

VICE ADMIRAL THOMAS H. BINFORD
U. S. NAVY, RETIRED

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

Thomas Howell Binford was born on August 25, 1896, in Durant, Mississippi, son of John Alexander and Elizabeth (Lowrance) Binford. He was graduated from Aberdeen, Mississippi, High School, attended Mississippi A. and M. (now State) College at Starkville, Mississippi and Marion Military Institute, Marion, Alabama, before entering the U. S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, from his native state in 1916. As a Midshipman he had World War I service in the USS VIRGINIA, operating with the Atlantic Fleet, during the summer of 1918. Graduated and commissioned Ensign with the Class of 1920 on June 7, 1919, he subsequently advanced in rank to that of Rear Admiral to date from March 1, 1948. On July 1, 1954 he was transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy and was advanced to the rank of Vice Admiral on the basis of combat awards.

Following graduation from the Naval Academy in 1919, he was assigned to the USS SEATTLE, and after serving as Assistant Navigator and Signal Officer of that cruiser for a year, he had duty from November 1920 until July 1928 in destroyers, serving successively in the WILLIAM JONES, MOODY, KIDDER, and MARCUS, with duty variously as Engineer, Navigator and Executive Officer. Completing nine years of sea duty, he served during the period of July 1928 to August 1930, as Officer in Charge of the Navy Recruiting Station, New Orleans, Louisiana. He had duty until May 1933 as Anti-Aircraft Control Officer of the USS TEXAS while that battleship operated with Battleship Division ONE, Battle Force, after which he returned to the United States for instruction at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island.

For a year, May 1934-May 1935, he served in the Enlisted Personnel Division of the Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. Returning to sea, he had duty first as Force Personnel Officer on the staff of Commander Scouting Force, USS INDIANAPOLIS, flagship, and from September 1935 as Assistant Fleet Personnel Officer on the staff of Commander Base Force, aboard the USS ARGONNE. He was transferred in August 1937 to duty as First Lieutenant and Damage Control Officer of the USS TUSCALOOSA, and a year later reported to Headquarters, Ninth Naval District, Great Lakes, Illinois, for a two year tour of duty as Aide to the Commandant.

In June 1940 he reported as Commanding Officer of the USS CLARK and subsequently was ordered to the Asiatic Fleet, assuming command in March 1941 of Destroyer Division 58, USS STEWART, flagship. In that command he participated in the Java Sea Campaign to the bitter end, which culminated in the Battle of the Java Sea, the first major surface battle of the war without aircraft. Division 58 operated with the Combined Fleet under overall command of Rear Admiral Doorman, Royal Dutch Navy. Vice Admiral (then Commander) Binford was the only officer to escape from Java with four ships. His flagship, the USS STEWART, turned over while in drydock for repairs, and since the local personnel (Dutch) were unable to repair her, had to be abandoned. (The STEWART was later raised, repaired, and

used by the Japanese Navy, and after the Japanese surrender, was again manned by U. S. Naval personnel for a short time before her "warrior's burial" at sea.)

For especially meritorious conduct while in command of Destroyer Division 58 during the early part of the war, Vice Admiral Binford was awarded the Navy Cross, the Silver Star Medal, and the Legion of Merit with Combat "V." The citations follow:

Navy Cross: "For especially meritorious conduct in action as Commander Destroyer Division Fifty-eight during the night of February 19-20, 1942, with greatly superior enemy Japanese Naval Forces in the Badoeng Strait. Despite the heavy opposing fire of the enemy, Commander Binford, following a well conceived plan, led his Division through a large strongly escorted convoy, sank numerous enemy ships, with torpedoes, damaged others with gunfire, and successfully retired his division without major damage to his ships and with only one casualty to his personnel."

Silver Star Medal: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity as Commander Destroyer Division Fifty-eight during the Battle of Java Sea, February 27, 1942, and in offensive daylight action against the Japanese Battle Line of heavy and light cruisers. Courageous and daring in the face of severe enemy fire, Captain (then Commander) Binford fought his ships boldly throughout the hazardous engagement, going in unsupported to deliver a successful torpedo attack against two hostile heavy cruisers and seven light cruisers, forcing the Japanese to break off the attack and thereby enabling the Allied ships to regain their battle formation..."

