

# Farewell, Daisy Mae! THE LAST ALL-GUN CRUISER GOES TO THE SMELTER

*The famed heavy cruiser Des Moines (CA-134) is towed to Texas for scrapping after years of searching for a port to berth her as a memorial warship fail*

BY KIT BONNER

**J**ust after 1700 on 21 August 2006, the 58-year-old heavy cruiser USS *Des Moines* (CA-134) "was warped away from its pier at the former US Navy Yard at

Philadelphia (inactive Ships Maintenance Facility) for the long voyage to Brownsville, Texas. Three local harbor tugs assisted in getting the old ship out of the anchorage and

attached to the USNS *Grasp* (ARS-51) a Navy salvage ship. The 214-ft-long tow vessel with 2400-shp diesels has adequate power for towing a ship like the *Des Moines* at 4- to 6-kts, providing the seas are cooperative. The journey to Texas was uneventful, and the *Des Moines* was cast loose from the *Grasp* shortly after arrival at ESCO Marine in Port Brownsville, Texas on 7 September 2006. Port Brownsville is the home of at least four major ship disposal and recycling operations (All Star Metals; ESCO Marine; Marine Metals; and the largest firm, International Shipbreaking Ltd, LLC). International has received contracts to recycle such ships as the ex-USS *Iwo Jima* (LPH-2); ex-USS *England* (CG-22) and the ex-USS *Sterrett* (CG-31). The Naval tonnage alone has been nearly 100,000 in renderable metals. However, the *Des Moines* has been acquired by ESCO Marine.

As soon as the cruiser arrived at the ship breaking site it was taken over by ESCO Marine. Under a \$924,000 contract, ESCO will scrap the ship and dispose of the metals. The high grade steel in the armor and copper from the cabling is some of the finest available. Likely, the ship will be placed in a makeshift dirt slip and slowly reduced from the top through the superstructure and down to the hull as the dirt pit is drained. Having intricate plans of the ship and having the company's experts study the interior is vital to

USS *Des Moines* visits Venice, Italy, in 1958. This is a popular liberty port as it is close to Rome, yet difficult to maneuver the ship into the tight Venice channel.

