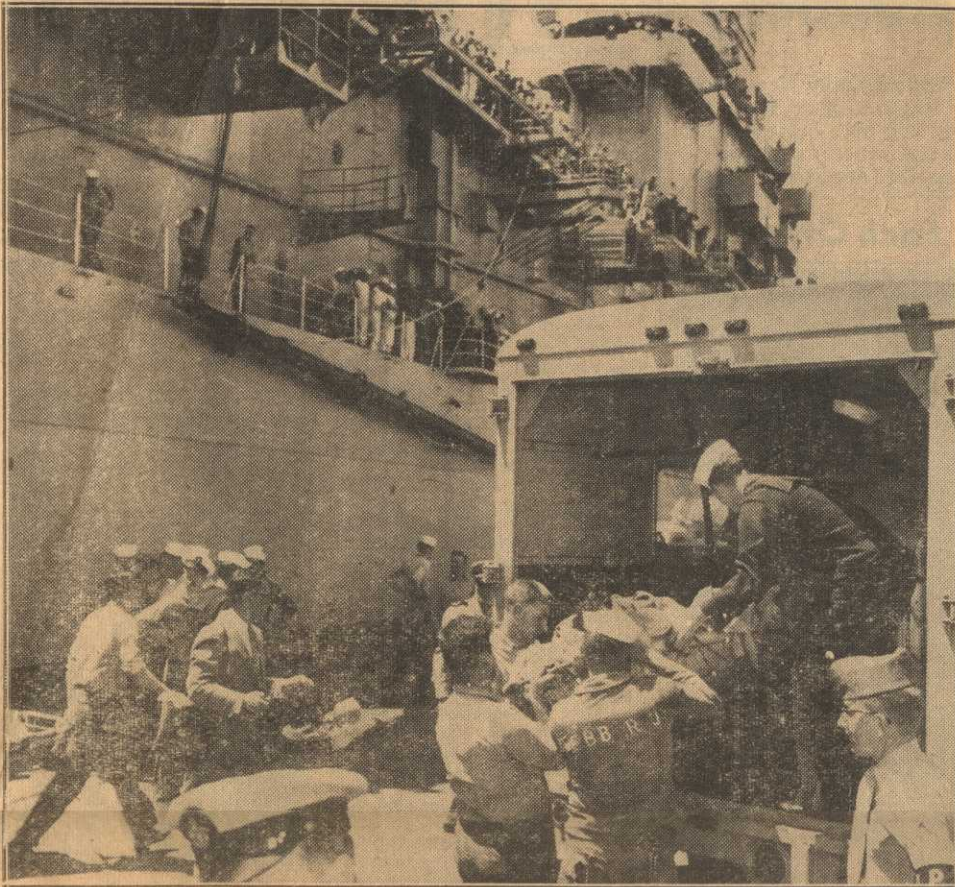


# Toll Hits 100 in Carrier Blast



(NEWS photo by George Mattson)  
While crew members line rails of Bennington, injured are taken from stricken ship and loaded into waiting ambulances at dockside.

## 201 Hurt in 4-Hour Bennington Fire; Ike Orders Inquiry

Quonset Point, R. I., May 26 (U.P.).—Explosions and fire that raged out of control for four hours turned the aircraft carrier Bennington into a floating hell today 75 miles from shore, killing at least 100 and injuring 201. Eighty-nine bodies have been recovered.

The explosion in the engine room came as the 33,100-ton warship rolled serenely through calm seas, carrying a 2,300-man crew on a training cruise from Norfolk, Va., to Newport, R. I.

Disaster struck moments after the last of 18 jet fighter planes zoomed from the deck at 6:20 A. M. Fire roared unchecked through the

meet the ship as it pitched, still smoking, into this port.

The explosion blew a steam turbine to bits. Officials said the blast apparently touched off highly flammable fluid from a catapult mechanism.

Most of the seamen in the engine room died instantly. Others were trapped as they slept or ate breakfast in the port side of the ship as fire fighters fought a vain battle to reach them.

"All I could see was fire and smoke," said Aviation Electrician's Mate 3/c Francis Toth of Phoenixville, Pa. "It looked like hell in there."

### Exceeded Only Once.

The Navy's only worse peacetime disaster occurred April 26, 1952, when 176 men died in a collision of the carrier Wasp and the destroyer Hobson.

