

## USS *NEW JERSEY* (BB 62) ~ FROM PHILADELPHIA TO CAMDEN:

### A Retrospective of 80 Years. Part I: World War II, First Commissioning

By Captain Lawrence B. Brennan, US Navy (Retired)<sup>1,2</sup>

Eighty years ago, the United States Navy ordered Battleship Number 62, ultimately to be named USS *New Jersey*, to be built at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard.<sup>3</sup> Today, that ship is moored across the Delaware River at Camden, New Jersey as a Museum Ship. During the intervening nearly 50 years, she fought in four wars - World War II (1943-1945), Korea (1951-53), Vietnam (1968-69), and the Lebanese Conflict (1983-84); she was placed in commission four times, actively serving more than two decades. For the past 20 years she has been a Museum Ship.<sup>4</sup>



Naval History & Heritage Command photo #NH45486<sup>5</sup>

**Fig. 1:** USS *New Jersey* (BB 62) *silhouetted against the sea and clouds, as seen from a minesweeper, 26 October 1943. She was then engaged in training in the Atlantic Ocean.*

This article is an overview of the postal history of the ship – technically a branch of the New York post office during much of her lengthy service. Interspersed with the narrative of the ship's construction and service are photographs and covers postmarked on board *New Jersey* or philatelic covers postmarked ashore marking historic events.

Much of the following information is *The Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (D.A.N.F.S. history online), as noted in endnote 4.

**USS NEW JERSEY (BB 62) ~ Part I: World War II ~ Capt. Lawrence B. Brennan**

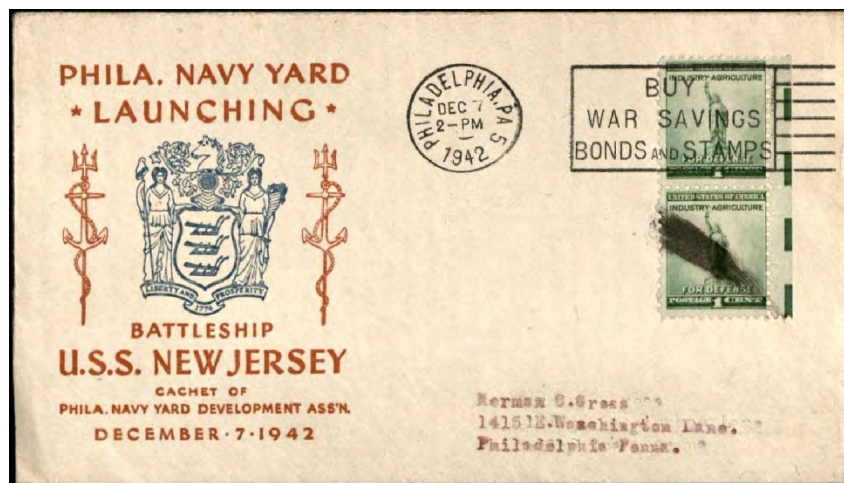
On 1 July 1939, the first day of Fiscal Year 1940, the United States ordered the first two *Iowa* class battleships. The class leader was built at New York Naval Shipyard while the second was USS *New Jersey*. Ultimately, six were ordered but only four [*Iowa*, *New Jersey*, *Missouri*, and *Wisconsin*] were completed; all served during World War II, Korea, during the 1980s rebuilding of the fleet, and now all four are Museum Ships.

The keel for *New Jersey* was laid 16 September 1940; she was launched 7 December 1942 sponsored by Mrs. Charles Edison, wife of Governor Edison of New Jersey the former Secretary of the Navy; the ship was commissioned at Philadelphia 23 May 1943, Captain Carl F. Holden, US Navy in command. She spent the rest of that year in the western Atlantic and Caribbean area.



Illustration courtesy George Mancin

**Fig. 2:** A Dr. Hutnick keel laying cover for New Jersey dated 16 Sep 1940 and postmarked on board USS Bear (AG 29) with her Lucy Type 3r (BTT) postmark with Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in her killer bars rated A in the USCS Postmark Catalog. The cover bears a green one cent Washington stamp (Scott #804) and an orange half cent Benjamin Franklin (Scott #803).



**Fig. 3:** A launching cover postmarked by a machine cancel at Philadelphia Post Office dated 7 Dec 1942, the first anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The cover bears a vertical pair of 1 cent green Defense Statue of Liberty stamps (Scott #899).

