

Princeton At the University of Washington

By Lee Corbin

Such a title would normally imply a collegiate sporting event. However, in this case, Princeton was the *USS Princeton*, a veteran US Navy gunboat with 20 years of Naval service that had one final duty to perform.

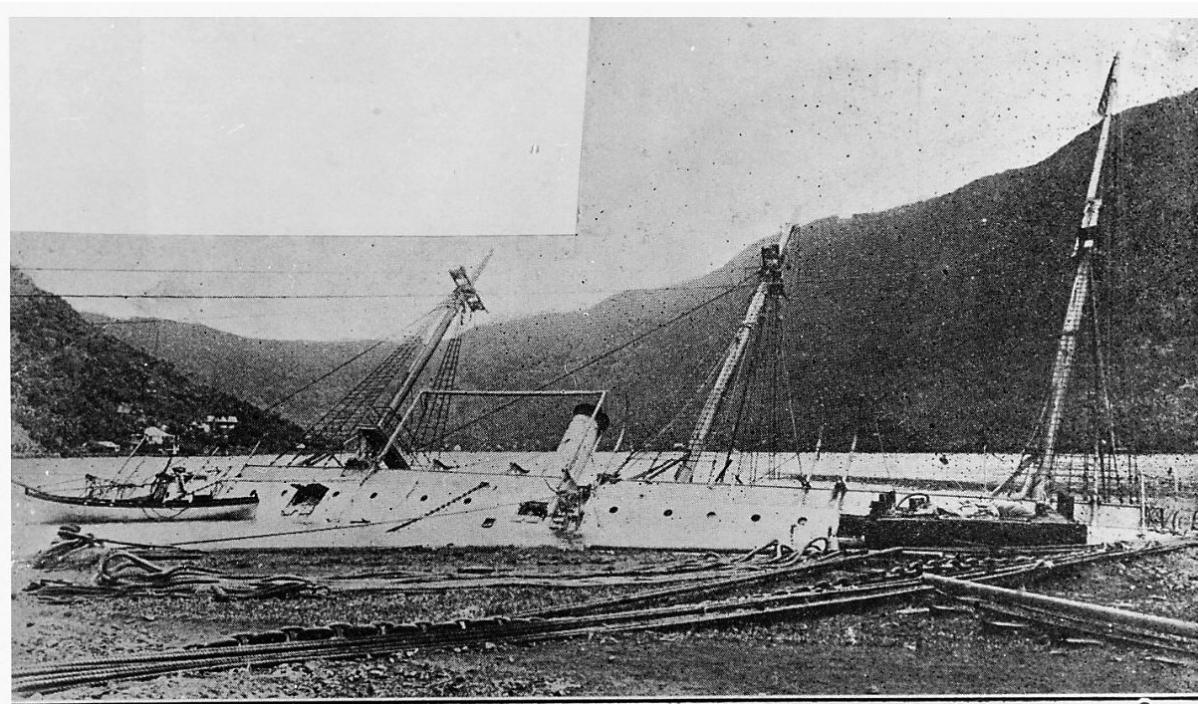
When the United States entered WWI in April, 1917, the University of Washington was converted into a military training camp in support of the war effort. The school's unique location, bordered by Lake Washington, Portage Bay, and the recently-opened Montlake Ship Canal, made it of particular interest to the Navy. With the canal and locks out to Puget Sound, the UW was one of the few university campuses in the country that could accommodate the largest warships. The first would be the *USS Princeton*.



USS Princeton, 1898

(Courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command)

Laid down in 1896, launched in 1897, and commissioned in 1898, *Princeton* would see service with the Asiatic Fleet during the Spanish-American War and the Boxer Rebellion. Her first decommissioning came in June of 1903 at Mare Island, California, where she would be tied up until 1905. In May of that year, she was recommissioned and assigned to the Pacific Squadron, with duty as far south as Panama and as far north as British Columbia. Once again, she was decommissioned, this time in Bremerton, Washington, in July, 1907.



USS Princeton, Run Aground at Tutuila, Samoa

(Photo Courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command)

Princeton received her third commissioning in November, 1909, and proceeded south to join the Nicaraguan Expeditionary Squadron, tasked with protecting American interests in the area and "show the flag" duties. After a return to Bremerton for repairs and alterations, *Princeton* sailed in late 1911 for duty as the station ship in Samoa.

