

Virginians at War

USS *Birmingham*

Resource Packet

Contains: Glossary, Timeline, Images, Discussion Questions, Additional Resources

Program Description: Virginians at War: WWII - USS Birmingham features the sailors who served on the Birmingham, built in Newport News, VA. It traces the Birmingham's movements from Virginia to Africa to the Pacific, island-hopping to Japan. Veterans tell the stories of the chaos of naval battles, lost crewmen, and the dangers associated with traveling the Pacific all the way to the island of Okinawa.

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Length: 19:35

Streaming link: <https://vimeo.com/367253840>

Featured Speakers:

CPO Arthur "Art" M. Afdahl, Lynn Haven, FL
LTjg Melvin B. Bergstrom, Winfield, IA
CDR Walter "Buddy" Douglas, Fort Belvoir
S1/C Richard N. Goodman, Culpeper
CAPT Robert B. Greenwood, Annapolis, MD
S1/C William H. Hodges Sr., Biloxi, MS
LT John L. Marocchi, Sperryville
S1/C Clyde D. McCann Sr., Grove City, OH
SM2/C Burton C. Newby, Sandpoint, ID
Betty J. Perkins, Morning Sun, IA
MM1/C John P. Rees, Cheyenne, WY
S1/C Don H. Roach, Dalton, OH
LT CDR Edward Ryan, Chevy Chase, MD
CY Harlan E. Smith, Danville, IL
S2/C Norman N. VanWormer, Londi, CA
Y2/C Richard L. Wilson, Kansas City, MO
FC3/C Jerome A. Wirkus, Edgar, WI
LT CDR Edward C. Young, San Diego, CA



GLOSSARY

IMPORTANT TERMS

- **Afterdeck:** an open deck at the stern (back) of a ship, also called aft deck or a-deck
- **Bridge:** the platform from which the ship is commanded
- **Chaplain:** a religious representative assigned to a specific ship or military unit
- **Cleveland-class:** a class of small, light armored warships used during WWII
- **General Quarters:** an announcement for everyone onboard to get to their battle stations
- **Kamikaze:** a Japanese plane that crashes into a target deliberately, causing destruction of both the plane and the target
- **Quarterdeck:** a raised deck towards the stern of the ship
- **Taps:** the bugle call played during military funerals
- **Tokyo Rose:** a nickname used by Allies given to female, English-speaking, Japanese radio propaganda broadcasters
- **USS Princeton:** aircraft carrier that exploded during the Battle of Leyte Gulf in 1944, damaging the USS *Birmingham* and its crew
- **Whaleboat:** a small, open boat that is pointed at both ends, often used for amphibious warfare (sea to land)

Battles

- Pacific Raids: Tarawa and Wake Island
- Empress Augusta Bay
- The Marianas: Capture of Saipan and Guam
- Capture of Tinian
- Raids on Western Caroline Islands, Okinawa, Northern Luzon, Formosa
- Capture of Iwo Jima
- Okinawa Bunto Operation

IMPORTANT PLACES

- **Bougainville:** an island province in Papua New Guinea, part of the Solomon Islands, that was occupied by Japanese forces during WWII
- **Leyte Gulf:** gulf in the Philippines that hosted the largest naval battle in history during WWII
- **Newport News Shipbuilding:** a shipyard in Newport News, Virginia that builds U.S. Navy and commercial ships (1886 – current)
- **Okinawa:** Japanese island that saw the bloodiest battle of the Pacific during WWII
- **Sicily:** Italian island that was invaded by Allied forces during WWII