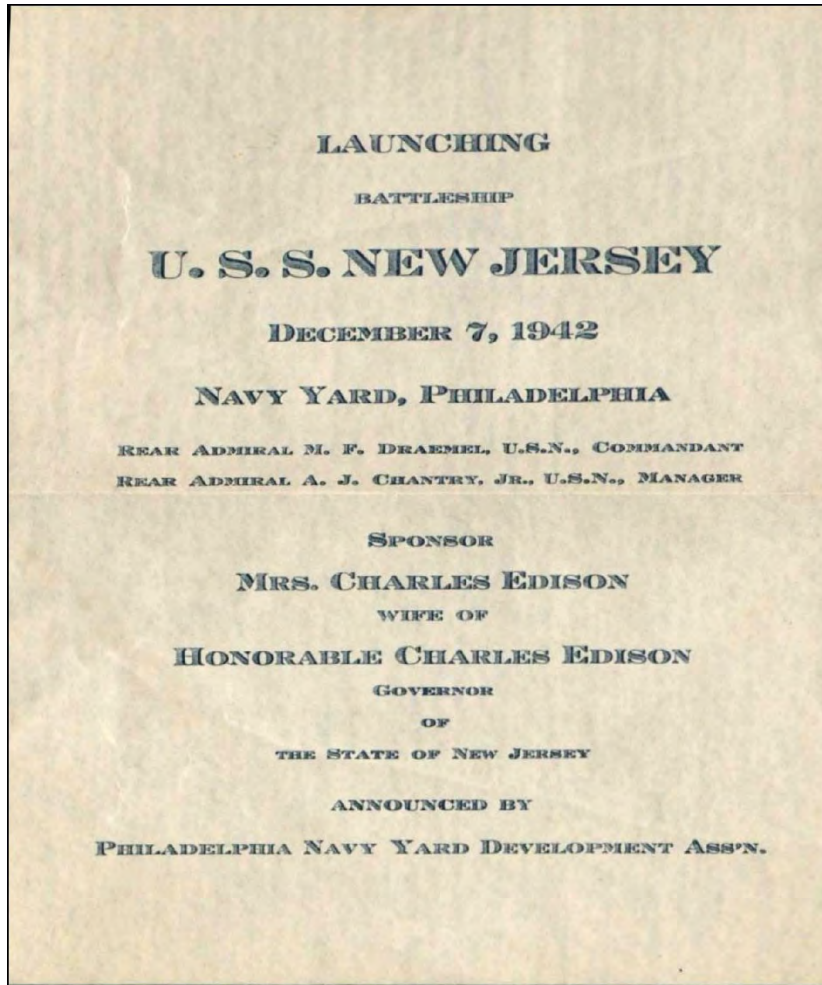


Illustration courtesy John Young

*Fig. 4: Launch Day program for USS New Jersey.*

Associate Press Photo, at  
NavSource.org #016232u

*Fig. 5: U.S. Naval officers wave from the bow on New Jersey BB-62 as she is launched at the Naval Yard at Philadelphia, 7 December 1942. Anchor and chains hang over the bow, which is higher than a five-story building.*