On July 11, 1914, while on routine patrol, *Princeton* struck an uncharted rock which opened a hole in her port side. In danger of sinking, with her bow and forward gun deck awash, the crew quickly got underway and were able to make it back to the docks of the Naval station at Tutuila. *Princeton* promptly sank in fifteen feet of water and rolled over on her side. No one, except for her crew, thought *Princeton* could be salvaged. In what was hailed as an achievement of American engineering, *Princeton* rose from the depths on September 18th and floated once again. She had been submerged for nearly 70 days. With additional mechanical, electrical, and structural work, she appears to have made her first sailing sometime around mid-January of 1915. A devastating hurricane

hit the Samoan Islands on February 10, and she was pressed into relief service carrying food, water, and clothing to the islands.



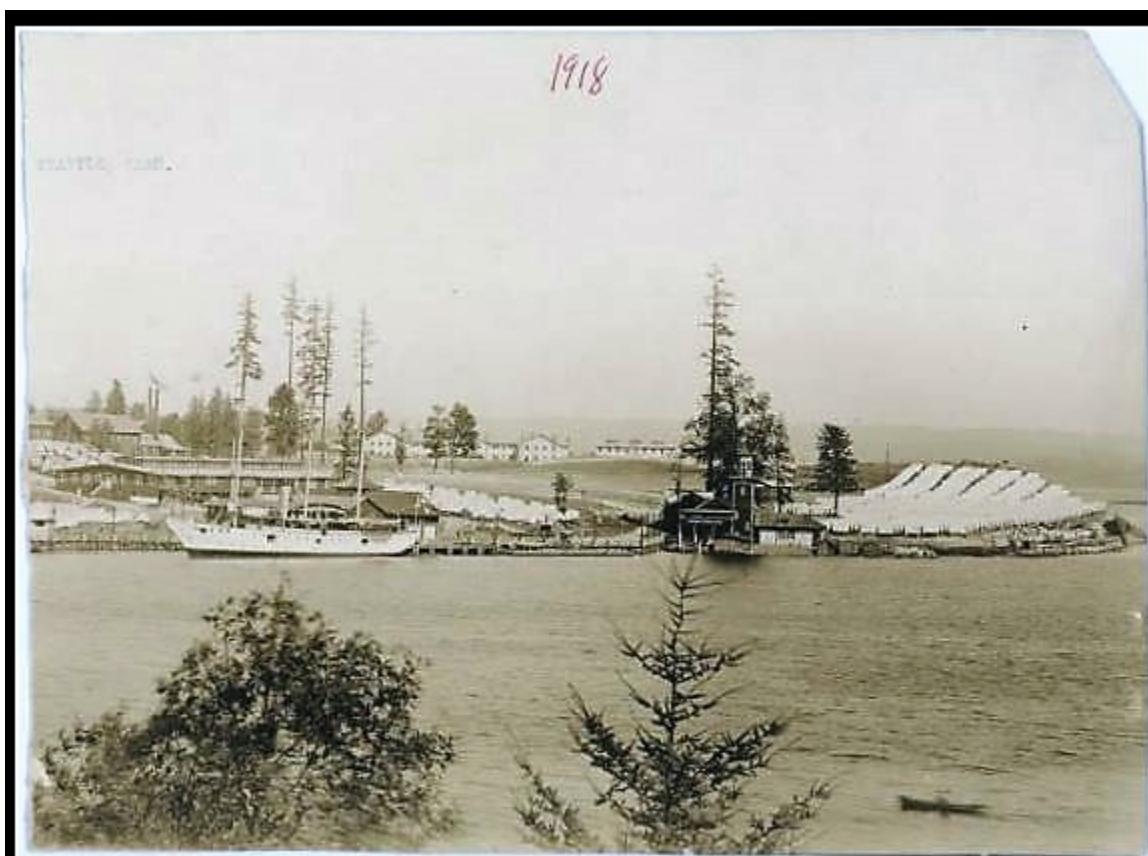
Another View of the Princeton

(Photo from "Salvage of the USS Princeton" by Ensign H. H. Miller)