Officers had difficulty identifying many of the charred victims.

More than 300 rescue workers, doctors, nurses, sailors and newsmen were on the dock when the ship reached port at 12:20 P. M. Stretcher cases were carried ashore by the score. A radio call for blood donors tied up traffic on all streets leading to the Navy hospital here.

It was only a little more than a year ago that the "Big Ben," as the Bennington is called, was rocked by an explosion at sea that killed 11 men.

Capt. William F. Raborn of the Bennington said the 18th plane had just cleared the deck when the car-

## Ike Extends His Sympathy

From THE NEWS Bureau

Washington, D. C., May 26.—President Eisenhower was informed today of the explosion aboard the aircraft carrier Bennington. He quickly issued a statement through Press Secretary James C. Hagerty extending his "personal and official sympathies to the officers and crew and to the families of those who have been injured or killed."

rrier shuddered from the explosion. "I realized that it was a catastrophe," he said, "so I launched the rest of the air group to clear the decks."

"I'm mighty proud of the way the crew acted. They displayed remarkable feats of heroism."

Members of the crew, rushing to the aid of their buddies, fought



(NEWS photo by Seymour Walby)  
Lt. John Wallam (right) rests at dockside after gruelling experience.

their way through billows of thick, black smoke to pull out injured men and bodies.

The dock was piled high with basket coffins to receive the victims. Survivors of the crew stood silently on deck, their faces smudged with smoke. Helicopters whirled overhead, evacuating the most seriously injured.

Ensign Robert Grant, of Brooklyn, his legs bleeding and his hair and eyebrows singed by flames, directed the evacuation of the injured.

"This was worse than war," he said, grimly.

### Collapsed Unconscious.

Grant told of collapsing, unconscious, while directing a human chain passing bodies up to the deck from the smoke-filled bowels of the warship.

"I don't know who carried me to safety," he said. "That was the way it was. We carried others until we dropped ourselves, then someone carried us out."

The captain said one of the two doctors aboard the ship was among those who died. The other, Clyde Norman, was credited with saving many lives.

"He did a heroic job," Capt. Raborn said.

Ensign L. D. Clapsaddle, Texar-

## SLUMS!

The third and last installment of 'Slums—New York's Battle of the Century' will appear in THE NEWS tomorrow.

kana, Tex., said the flight personnel fortunately had been called to duty a half hour before the fire broke out.

"That was the only thing that saved this from being much worse," he said. "If the men had risen from bed later, they would have been lined up waiting for breakfast just at the time of the blast."

### Warrant Officers Badly Hit.

Crew member Howard Rains, of Brooklyn, said the warrant officers' mess was the hardest hit.

"There were over 20 warrant officers in there, eating breakfast, and I don't think any of them got out alive," Rains said.

"The cooks got it just as bad. I know 25 of them were wiped out."

The facilities of the carrier's sick bay were hopelessly overtaken within minutes after the blast. Raborn said many were saved by prompt evacuation by helicopters.

The helicopter evacuation to the lawn of Newport Naval Hospital was supervised by Rear Adm. John M. (Peg Leg) Hoskins, who developed the technique in Korean combat.

The Bennington left Norfolk, Va., on Monday to rendezvous with a training task force off New England.

### Built in Brooklyn.

The huge carrier, of the Essex class, was built in the shipyard in Brooklyn and commissioned in 1944.

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(NEWS photo by Nick Sorrentino)  
Navy Secretary Thomas holds press conference after disaster.

interior of the mighty vessel, taking the second highest peacetime toll of lives in U. S. naval history.

### Secretary's Son Aboard.

President Eisenhower called for an immediate investigation. Navy Secretary Charles S. Thomas, who had a son aboard, flew here to

## Two News Planes Shuttle Photos of Navy Disaster

Two airplanes and a crack camera staff again paid off for this newspaper and its readers as the story of the Bennington disaster was covered pictorially at sea and ashore yesterday. The flash that the Bennington was in distress was received in THE NEWS office at 10:14 A. M. In slightly more than an hour, one NEWS plane was circling over the crippled ship at the entrance to Narragansett Bay, a cameraman making air views, and the other was landing three more photographers at Quonset Point, R. I., where the Bennington was to dock. While the photographers worked on the scene, both planes maintained a shuttle service between Quonset Point and New York, delivering the dramatic photos to THE NEWS throughout the afternoon.