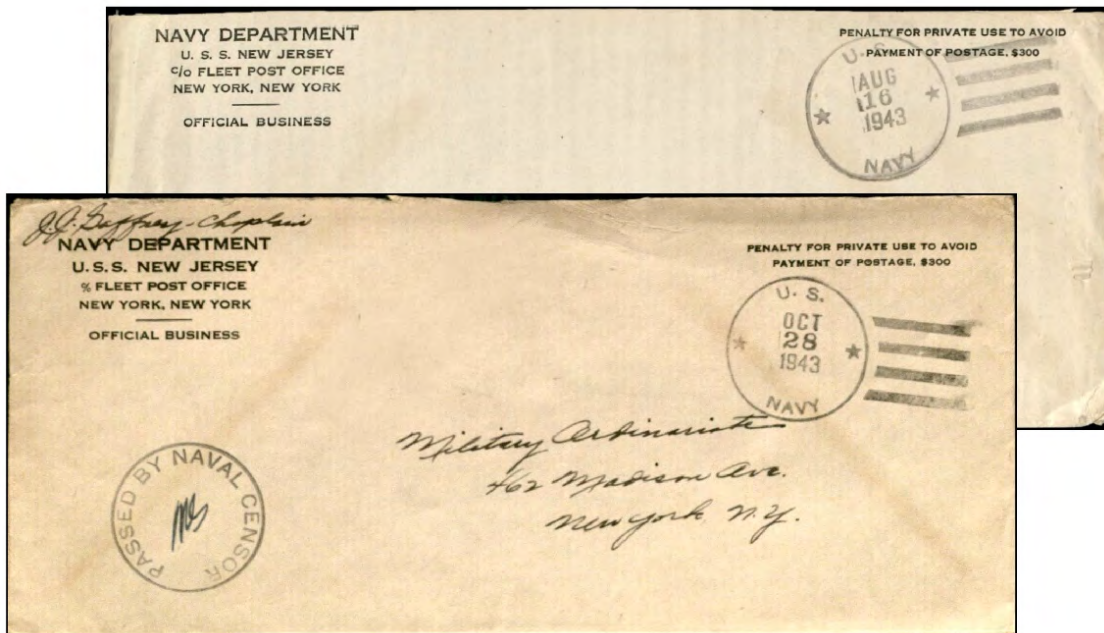




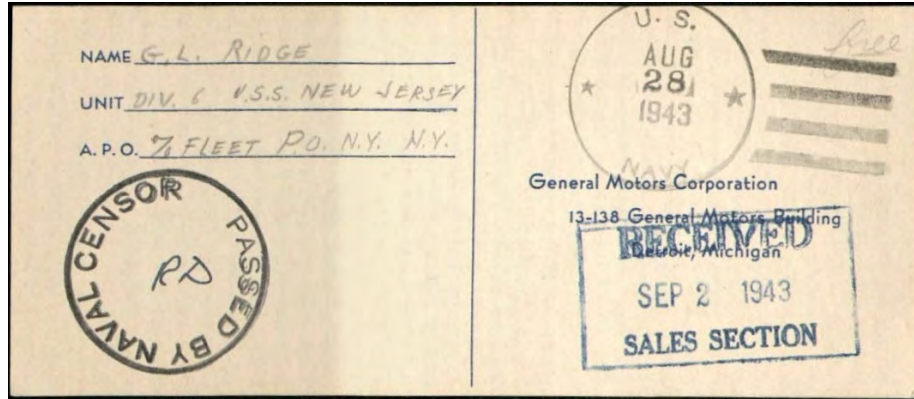
Illustration courtesy Richard Hoffner.  
**Fig. 6:** A printed First Day in Commission cover for USS New Jersey dated 23 May 1943, with her Locy Type 2z\* postmark and Locy Type 9efu handstamp not touching the stamp, plus censor marking. Sponsor unknown. The cover bears a 2¢ red Ohio River Canalization stamp (Scott #681). The postmarks are rated B in the USCS Postmark Catalog. Note the USS New Jersey Br. cancel of the New York post office.

The cover is addressed to Chief Electrician’s Mate A. J. Lance, US Navy. Archie Lance is a well-known collector who was a member of *New Jersey*’s crew and became a Warrant Officer and then a Lieutenant (junior grade).

*New Jersey*’s 23 May 1943 commissioning was followed by a shakedown cruise in the Atlantic Ocean.



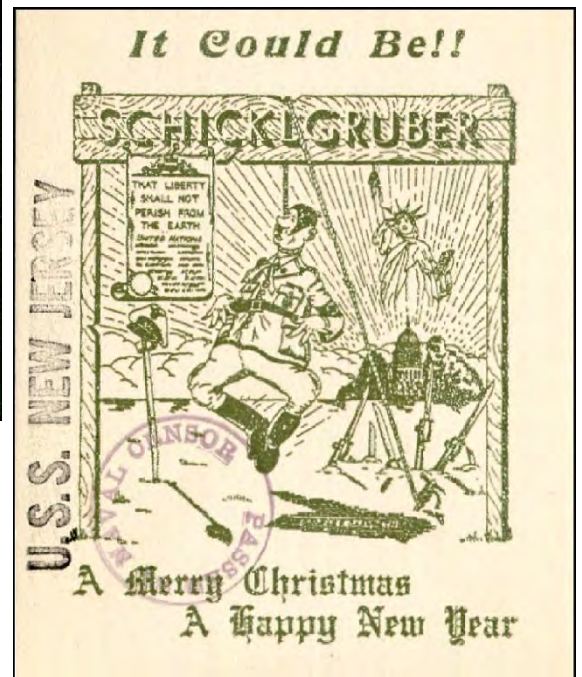
**Fig. 7:** Two Number 10 size official mail “Penalty Envelope” with the Fleet Post Office New York return address printed in the upper left corner, with New Jersey’s Locy Type 2z\* postmark which is rated B in the USCS Postmark Catalog. The cover cancelled 16 August 1943 is uncensored; the 28 October 1943 cover forwarded a report from Father J. J. Gaffney, the Roman Catholic Chaplain to the Military Ordinariate in New York. It is censored and is cancelled the day after the ship’s first Navy Day.



