World War II ship now a permanent landmark

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The USS Kidd of Baton Rouge is being considered for designation as a national historic landmark. The World War II Fletcher class destroyer is docked just off the Mississippi River levee downtown. An accompanying Nautical Historic Center is now under construction between the ship and Catfish Town. Under the supervision of the USS Naval War Memorial Commission, the $2.7 million museum is scheduled to open this fall.

The Kidd's unusual docking facility allows the ship to refloat each year during flood stage and settle back down to a dry dock cradle during normal river stages, according to Commission Chairman Dan Derbes.

The museum, as a memorial to the state's veterans, will feature ship models, numerous artifacts, a five-story observation tower, an auditorium and a gift shop. The exhibits will follow the theme "Man and Water, War and Peace."

A sunken plaza will be surrounded by four walls, inscribed with the names of all Louisiana servicemen killed or lost in wars since the Civil War. A covered courtyard is designed to house sculpture and will eventually contain a World War II aircraft suspended from the canopy.

The ship itself, built in 1943, is the most complete surface vessel the Navy has ever released for such a project. She earned eight battle stars during her service in World War II and the Korean War, surviving a direct hit from a Japanese suicide plane. Many Louisianans served aboard the Kidd, which was named after Rear Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, who was killed aboard the Battleship Arizona during the Pearl Harbor attack.

The 36-foot-long destroyer was decommissioned in 1964 and was headed for the scrapyard before Louisiana showed interest in her restoration and preservation about three years ago.

The Kidd has been faithfully restored to its original World War II configuration, with an emphasis on educational exhibits. She was sandblasted and repainted in original wartime camouflage colors, complete with the restoration of the Captain Kidd pirate ensignia on the smokestack.

Funds for the ship exhibit were derived by the commission from donations and a matching state appropriation.

The Kidd is open for tours every day from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and a tape-recorded guide is available. Admission prices are $3 for adults, $2 for members of groups (over 15), $1.50 for children between the ages of 6 and 14 and free for children under the age of 6. Group parties and overnight stays for scout troops and youth groups can be arranged.

Children can spend the night and have birthday parties aboard the USS Kidd.