Legion of Merit: "For exceptionally meritorious conduct...as Commander Destroyer Division Fifty eight during the Java Sea Campaign, -December 20, 1941 to February 28, 1942. Working in close liaison with the Dutch Commander of the Allied Striking Force and capably assisting in the planning and execution of orders, (he) conducted the operation of his command boldly and with indomitable courage against the terrific fire power of formidable Japanese combatant forces...countered the blasting attacks of hostile air and surface units with inspiring leadership and expert tactical ability and despite overwhelming odds, contributed materially to the destruction of Japanese surface forces without loss to his command."

He was later awarded the Order of William, the highest award conferred upon any Naval officer by the Dutch Government. The decoration was presented in person by Queen Wilhelmina, in Washington, D. C., during her last visit to the United States.

Upon his return to the United States in May 1942, he became Assistant Director, Enlisted Personnel Division, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, serving as such for two years. On January 1, 1944 he was designated Director of that Division, and continued in that capacity until November of the same year. In his tour

of duty in the Bureau of Naval Personnel, he had charge of procurement, distribution, promotion, and discipline of all enlisted personnel in the Navy (augmented during that period by approximately two and one-quarter million enlisted men), and assisted in the setting up and administration of the enlisted WAVE program. For services in the assignment, he received a Letter of Commendation from the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel.

During the last year of the war, he had command of the USS MIAMI (CL 89). Under his command, the MIAMI, a cruiser of the Fast Carrier Task Force of the Third Fleet in the Pacific, participated in strikes on Tokyo, Chichi Jima, Kyushu, Okinawa, and the bombardment of Okino Daito Jima. For "exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services as Commanding Officer of the USS MIAMI during the period 1 February to 5 May 1945, while his ship was engaged in support of five strikes against the enemy," he was awarded a Gold Star in lieu of a second Legion of Merit with Combat "V."

He was also awarded a Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," for "heroic achievement as Commanding Officer of the USS MIAMI in action against enemy Japanese forces in the Pacific War Area on April 14, 1945..." The citation continues: "When his ship was ordered to proceed to the radar picket line and render assistance to the USS SIGSBEE which had been hit by a Japanese suicide plane and stopped dead in the water, (he) placed medical aid on board the stricken vessel and towed her to a safe location despite the necessity of repelling continued hostile air attacks..."

In January 1946 he reported to Headquarters, Fourteenth Naval District, Pearl Harbor, T. H., where he served for two years as Assistant Chief of Staff (Personnel) to the Commandant. In June 1948 he was designated Chief of Staff and Aide to the Commander, Hawaiian Sea Frontier and Commandant, Fourteenth Naval District, and served in that capacity until April 1949, when he became Commander Cruiser Division ONE. Under orders of September 6, 1950 he was relieved for duty as Commandant, Armed Forces Information School, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. He reported on December 14, 1950 and moved the School to Fort Slocum, New York in April 1951. In April 1954 he was assigned to the Third Naval District, with headquarters in New York, New York, where he remained until transferred to the Retired List of the U. S. Navy on July 1, 1954.

In addition to the Navy Cross, Silver Star Medal, Legion of Merit with Gold Star, Combat "V," Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V," and the Order of William, Vice Admiral Binford has the Victory Medal; Atlantic Fleet Clasp; the Second Nicaraguan Campaign Medal; American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp; American Campaign Medal; Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with four engagement stars; World War II Victory Medal; China Service Medal; Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia Clasp; National Defense Service Medal; and the Philippine Defense Ribbon with one star.

Vice Admiral Binford is a member of the Army and Navy Country Club, Washington, D. C., Masonic Organization; Newcomer Society in North America; Naval Order of The United States; Military Order of The World Wars (Life Member); and New York Yacht Club (N. Y. C.).

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