*Fig. 8: A pre-printed "Thank you" card addressed to General Motors by a sailor to acknowledge receipt of a gift carton of cigarettes sent by the GM employees. The sailor has printed his name and FPO N.Y. N.Y. return address in the upper left corner. The censored card is cancelled 28 August 1943 with New Jersey's Locy Type 2z\* postmark and was received by GM on 2 September 1943. In addition to those donated to the military by civilians, hundreds of millions of cartons of tax-free cigarettes were sold in ship's stores for less than a dollar per carton for decades before and after World War II.*



*Fig. 9: A small cover for a Christmas and New Year card franked with a brown one and a half cent Martha Washington stamp [Scott #805] with Mr. Lance's hand written name above the Fleet Post Office New York rubber stamp return address in the upper left corner. The censored cover is cancelled 21 Dec 1943 with New Jersey's Locy Type 2z\* postmark. The envelope is addressed to George Sadworth, a well-known naval cover collector; the enclosed card also bears a censor mark and a large rubber stamped "U.S.S. NEW JERSEY" to the left of the picture.*



*Fig. 9a: Enclosed card picturing Hitler.*



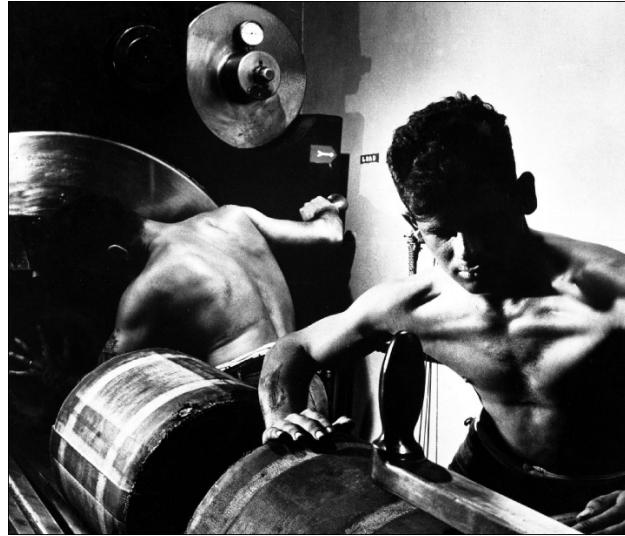
Life aboard ship – preparing for battle ~

Figs. 10 a-d: NavSource.org<sup>6</sup>



Navsource #016241

*Fig. 10a: Crewmen are seen loading 16" projectiles through a main deck scuttle. The projectiles are hoisted down several decks by a portable beam hoist built onto the top of the main turrets.*



Navsource.org #0162005

*Fig. 10b: Gunners packing in bags of powder which will fire the huge shell already in gun.*



Navsource #016246f

*Fig. 10c: Ordnance men aboard New Jersey (BB-62) move a 16-Inch projectile to an ammunition hoist.*



Navsource #016244

*Fig. 10d: A crewman relaxing under the guns which will fire the ordnance.*

On 7 January 1944 *New Jersey* passed through the Panama Canal war-bound for Funafuti, Ellice Islands. She reported there 22 January for duty with the Fifth Fleet, and three days later rendezvoused with Task Group 58.2 for her first combat duty – the assault on the Marshall Islands.



*Fig. 11: A 23 January 1944 cover sent to River Forest, Ill. upon arriving at Funafuti in the Ellice Islands, just before New Jersey's first combat duty in the Marshall Islands. Her Fleet Post Office address is now San Francisco.*

*New Jersey* was Admiral Spruance's Fifth Fleet flagship during the mid-February raid on the Japanese base at Truk. Through the rest of 1944, she took part in raids on Japanese-held islands, the Marianas invasion and Battle of Philippine Sea, the Battle of Leyte Gulf and operations against the Philippines.



*Fig. 12: Admiral Raymond Spruance and Admiral Chester Nimitz aboard USS New Jersey.*<sup>7</sup>

*New Jersey* began her career as a flagship 4 February in Majuro Lagoon when Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commanding the Fifth Fleet, broke<sup>8</sup> his flag. Her first action as a flagship was a two-day surface and air strike against the Japanese fleet base on Truk in the Carolines. This was coordinated with the assault on Kwajalein, and interdicted Japanese naval retaliation during the conquest of the Marshalls.



Image courtesy John Young

Fig. 13: 5 Feb 1944 cancel Locy Type 2z with straight line “USS New Jersey” placed across but not part of the lower section of the circular device below the date



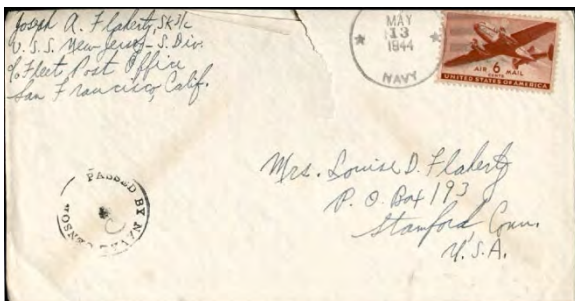
Figs. 14 and 14a: Censored airmail covers sent by crewmen soon after New Jersey transited to the Pacific. New Jersey was Fifth Fleet flagship with Admiral Spruance embarked at this time.