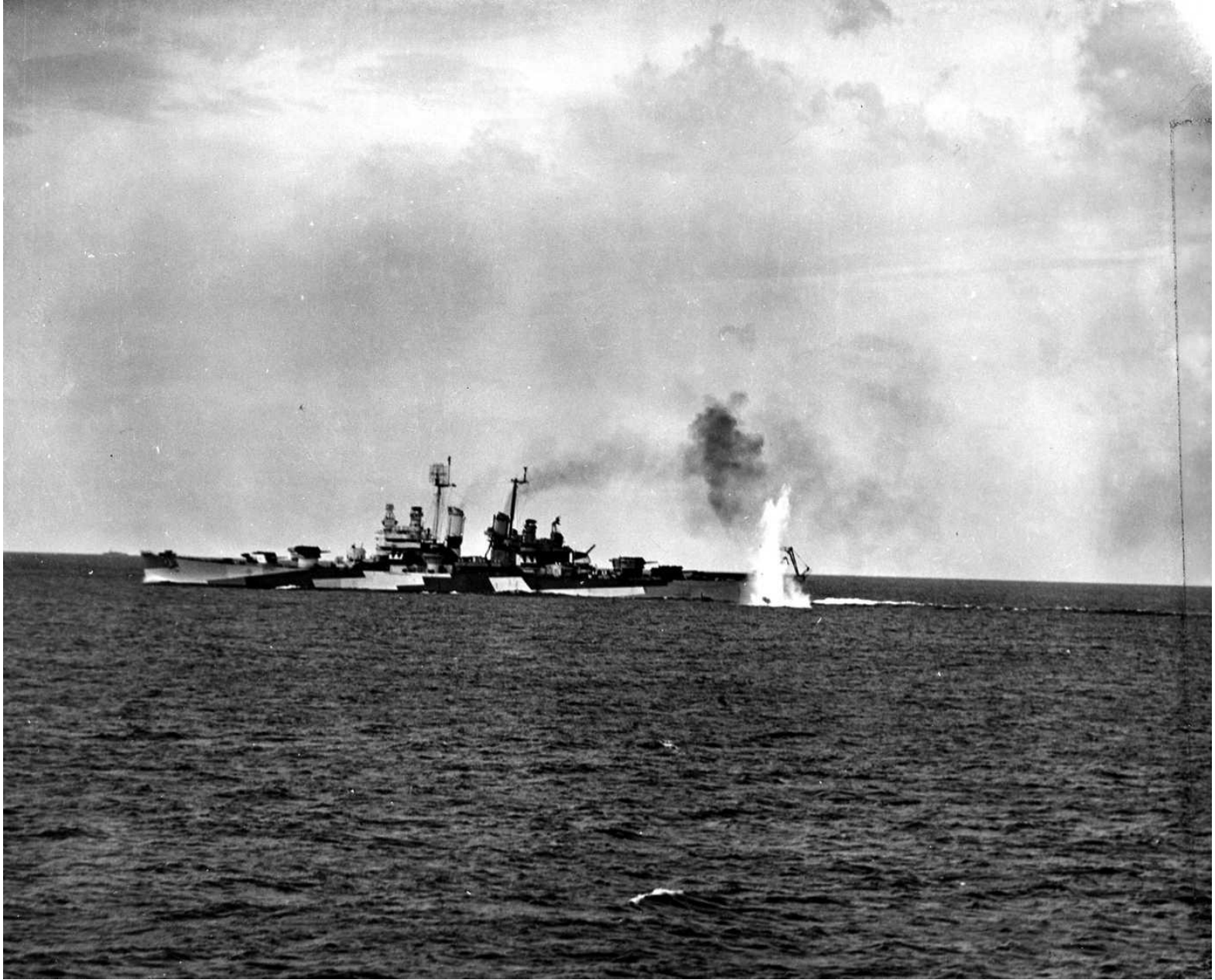
Awards

- **Battle Stars (x8):** award issued to warships during WWII and Korea for meritorious participation or damage during battle
- **Navy Unit Commendation:** award issued to a Navy or Marine Corps unit for outstanding heroism
- **Bronze Service Star:** a star added to a medal or ribbon to indicate additional awards – the first bronze service star indicates the second time receiving the award, and so on
- **Silver Service Star:** a star added to a medal or ribbon in place of five bronze stars



