

“Big Mamie”

The USS Massachusetts (BB-59) was laid down 20 July 1939 by Bethlehem Steel Co., Quincy, MA, and launched 23 September 1941. She was commissioned 12 May 1942 at Boston, Capt. Francis E. M. Whiting in command...and off she sailed into History.

While steaming off Casablanca 8 November, 1942, she came under fire from French battleship *Jean Bart's* 15-inch guns. She returned fire, firing the first 16-inch shells fired by the U.S. against the European Axis Powers. Within a few minutes, she silenced *Jean Bart's* main battery; then she turned her guns on French destroyers which had joined the attack, sinking two of them. She also shelled shore batteries and blew up an ammunition dump. After a cease-fire had been arranged with the French, she headed for the United States and prepared for Pacific duty. In mid-November, she sailed with a carrier group striking Makin, Tarawa, and Abemama in the Gilberts; on 8 December she shelled Japanese positions on Nauru; and on 29 January, 1944, she guarded carriers striking Tarawa in the Gilberts. The *Massachusetts* bombarded Kwajalein, and struck against Truk in February. On 21 to 22 February, she helped fight off a heavy air attack on her task group while it made raids on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. She took part in the attack on the Carolines in late March and participated in the invasion at Hollandia in April which landed 60,000 troops on the island. On 1 August she left Pearl Harbor to resume operations in the Pacific after being refitted. She participated in a fleet strike against Okinawa and also took part in the Battle for Leyte Gulf. *Massachusetts* sailed into a howling typhoon 17 December, with winds est. at 120 knots. Three destroyers sank at the height of the typhoon's fury.

Massachusetts fired what was probably the last 16-inch shell fired in combat in World War II while shelling Japan in August 1945. She was struck from the Naval Register 1 June 1962. She received 11 battle stars for World War II service. "Big Mamie" now sits at Battleship Cove, Fall River, MA, as the Bay State's memorial to those who gave their lives in World War II.

[Battleship Cove will be featured later this year in the RMS Bulletin]

