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# THE FORGOTTEN ALASKA-CLASS

NOT A BATTLECRUISER NOR A BATTLESHIP, THESE TWO LARGE CRUISERS WENT INTO SERVICE AFTER THE OPPOSING ENEMY SHIPS HAD ALL BEEN DEFEATED  
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Today, two of the least known World War Two US Navy warships were the USS *Alaska* (CB-1) and USS *Guam* (CB-2). Even the 1930s' isolationist US Congress could see that both Germany and Japan had the intention of world domination. This could lead to the possibility of America fighting a world war by itself if our nation's numerous Allies were

all destroyed by the growing military power of these two dictatorships. Within that decade, a few small naval appropriation bills were passed but it took the surrender of France after being overrun in just six weeks combined with Japan threatening American Pacific possessions for the government to finally act.

On 19 July 1940, the Vinson-Walsh Act was passed and this was

better known as the Two-Ocean Navy Act — the bill would provide ships for the US Navy to fight wars in both the Pacific and the Atlantic. Immediately increasing the size of the US Navy by 70%, the Two-Ocean Navy Act authorized construction of 257 ships and included the construction of 18 aircraft carriers,

new battleships and six *Alaska*-class cruisers and these last ships form the basis of this story.

Changing tactics and the devastating Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor would result that of all the newly-authorized or under construction battleships for the Navy, only four *Iowa*-class battleships and four *South Dakota*-class battleships would see completion. None of the *Montana*-class battleships would be completed. This left the six authorized *Alaska*-class large cruisers along with the problem of what to do with the ships.

With the construction of the new fast carrier task forces, the role of the large cruiser was to protect them against



US Marines atop their 5-inch gun mount during firing practice in February 1945. Note the local control ring sight and the binoculars and sound-powered telephones.



USS *Alaska* (CB-1) photographed from the USS *Missouri* (BB-63) off the East Coast when both ships were taking part in their shakedown cruises. Note the heavy cruiser's Measure 32 camouflage.



CB-1 on 30 July 1944 off the Philadelphia Navy Yard.