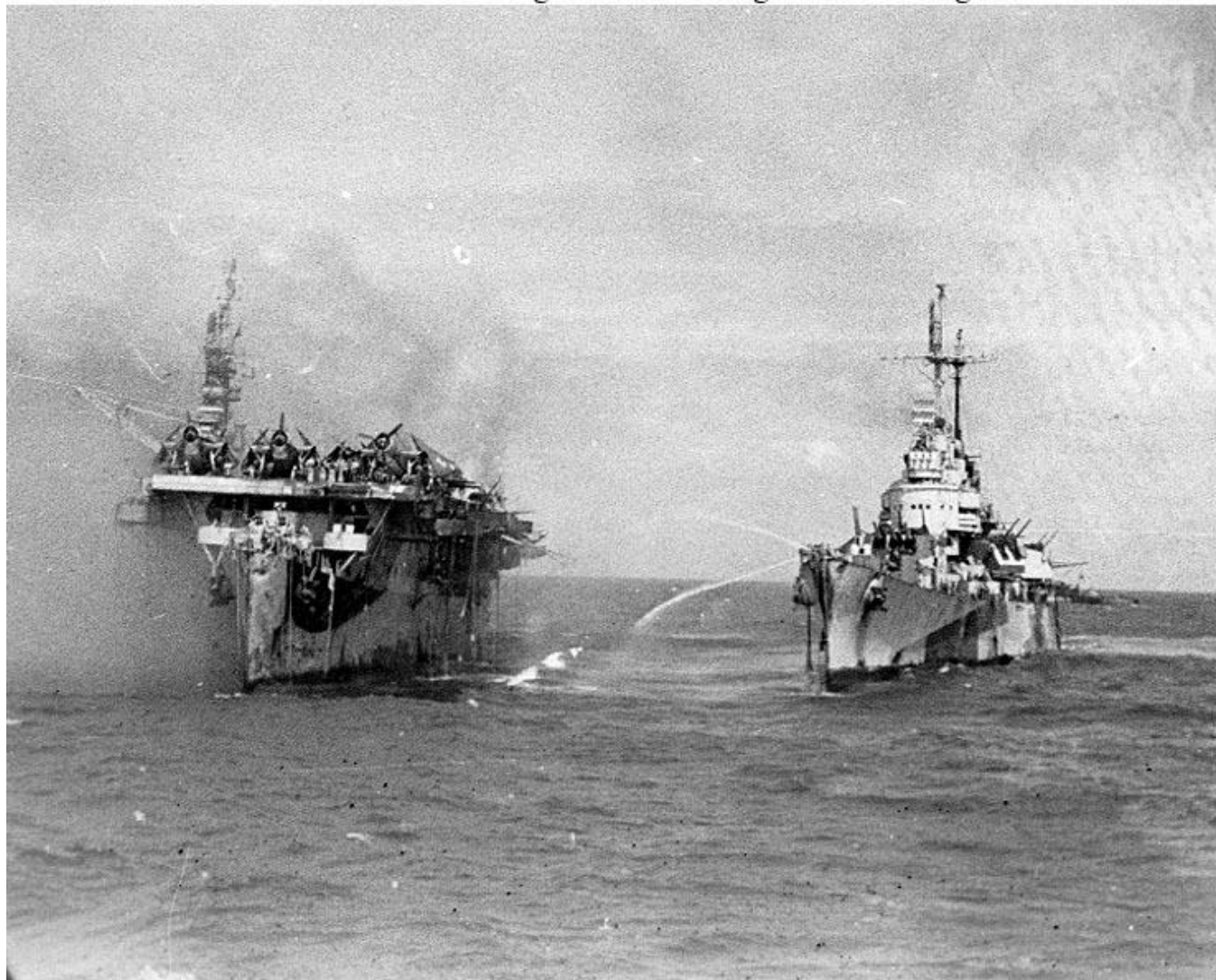
USS BIRMINGHAM TIMELINE

- **March 20, 1942:** USS *Birmingham* is launched
- **January 29, 1943:** U.S. Navy commissions the *Birmingham*, which is commanded by Captain John E. Wilkes
- **June, 1943:** USS *Birmingham* sails for the Mediterranean for Operation Husky
- **July 10, 1943:** *Birmingham* supports the Allied Landing at Sicily, has its first casualty
- **August, 1943:** Thomas B. Inglis takes over command of USS *Birmingham*
- **November, 1943:** Carrier raids on Tarawa and Wake Island
- **November 1-2, 1943:** *Birmingham* supports landings in Empress Augusta Bay, at Bougainville
- **November 8-9, 1943:** *Birmingham* takes damage in the form of two torpedoes, for the first time in its history, while covering troops at Bougainville
- **June 15 – July 9, 1944:** *Birmingham* supports the invasion of Saipan
- **July 21, 1944:** *Birmingham* supports the Allied landing on Guam
- **July 24 – August 1, 1944:** *Birmingham* supports the invasion of Tinian
- **September, 1944:** *Birmingham* assists in the assault on Peleliu, and carries out air strikes on Mindanao, Okinawa, and Formosa
- **October 24, 1944:**
 - **9:40 AM:** a Japanese kamikaze dives and hits the USS *Princeton*
 - **10:05 AM:** the USS *Princeton* suffers an internal explosion, leaving it dead in the water – *Birmingham* and three other ships come to help put out fires and rescue crew of the *Princeton*
 - **1:30 PM:** a Japanese air raid nears the *Princeton*, causing the *Birmingham* and other ships aiding in restoring the *Princeton* to leave the area
 - **3:00 PM:** *Birmingham* and other ships return to continue putting out fires on the *Princeton* after Japanese forces clear the area, but the *Princeton's* bomb magazine explodes, destroying the rear of the *Princeton* and sending hot shrapnel and debris at the *Birmingham* at high speeds – 239 men die and over 400 are wounded
- **March 4-5, 1945:** *Birmingham* is returned to service and supports the invasion of Iwo Jima
- **March 25 – May 5, 1945:** *Birmingham* supports the invasion of Okinawa
- **May 4, 1945:** *Birmingham* is hit by a kamikaze attack – the Japanese aircraft strikes through three decks and explodes in the sick bay, killing 45 and wounding 83
- **January 2, 1947:** *Birmingham* is decommissioned



(U.S. Navy)

Photo # 80-G-281660-2 USS Birmingham comes alongside the burning USS Princeton



(U.S. Navy)

Photo # 80-G-270357 USS Birmingham fighting fires on USS Princeton, 24 Oct. 1944



(U.S. Navy)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What role did the USS *Birmingham* play in the battles it participated in? What battles did it participate in?
2. What kind of damage could the *Birmingham* take and still operate? Why might it have been able to continue to operate?
3. On a ship like this, what were the major dangers faced by crew members?
4. What was the most dangerous thing faced by the *Birmingham* in the Japanese theater?
5. How do you feel about the recollections of the ship's former crew members?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about the experiences of Virginians in World War II, view *Virginians at War: WWII Submarines* and other films at vawarmemorial.org.

Looking to do more research? Check out the links below.

- <http://www.navsource.org/archives/04/062/04062.htm>
- <http://www.researcheratlarge.com/Ships/CL62/MightyB.html>
- <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1430>