

U.S.S. South Dakota—Transcript of Two Records

H75-244 | 9382

June 7, 1941 – Camden, New Jersey

Disk 1

[Lewis Fischer] This is the New York Shipbuilding Corporation here in Camden, New Jersey. Where we are about to witness the launching of the United States newest giant the 35,000 ton battleship, *South Dakota*.

Directly opposite us, on the speakers stand is the sponsor Mrs. Harlan J. Bushfield, wife of the Governor of South Dakota. And at the moment Mrs. Bushfield is standing there at the bow of the ship with the christening bottle in her right hand, as a matter of fact she has both hands on it, sort of a baseball players batting stance waiting for the signal to be given when she will actually christen the *South Dakota* and she'll go down the ways. (00:38)

Standing directly behind her is the public relations, ah...official of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Mr. Fred Cornell, who has his left hand actually placed on the bow of the battleship waiting to detect the slightest movement. As soon as he feels her start down the ways he'll give the signal to Mrs. Bushfield and the actual christening and the beginning of the ships sliding down the ways will be very nearly simultaneous. (01:09)

There's been about a twenty-five minute delay here this afternoon because the tide hasn't been... just exactly right, ah...for the launching. This giant battleship completely fills these ways there is very little clearance on either side or at the top so that it's a ticklish job to launch her without any leeway at all. However, all the chocks have been taken out from underneath her keel only the hydraulic triggers and the trigger pit are holding her on the ways and as soon as the word is given which should be at any moment now, she'll be on her way down into the Delaware River. (01:47)

Directly in back of me incidentally is the Washington High School band from Sioux Falls, South Dakota which has come all the way from Sioux Falls to play for these ceremonies. We've had some music from them a bit earlier in the morning and they are going, of course, to play as the ship goes down the ways. (02:06)

(...inaudible second voice) We are still waiting ah, for...the launching here it should be at any moment Mrs. Bushfield is standing there with the christening bottle poised and everybody in the crowd is breathless waiting for this monster to go down the ways. (02:28)

There was a great deal of work going on in the adjacent ways, ah four cruisers under construction here on our right and they are building an additional five shipbuilding ways on our left so that the din of riveting and work in general has been pretty bad until just a few moments ago when everybody knocked off work and came over to the ways on which the *South Dakota* is poised to witness the ceremonies. The roof tops of the workshops and factories in the yard here are full of workmen who are waiting just as breathlessly as we are to see the *South Dakota* go down the ways. (03:04)

I see a number of patrol craft, coast guard boats of one kind or another moving slowly up and down the river front here and I'm also told by our officials that all shipping, all craft of every kind have been warned to keep away from this immediate area in order to facilitate the launching of the navy's newest battleship. (3:30)

The ceremonies are going to be particularly brief as there is a great deal of work going on here at the yard and as little interruption as can be gotten away with is hoped for. Incidentally, on the speakers stand is Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox who will address the gathering here immediately after the *South Dakota* has been launched. And at the same time, he will preside at the laying of the keel of the new 10,000 ton cruiser *Santa Fe*. The *Santa Fe's* keel will be laid (large uproar in background...) Oh, there she goes...(sound of two bottles smashing) there she goes Mrs. Bushfield has just smashed the christening bottle and majestically the *South Dakota* is going down the ways. You can hear the crowd yelling, the flags are flying and the whistles blowing. It is a magnificent sight. (04:22)

She's going away from us...the stern is in the water now... (Washington High School Band playing "Anchors Aweigh" in background) great waves are being pushed up all around. The ways are smoking...and now she's almost completely in the water. Only the front end of the cradle can be seen. Band playing "Anchors Aweigh" of course in back of us...now the bow is just about disappearing into the water. And the United States newest giant the *U.S.S. South Dakota* has been launched. ("Woo" in background)(05:00)

There go the anchors...two, three, all four of them are down. The news reel camera is grinding away. She's still moving out into midstream there. They're trying to stop her way but, she's still moving out into mid-stream. We can't see a great deal now because of the crowd. (Inaudible voice in the background) Yes, she is...just about...stopped, a very little way, flags flying of course from the top side a beautiful site as we stand looking down the ways, out into the river and the majestic *South Dakota* floating there amid the celebration. (05:46)

At the end of the ways, hanging from a giant crane, is the keel of the *Santa Fe*, the new 10,000 ton cruiser which is going to be laid down I understand in just a matter of minutes which should be some sort of a...just a moment we will take you to the speakers stand. (06:08)

Ah, the crowd has just given Mrs. Bushfield ah, sponsor...of the *South Dakota*. They gave Mrs. Bushfield a tremendous hand and she thanked them all and of course she and Mr. Cornell standing there, said they both had a pretty good cry as she started to move out. (Inaudible background voice) (06:32)

Coming up the ways, is the...hanging from the crane is the keel of the *Santa Fe* and I think of course that this must be some sort of a record, it's only been a matter of seconds, not more than a minute, since the *South Dakota* went down the ways and we're about to see the keel of the *Santa Fe* raised on the same ways in virtually the same spot. They are certainly not wasting any time here this afternoon. (07:02)

(Inaudible remarks in background) There are a few remarks being made by Mr. Cornell from the speakers stand and ah, if he gives us anymore descriptive material about the *Santa Fe* I will take you to the speakers stand and we'll see what he is telling the audience gathered here about the dais. The tugs incidentally

which were visibly tugging around the harbor have come up to the sides of the *South Dakota*, seem to have gotten lines across and they are just beginning to maneuver her about and eventually will move her into her dock, of course, where the work of fitting her out will begin. (07:46)

(Inaudible remarks in background) Mr. Cornell has just remarked that...the ship is exactly in the spot out in the harbor there, that was designated for her to be in and ah, that is no trifling job at all, 35,000 ton ship the *South Dakota* and they managed to launch her and have her come to rest in exactly the designated spot out there in the harbor in the Delaware River. I see that the tugs are rested about her now. The anchors of course have been down for some time and they are starting to swing her around and prepare to maneuver her to her dock where she will remain for some months for the remainder of her fitting. (08:39)

Mr. Cornell has just told us that Secretary of the Navy Knox will make his address in just a few moments and as soon as we see that he is ready we'll take you over to the speaker's stand where the Secretary of the Navy will address us. On behalf of the launching ceremonies of the *U.S.S. South Dakota* and will also preside at the laying of the keel of the new cruiser, the *Santa Fe*. (09:07)

The crowd is milling around below us here now and I see that the roof tops are beginning to empty off the workmen are starting back to their various jobs. And ah, (loud whistles sound) I believe that that whistle you just heard was the signal for the workmen to head back to their work and now we are going to take you, yes Mr. Cornell has just said that the workers will return to work and they're doing that right now. We are going to take you to the speakers stand now. (09:49)

Disk 2

[Mr. Cornell] just addressed the audience, told them that we are about to hear the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, who is mounting the speaker's platform now. He will be introduced by the president of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, Mr. John F. Netton, the president as I said of the New York Shipbuilding Corporation. We take you now to the speaker's stand where we will here Mr. Netton's introduction. (10:22)

[Mr. Netton] Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Frank Knox. (Applause)

[Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox] Mr. Netton, Mrs. Bushfield and Governor Bushfield...distinguished guest...and fellow Americans. There are fewer stirring views, nor moving sites, than that which you just witnessed. To see a great battleship leave the spot on the land and take to her native element. And to know that great ship will make a tremendous contribution to the safety of our country and all the people in it, is a moving thought. (11:24)

I confess I stirred profoundly as I saw the *South Dakota* take to the water. My first and most pleasurable duty is to bring to you...the greetings of the President of the United States (11:49) (Applause)

As the commander and chief of the army and the navy, his heart is here with us, the arduous burden which he bears did not permit him to join with us physically. But spiritually, I know of no man under the stars and stripes who is jointed more deeply, than this addition to the American fleet then its principal commander. (12:27)

Next, my duty is to express on behalf of the navy department, to the management and to the men of this superb ship building organization, our great appreciation. Not only that you have built it here, the greatest ship that floats in the ocean. But that you have launched that huge ship...five months ahead of schedule. (Applause) (13:04)

There never was a time, when time was so precious, as right now. We are living through a period, when the first concern of every American citizen who loves his country and cherishes its institutions. The single thought is for the defense of that country and those institutions. (Blowing of whistles) (13:47)

And this great ship that was just taken to the water. Will be/make a magnificent contribution to American sea power. I've already complemented you upon the speed at which this ship was launched. The speed you have displayed here is being produced and practiced in that sister service of the sea, the air. And all over America, men like you, are speeding that sister service of the navy, the air. And it is extremely wise that we should put our great emphasis on the speed in these

departments of defense. Because our future safety, through its very large navy, first upon the successful minds of those two services in the common defense. (15:09)

Only those nations, which are successful in inaugurating, in equipping, in manning, and requiring these two great services will be served in the future. (15:28)

I want to also push for the management and the men of this service, my appreciation, of the object lesson you have given us, in having in the air on a crane, at the very moment when the *South Dakota* was taken to the water, the first member of the keel of the cruiser *Santa Fe*. I can think of no way in which you men here, in tandem, could so completely, emphasize and epitomize, the most important thing about defense, and that is the important element of time. Before the great *South Dakota* was launched away, the keel of the *Santa Fe* was descending on those very same ways. (16:25)

Now then, particular you men who work in this plant, I wish I could bring home to you in the full, the fact that you in your service here and in the heart and soul and spirit which you put into it, are serving your country exactly and in precisely the same way that other men service it in uniform. (Applause) (16:55)

We must, if we are to play our part in the world of the future, establish and maintain the greatest sea power the world has ever seen and along with that predominant sea power, and auxiliary service, civil supplemented and make it all powerful everywhere. (17:25)

Unhappily we seem to be living in a time, when affairs are moved by force, when destinies are controlled by force and since we know now that at this time in the world, which for some time in the future we must live. Then we American's must have that force, which is first essential to protect us in our security and safety and finally to support those elements and those ideals in humanity and civilization that will bring finally peace to this war in the world. (18:04)

On your behalf I say, to the good ship *South Dakota*, God go with you, because after all, your mission, the mission for which we built you, is not war, but the prevention of war as God wills. Thank you. (18:27) (Applause)

[Lewis Fischer] Ladies and gentlemen, you have just heard an address by Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, at this double ceremony. The launching of the navy's newest battleship, the *U.S.S. South Dakota* and the almost simultaneous laying of the keel of the new cruiser, *Santa Fe*. (18:56)

The Washington High School Band of Sioux Falls, South Dakota which has come here for these ceremonies is just about to play the National Anthem. And of course, we are going to let you hear that just as soon as they begin. (19:16)

Here remarks are being made now from the speaker's stand about the four cruisers which are on these ways adjacent to us on our right and they are also talking about the new ways under construction on our left. Five new ones in fact, which will triple the capacity of this yard. The *South Dakota* is almost in mid-stream now she's been headed upstream and is moving very slowly, pushed by a number of tugs towards the pier where she will be moored for the remainder of the construction work which happens to be done [unknown] (19:57)

[Washington High School Band, "Star Spangled Banner"] (20:05 to 21:02)

And so ladies and gentlemen with the playing of the National Anthem the *U.S.S. South Dakota* floating majestically in midstream and the keel of the new cruiser *Santa Fe* in place on the ways, we conclude the ceremonies here at the New York Shipping Corporation yard this afternoon. This is Lewis Fischer speaking. (21:28)