

OLD

FAITHFUL



BUILT-IN GEYSER made the Birmingham unique among ships after Bougainville battle, when deck was cut to relieve pressure of water being shipped through hole in hull. Resulting geyser earned ship name of "Old Faithful."

EXPLOSION of the light carrier USS *Princeton* off the Philippines last October resulted in another ship's suffering one of the most devastating moments in naval warfare in the Pacific—with 229 officers and men meeting instant death and 420 injured.

These 649 casualties, more than three times the *Princeton's* own, were aboard the light cruiser USS *Birmingham* which for five hours had battled stubborn fires raging throughout the flattop, victim of a Jap divebomber.

In releasing the story of the tragedy last month the Navy Department announced that the *Birmingham*, veteran of numerous combat actions in both European and Pacific waters since her commissioning in January 1943, had returned to service after being repaired and modernized at the Mare Island Navy Yard.

Jap Divebomber Scores

Both vessels assisted in operations in support of General of the Army MacArthur's first landing in the Philippines. Earlier, raids had been made to knock out Japanese airpower; but by D+4, 24 October, the enemy recovered sufficiently to organize counterattacks directed in part at the 3d Fleet under command of Admiral William F. Halsey Jr., USN.

At 0940 a single Japanese plane which had concealed itself above the

overcast made a sudden divebomb run on the *Princeton* and dropped a bomb in the center of her flight deck. There was an explosion and the *Princeton* dropped out of formation to fight the fire that ensued. The cruiser USS *Rees*

and four destroyers, *Irwin*, *Morrison*, *Gatling* and *Cassin Young*, were ordered to stand by.

About 20 minutes later there were two violent internal explosions, possibly from bombs or gasoline, on the *Princeton*. She lost all motive power and was dead in the water, flames leaping from her deck to the overcast. The *Birmingham* then was ordered to reinforce the other ships at the scene and she undertook direction of the salvage operation.

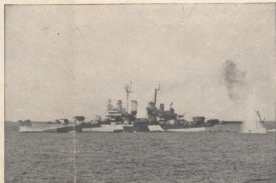
Meanwhile, the abandon ship order was given aboard the *Princeton* and hundreds of men soon were in the water being picked up by the lighter vessels present. Her captain and a party of men remained aboard the *Princeton* in an effort to help save her.

Capt. Thomas B. Inglis, USN, of Houghton Lake, Mich., was CO of the *Birmingham*. As SOP and skipper of the vessel best equipped to fight fires, he determined to use a daring maneuver. To obtain the most efficient use of the *Birmingham's* fire-fighting capacity he ordered her run close alongside the *Princeton* on the windward side. The *Reno* meantime circled at a distance to give protection against possible plane or submarine attack.

Birmingham Fights Flames

"The entire ship aft the bridge was in flames and heavy clouds of smoke," Capt. Inglis said. "Minor-caliber ammunition was continuously exploding like strings of firecrackers inside the *Princeton*. There were occasional heavier explosions. There was some danger in keeping the ships alongside, but I was somewhat reassured by the innocuous effects of the internal explosions and soon we made good progress against the flames."

The first half-hour of fire-fighting



NEAR MISS was scored on the Birmingham a year ago at Saipan. Except for two men injured and a 20-mm. gun damaged, the ship escaped unscathed.

Official U. S. Navy photographs

ALL HANDS