments. Men were killed and wounded. But the Kearny kept an even keel and steamed some 400 miles under her own power to make port.

Perhaps this is a symbol of the difference between what our Navy was and what it will be in the days to come.

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE