

# Iowa explosion blamed on sailor

by Leo Scanlon

In the aftermath of the April 19 explosion aboard the battleship *U.S.S. Iowa*, the Navy's Judge Advocate General Manual Investigation into the incident has chosen to label a Navy chief petty officer a mass murderer, solely on the basis of hypotheses and psychological profiles which don't even merit the description "preponderance of evidence."

The fateful explosion occurred as the *Iowa* was being prepared for a tour of the militarily and politically sensitive Baltic Sea. Twelve days before the explosion, Jürgen Dragsdahl, a Danish journalist closely tied to anti-NATO, pro-terrorist circles in Europe, made an editorial appeal for the violent saboteurs of Greenpeace to take action against the *Iowa* (see *EIR*, April 21, 1989, "Greenpeace: Shock Troops of the New Dark Age"). Such "targeting" articles routinely appear in advance of attacks by Soviet *spetsnaz* commandos and indigenous terrorists against NATO facilities.

Despite this, the Navy report ignored the question of terrorism, utilizing instead a "victimology" profile prepared by FBI behavioral scientists, to conclude that Clayton Hartwig had constructed a detonator disguised as a part of the gun charge, smuggled it into the gun turret, inserted it among the powder bags being loaded into the open breech, and caused it to ignite 470 pounds of smokeless powder, instantaneously killing himself and 47 others.

## Psycho-babble 101

The extraordinary scenario presented in the Navy report depends exclusively on a curious document called an "equivocal death analysis" prepared by psychiatrists from the National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC) at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. The report concludes: "In summary, it is the opinion of [names deleted] that the victim was a troubled young man who had low self-esteem, and who coveted the power and authority that he felt he did not possess. The real and perceived rejections of significant others emotionally devastated him. This, combined with his inability to verbally express anger . . . virtually ensured some type of reaction. In this case, it was suicide. He did so in a place and manner designed to obtain the respect and recognition that he felt had been denied him."

The principal problem with this piece of jargon, as with the technical scenario constructed to support it, is that there is no actual evidence to support the conclusion.

## The technical investigation

Turret explosions are uncommon, but by no means unprecedented on battleships, and according to experts who have looked into the matter, there has never been a clear explanation of why one occurs. The case of the *Iowa* was typical: The devastation caused by the explosion left little evidence and no witnesses. Three weeks into the investigation, the technical team was prepared to hypothesize that a faulty powder bag ignited as a result of friction caused during the loading procedure. They proceeded to conduct some 20,000 tests at a cost of \$4 million, to try to reproduce the conditions which might have caused the explosion—and they failed.

Once the hypothesis of deliberate action was introduced, the technicians examined the molecular composition of the residue on the 2,000-pound projectile lodged in the barrel of the gun, and did discover some "foreign material." They set about creating model detonators designed to look like a piece of the charge which is inserted among the powder bags at the point where the ignition was believed to have originated. The detonators worked, proving that sabotage could have occurred. But they have been unable to match the residue created by their detonators with the material found on the projectile.

The official evaluation of these experiments is "inconclusive." Adm. Bud Edney, Vice Chief of Naval Operations, bluntly told the press: "We will never know with absolute certainty exactly what happened in Turret II."

Three weeks into the investigation, the Navy received a letter from the family of Clayton Hartwig, asking for assistance in resolving a dispute over an insurance policy the sailor had taken out before his death. This triggered a new track, a criminal investigation, on the premise that "financial fraud" may have been involved.

The investigating officer, Adm. Richard Milligan, said that Hartwig "looked like a clean-cut sailor; he was a clean-cut sailor. He was a bright sailor. He didn't smoke. He didn't drink and he didn't carouse on liberty. He did his job." The admiral reported that he was neither a homosexual, nor emotionally unstable, nor any of the other things the FBI leaked to NBC News during the investigation.

Independent psychiatrists hired by ABC News, examining his letters to friends and family, found "consistency of mood and tone, structural coherence, presence of humor, absence of any sense of hopelessness or victimization. He . . . expressed loyalty to the Navy, love of family and friends, and anticipation of his next assignment overseas." They concluded that "it would be unprecedented in the annals of medicine and criminal law for a person with Mr. Hartwig's psychiatric profile to have committed the crime."