Each cover is franked with a carmine six cent Transport Plane stamp [Scott #C25] with sailor’s hand written return address in the upper left corner. They are cancelled 11 Feb 1944 and 16 Mar 1944 respectively with New Jersey’s Locy Type 2z\* postmark. While surface mail was free, many sailors paid the six cents airmail fee to expedite their correspondence.

Between 17 March and 10 April, *New Jersey* first sailed with Rear Admiral Marc A. Mitscher’s flagship USS *Lexington* (CV 16) for an air and surface bombardment of Mille, then rejoined Task Group 58.2 for a strike against shipping in the Palaus, and bombarded Woleai. Upon his return to Majuro, Admiral Spruance transferred his flag to USS *Indianapolis* (CA 35). He would again break his flag in *New Jersey* at the end of the war.



*New Jersey's* next war cruise, 13 April-4 May 1944, began and ended at Majuro. She screened the carrier striking force which gave air support to the invasion of Aitape, Tanahmerah Bay, and Humboldt, Bay, New Guinea, 22 April, then bombed shipping and shore installations at Truk 29-30 April. *New Jersey's* sixteen-inch salvos pounded Ponape 1 May.

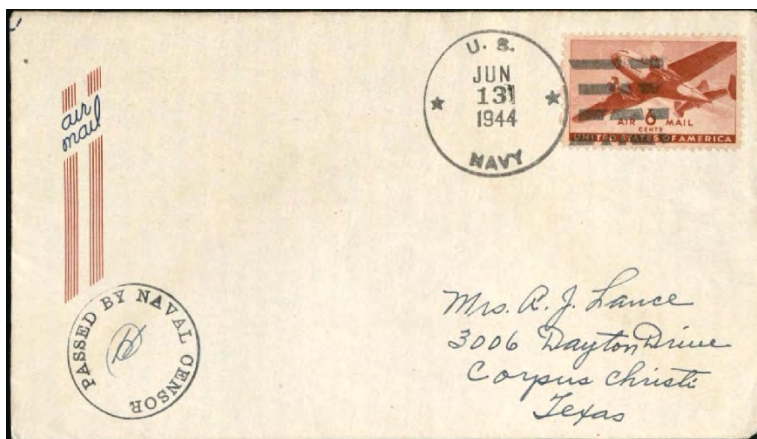


**Fig. 15:** A censored airmail cover sent by a crewman franked with a carmine six cent Transport Plane stamp [Scott #C25] with sailor's hand written return address in the upper left corner. The censored cover is cancelled 13 May 1944 with New Jersey's Locy Type 2z\* postmark.



**Fig. 16:** Part of the Lance correspondence, this cover is canceled between the Hollandia Operation and the Marianas Operation, 26 May 1944. The cover is addressed to the only woman who has served as president of the Universal Ship Cancellation Society.

After rehearsing for the invasion of the Marianas, *New Jersey* put to sea 6 June [D-Day at Normandy] in the screening and bombardment group of Admiral Mitscher's Task Force.



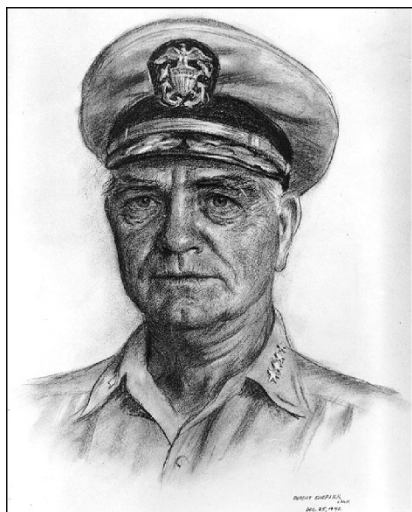
**Fig. 17:** Also part of the Lance correspondence, this cover is canceled during the Marianas operation, 13 June 1944.

The Japanese response to the Marianas operation was an order to its Mobile Fleet to attack the US invasion force. Shadowing US submarines tracked the Japanese fleet into the Philippine Sea. *New Jersey* took station in the protective screen around the carriers on 19 June 1944 as US naval aviators and Japanese pilots dueled in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. That day and the next sealed the doom of Japanese naval aviation. In this "Marianas Turkey Shoot," the Japanese lost more than 400 aircraft. This loss of trained pilots and aircraft was equaled in disaster by the sinking of three Japanese carriers by submarines and aircraft, and the damaging of two carriers and a battleship. The US Navy's anti-aircraft fire proved virtually impenetrable; only two US ships were slightly damaged.



Illustration courtesy Naval Online Cover Collection: Jon Burdett  
**Fig. 18.** Cancelled 16 August 1944 with a USS *New Jersey* corner handstamp FPO San Francisco.

