

the grand old cruiser in a dirt slip is not a pretty sight; however, the Navy could not continue funding the preservation of a ship whose worth expired decades ago, and there were no successful bids by private interests to make the ship into a museum or any other entertainment venue. The Navy did not consider the *Des Moines* suitable for a SINKEX assignment, so the only avenue left was to dispose of this fine ship through the use of a ship recycling firm.

Veterans who either served aboard this ship or love cruisers as I do have to face the unpleasant reality that ships like the ex-USS *Des Moines* are too expensive to maintain. Vessels that are far more modern (e.g. USS *California* (CGN-36), USS *America* (CV-66); and scores of nuclear attack submarines) have already been recycled or sunk in tests over the last few years. Retaining the *Des Moines* was literally impossible, especially in today's economic climate and the Navy Department's need to conserve taxpayer dollars for ship modernization, new ships, and most importantly attention to crew training, retraining and habitability issues. Keeping the *Des Moines* in the Navy's inventory was costing an estimated \$800,000 per year, and this is untenable in any economic times whether good or bad.

However, the *Des Moines* is not simply a big steel ship that will save the taxpayers thousands of dollars by being scrapped. In years past, the ship played a part in the development of some of today's most sophisticated Naval armament.



The Operations Yard at ESCO Marine in Port Brownsville, Texas. One of the current slips or another yet to be cut will be used to scrap the *Des Moines*.

## THE HEAVY CRUISER *DES MOINES*

The *Des Moines* was one of a limited number of what could be considered "very heavy" cruisers. As a class it was conceived in early WWII to combat the fast maneuvering enemy cruisers that the Allied ships met in the Solomons at night — particularly on 9 August 1942. Four Allied cruisers were lost in a surface action to well-handled Japanese ships that struck hard and left quickly. The US Navy needed a rapid fire 8-in gun cruiser that could respond to anything brought to bear by the Japanese, especially in a night surface action. Unfortunately, the aircraft carrier made this a mute issue, and by the time the rapid fire

8-in gun cruiser was commissioned, there was no further need for this type of ship. There would never be a need in the future either. Had the *Des Moines*-class been available in 1942, the night surface actions would have resulted in entirely different outcomes.

The "Daisy Mae," as it was dubbed by its devoted crews, was launched on 28 May 1945, and commissioned on 16 November 1948. The *Des Moines* was to have been the lead ship for ten cruisers in her class. However, the war came to an end, and only the USS *Salem* (CA-139) and USS *Newport News* (CA-148) were built and commissioned. All had highly satisfactory careers, and the *Salem*

is now a museum ship in Quincy, Massachusetts. The *Newport News* was sold for scrap in February 1993. The *Des Moines* was designed for a full load

Norfolk, 1954, where the *Des Moines* is moored outboard of the USS *Macon* (CA-132) with the *Essex*-class aircraft carrier USS *Randolph* (CV-15) on the other side of the pier. The photograph was taken from the bow of an *Iowa*-class battleship.