But *Princeton* needed repairs that could only be obtained on the West Coast, and on September 1st she departed Tutuila in convoy with the *USS Nanshan* for the Puget Sound Navy Yard. With stops in Hawaii and San Francisco, she arrived in Bremerton on October 8th, that final leg under tow by the *USS Colorado*. In fact, evidence suggests she may have been under tow the entire trip from Samoa. Once back at Bremerton a Navy inspection board determined it would cost nearly \$100,000 to bring the ship back to full status, way more than it was worth. Repairs to the hull damage were made and *Princeton* was ordered on March 10th, 1916, to be decommissioned as soon as possible.

Since departing Samoa, newspapers had reported various fates for the old gunboat, from immediate scrapping to total overhaul and a return to the line. One newspaper wrote she would come out of drydock as a "radio tender" to service the Alaskan wireless stations. There was talk of selling her to Cuba. A planned nautical academy on the campus of the University of Washington needed a training ship. As late as May, 1917, Spokane's *Spokesman Review* was reporting the *Princeton* had been sold as a cargo ship.

The Navy had other plans. On August 27th, 1917, the *Seattle Daily Times* announced that, in all likelihood, the *USS Princeton* would be assigned to the recently-opened Naval Training Station on the University of Washington campus. Similar articles followed, always referring to ‘unofficial’ reports. On January 10, 1917, the first Navy warship in history entered the freshwaters of Lake Union and Portage Bay, docking at the university training camp. One-week later *Princeton* was commissioned for the final time, becoming a floating classroom. The camp now had the ideal equipment to train the recruits that would be manning the Navy’s ships. As a commissioned training ship, it included a small crew of experienced, ‘regular Navy’, sailors to act as instructors. These were senior petty officer quartermasters, boatswain’s mates, gunners, and carpenters. One particular instructor was Chief Boatswain’s Mate Michael Mallia, who held the distinction of having fired the Navy’s first shot of the Spanish-American War. Even Professor Everett O. Eastwood, head of the university’s mechanical engineering department, was involved in the training. Sixteen men from his engineering officer course overhauled the *Princeton*’s engines, with plans to get her up and running by the end of summer for a short cruise. By the war’s end, the *Princeton* looked like a new boat.



USS Princeton Docked at the Naval Training Station

(Photo Courtesy of University of Washington)

With the war over, the Navy decommissioned *Princeton* for the final time in April, 1919, struck her from the Navy list in June, and sold her in November. Once again there were hopes of establishing a state nautical school on the UW campus, with *Princeton* serving as a training ship, but those plans never materialized. In December of 1924, she was towed over to the east side of Lake Washington and tied up at the Houghton shipyard near present-day Kirkland. In 1927 she was seized for non-payment of moorage fees and sold to the Seattle salvage company Nieder & Marcus. *Princeton* was dismantled in 1928.



Training Aboard the USS Princeton

(Photo Courtesy of the Museum of History and Industry)

Anemone IV, SP-1290

But the Seattle Naval Training Station was a two-boat fleet.

About the same time the decision was being made to send *Princeton* to the University of Washington campus, wealthy lumberman, fisherman, and recently retired Washington State legislator Edgar Albert Sims purchased *Anemone IV*. Described as a "ketch-rigged auxiliary schooner", she was 120 feet in length with a nearly 19-foot beam. "*The Finest of Class in B. C. Waters*" is how the *Vancouver Daily World* described her on July 5th, 1917. Whether it was Sims' intention all along is unknown, but he quickly offered the free use of *Anemone IV* to Commander Miller Freeman, commanding officer of the Naval Training Station. The Navy took possession of *Anemone* on October 3, 1917. Although never commissioned she was designated as a "Section Patrol" boat, number 1290, and was used by the camp to train recruit sailors under actual cruising conditions. With the war over, she was placed out of service on March 3, 1919, and returned to E. A. Sims the next day. The following month, the April edition of *Pacific Motor Boat* published a full-page ad announcing *Anemone IV* was for sale.



Anemone IV, Docked at the University of Washington

(Photo Courtesy of the Naval History and Heritage Command)