From August 1944, she was flagship of Admiral William F. Halsey's Third Fleet. *New Jersey* broke his four star flag 24 August 1944. For the eight months after she sailed from Pearl Harbor 30 August, *New Jersey* was based at Ulithi.



**Fig. 19:** *New Jersey*-born Admiral William F. ("Bull") Halsey.<sup>9</sup>

In September the targets were in the Visayas and the southern Philippines, then Manila and Cavite, Panay, Negros, Leyte, and Cebu. Early in October raids to destroy enemy air power based on Okinawa and Formosa were begun in preparation for the Leyte landings 20 October 1944.

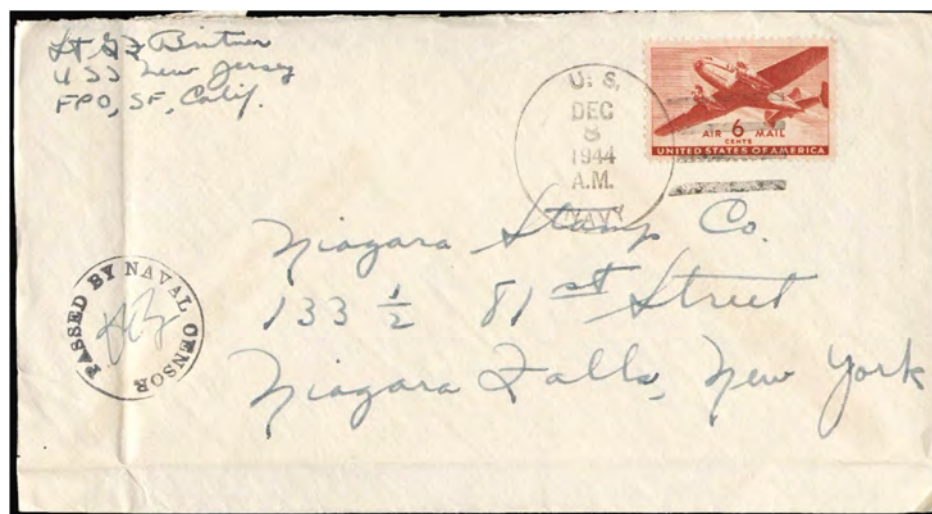
This invasion brought on the last great sortie of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Its plan for the Battle for Leyte Gulf included a feint by a northern force of carriers, without aircraft, to draw away the battleships, cruisers and fast carriers with which Admiral Halsey was protecting the landings. This was to allow the Japanese Center Force to enter the gulf through San Bernardino Strait.

At the opening of the battle planes from the carriers guarded by USS *New Jersey* struck at both the Japanese Southern and Center Forces, sinking a battleship 23 October. The next day Halsey shaped his course north after the decoy force had been spotted. Aircraft from his carriers sank four of the Japanese carriers, as well as a destroyer and a cruiser, while *New Jersey* steamed south at flank speed to meet the newly developed threat of the Center force.



*Fig. 20: Admiral William F. Halsey, Commander, Third Fleet (left center) eats Thanksgiving dinner with the crew of his flagship, USS New Jersey (BB-62), 30 November 1944.*

Official U.S. Navy Photograph #80-G-291498



Official US Navy photograph #80-G-291047<sup>10</sup>

*Fig. 21: A censored airmail cover sent by Lieutenant G. F. Britner, Jr., franked with a carmine six cent Transport Plane stamp [Scott #C25] with his hand written return address in the upper left corner. The censored cover is cancelled, during the Leyte Operations including the Luzon Attacks, with New Jersey's Locy Type 2z\* postmark dated 8 Dec 1944, 10 days before the first of two Pacific typhoons which caused serious damage to Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet.*

*New Jersey* sailed with a carrier task group for air attacks on Luzon 14-16 December and then found herself in a typhoon which sank three destroyers. She returned to Ulithi on Christmas Eve to be met by Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, who had convened a Court of Inquiry. This was the first of two disastrous typhoons which damaged the Third Fleet.



**USS *NEW JERSEY* (BB 62) ~ Part I: World War II ~ Capt. Lawrence B. Brennan**

From 30 December 1944 to 25 January 1945, *New Jersey* guarded the carriers in strikes on Formosa, Okinawa, and Luzon, on the coast of Indo-China, Hong Kong, Swatow and Amoy, and again on Formosa and Okinawa. At Ulithi 27 January Admiral Halsey lowered his flag but it was replaced two days later by that of Rear Admiral Oscar Badger commanding Battleship Division Seven.

In support of the assault on Iwo Jima, *New Jersey* screened the *Essex* group in air attacks on the island 19-21 February, and escorted the first major carrier raid on Tokyo 25 February, a raid aimed specifically at aircraft production. During the next two days, Okinawa was attacked from the air by the same striking force.



**Fig. 22 & 23: Censored airmail covers franked with a carmine six cent Transport Plane stamp [Scott #C25] with Petty Officer Flaherty's hand written name above the rubber stamp return address in the upper left corner. The censored covers are cancelled, during the Leyte Operations including the Luzon Attacks, with New Jersey's Locy Type 2z\* postmark dated 20 February 1945 & 11 Apr 1945, during Fifth and Third Fleet raids in support of Okinawa Gunto Operation.**

*New Jersey* was engaged in the conquest of Okinawa from 14 March until 16 April. As the carriers prepared for the invasion with strikes there and on Honshu, *New Jersey* fought off air raids, used her seaplanes to rescue downed pilots, and defended the carriers from suicide planes. On 24 March 1945 she again carried out heavy bombardment, preparing the invasion beaches. *New Jersey* continued her Pacific combat operations into 1945, supporting the invasions of Iwo Jima and the Ryukyus.

6 August and 9 August 1945 marked the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan, and on 15 August, Japan announced its intentions to surrender. The formal surrender ceremony was conducted in Tokyo Bay on board the USS *Missouri* on 2 September 1945.



Fig. 24: An uncensored airmail cover franked with a carmine six cent Transport Plane stamp [Scott #C25] with Petty Officer Flaherty's hand written name above the rubber stamp return address in the upper left corner. The censored cover is cancelled with New Jersey's Locy Type 2z\* postmark dated 12 Sep 1945. The letter enclosed, dated 11 Sep 1945 reported that "we will get underway tomorrow and move up to Japan, probably at Yokohama."

*New Jersey* was not present in Tokyo Bay on the day of signing of the Instrument of Surrender. During the final months of the war, *New Jersey* was overhauled at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. She sailed 4 July for San Pedro, Pearl Harbor, and Eniwetok bound for Guam. There, on 14 August, she once again became flagship of the Fifth Fleet under Admiral Spruance. Brief stays at Manila and Okinawa preceded her arrival in Tokyo Bay, 17 September, where she served as flagship for the successive commanders of Naval Forces in Japanese waters until relieved 28 January 1946 by USS *Iowa* (BB 61).



Cover illustration courtesy John Young

Fig. 25: A cover celebrating the successful conclusion of the war, and the naval contributions of Admiral Halsey and Admiral Nimitz to this effort.

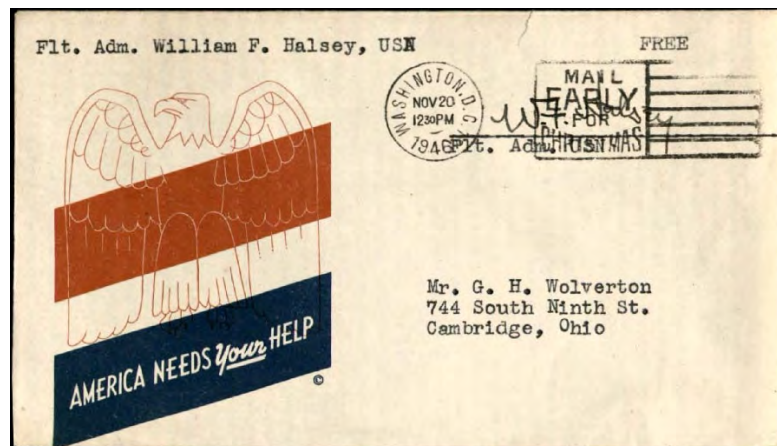


*Fig. 26: An uncensored multicolor printed Navy Day cacheted # 10 airmail cover franked with two carmine six cent Transport Plane stamps [Scott #C25] with Seaman First Class (S1/c) Jos. L. DuBois' hand written return address in the upper left corner. The uncensored cover is cancelled with New Jersey's Locy Type Pz (N-8c) postmark dated 28 Oct 1945, the day after Navy Day but still during 27 October throughout most of the United States, with "Tokyo Japan" in the killer bars rated C in the USCS Postmark Catalog (5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1997).*

As part of Operation Magic Carpet, *New Jersey* took aboard nearly a thousand homeward bound troops with whom she arrived at San Francisco 10 February 1946.

After west coast operations and overhaul at Puget Sound, *New Jersey* returned to the Atlantic as she came home to Bayonne, New Jersey, for her fourth birthday 23 May 1947.

Between 7 June and 26 August, 1947 *New Jersey* formed part of the first training squadron to cruise Northern European waters since the beginning of World War II. Over two thousand Naval Academy and NROTC midshipmen received sea-going experience under the command of Admiral Richard L. Connoly, Commander Naval Forces Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean, who broke his flag in *New Jersey* at Rosyth, Scotland 23 June. She was the scene of official receptions at Oslo, where King Haakon VII of Norway inspected the crew 2 July, and at Portsmouth, England. The training fleet was westward bound 18 July for exercises in the Caribbean and Western Atlantic.



*Fig. 27: An uncensored free mail printed cacheted cover with Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey's typed return on the upper left side and his autograph on the upper right side beneath the typed "FREE" frank and under the 20 Nov 1946 Washington D.C. machine postmark.*





Fig. 28: A printed cacheted cover marking New Jersey's Last Day Postal Service and cancelled with New Jersey's *Locy Type 2(n)* postmark dated 29 May 1948, rated A in the USCS Postmark Catalog (5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1997).

After serving at New York as flagship for Rear Admiral H. H. McClean, Commander, Battleship Division One, 12 September-18 October, *New Jersey* was inactivated at the New York Naval Shipyard. She was decommissioned at Bayonne 30 June 1948 and assigned to the New York Group, Atlantic Reserve Fleet. She would be recommissioned three more times, before becoming a Museum Ship in 2001 – a story for another day.

During World War II, *New Jersey* received nine battle stars for action in the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre in 1944 and 1945. The operations she participated in are listed below:

- 1. Marshall Islands Operation**
  - Occupation of Kwajalein and Majuro Atolls
  - Bombardment of Mille Atoll
- 2. Asiatic-Pacific Raids – 1944**
  - Truk Attack
  - Papau, Yap, Ulithi, Woleai Raid
  - Truk, Satawan, Ponape Raid
- 3. Hollandia Operation**
  - Aitape, Humboldt Bay, Tanahmerah Bay
- 4. Marianas Operation**
  - Capture and Occupation of Saipan
  - Battle of the Philippine Sea
  - Capture and Occupation of Guam
  - Palau, Yap, Ulithi Raid
- 5. Western Caroline Islands Operation**
  - Capture & Occupation of Southern Palau Islands
  - Philippine Island Assaults
- 6. Leyte Operation**
  - Third Fleet Supporting Operations – Okinawa Attack
  - Northern Luzon & Formosa Attacks
  - Luzon Attacks
  - Visayas Attack

**7. Luzon Operation**

Formosa Attack  
Luzon Attacks  
China Coast Attacks

**8. Iwo Jima Operation**

5th Fleet Raids against Honshu & the Nansei Shoto  
Assault & Occupation of Iwo Jima

**9. Okinawa Gunto Operation**

5th & 3rd Fleet Raids in support of Okinawa Gunto Operation

**10. Japanese surrender and Occupation Duty**

**World War II - Medals and Achievement Awards**

*Asiatic - Pacific Campaign Medal for World War II*

*World War II Victory Medal: May 23, 1943 - December 31, 1946*

*Navy Occupation Service Medal / Asia: October 23, 1945 - January 29, 1946*

**ENDNOTES:**

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Copyright MMXVI by Lawrence B. Brennan, all moral and legal right reserved. May not be reproduced or republished without the prior written consent of the author.
- <sup>2</sup> Lawrence B. Brennan is a retired U.S. Navy Captain, an adjunct professor of law at Fordham Law School, and an admiralty and maritime law litigator in New York City. He was a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice. He was educated at Fordham University in New York City (B.A. *magna cum laude* 1974 and J.D. 1977). He is a member of the Bar of the State of New York and various federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.
- <sup>3</sup> Fahey, James C. *The Ships and Aircraft of the United States Fleet (War Edition)*, New York, Ships and Aircraft 1942, p. 5.
- <sup>4</sup> The ship's history is based, as usual, on the *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*' entry found on line at <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/n/new-jersey-ii.html> and on <https://www.battleshipnewjersey.org/the-ship/full-history/>
- <sup>5</sup> Many of the photos used here come from the Naval History and Heritage Command web site, at <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-navy-ships/battleships/new-jersey-bb-62/NH-45486.html>. We will identify them by their number on that web site
- <sup>6</sup> Other photos are from NavSource Online: Battleship Photo Archive (for USS NJ BB-62) at <http://www.navsource.org/archives/01/62a.htm> .
- <sup>7</sup> WWII database web site at <https://ww2db.com/images/5b9175682cd55.jpg>.
- <sup>8</sup> Harvard History Professor and retired Rear Admiral, US Naval Reserve, Samuel Eliot Morison instructed, You set a sail, raise the jack or ensign, hoist a signal, but break (out) an admiral's flag..." "Notes on Writing Naval (not Navy) English," originally published in *The American Neptune* (January 1949) pp.5-9.
- <sup>9</sup> A New Jersey native, Fleet Admiral Halsey was born in Elizabeth 30 October 1882. He was promoted to Fleet Admiral and became Navy's junior five star Admiral on 11 December 1945.
- <sup>10</sup> Naval History & Heritage Command, *op cit.*, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-navy-ships/battleships/new-jersey-bb-62/80-G-291047.html>.