

# **NEWS RELEASE**

**Public Affairs Office – USS BENNINGTON (CVS-20)**

**10 November 1967**

## **BENNINGTON RECOVERS APOLLO 4 SPACECRAFT**

**WITH THE USS BENNINGTON (CVS-20) AT SEA - - Technical**  
Ability and know how are the keys to success in almost any job and so it was with the recent Saturn/Apollo 4 spacecraft flight.

Preparations for the flight and recovery of the spacecraft module were well in progress many months before the actual flight.

For BENNINGTON preparations began late in August when her “skipper” Captain Richard Graffy was notified that BENNINGTON was to serve as the primary recovery ship for the shot.

Postponement after postponement of the shot, however, caused more than a month’s delay for the BENNINGTON. But finally on October 11 the word was “go” and BENNINGTON left California for Pearl Harbor and her ultimate destination approximately 275 miles east by northeast of Midway Island to retrieve the Apollo 4 Command Module.

The shot was delayed again and BENNINGTON remained in Hawaii for three more weeks. During that time Benn’s crew practiced, using a mock capsule provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to perfect its procedures for the pickup.

The job involved keeping a steady flow of information between the tracking and recovery aircraft, the ship, Houston and Hawaii. Simulated exercises were set-up to evaluate this flow and to perfect procedures of contact, approach and the actual pickup.

But in the midst of space age technology and sophisticated equipment the final pickup rested in the hands of BENNINGTON’s deck seamen.

Using block and tackles, muscle power and marlinspike seamanship they demonstrated an up to date use for centuries old techniques.

Finally after months of waiting and many hours of hard work and practice the day came for BENNINGTON to start on her mission. Leaving Pearl Harbor on November 6 for her station in the recovery area she waited until the morning of November 9 and the payoff for weeks for weeks of training.

The countdown went as scheduled and the Apollo 4 spacecraft lifted off at 1 AM local time. At the conclusion of the eight and three-quarter-hour flight time all hands were tensely waiting for splashdown. Suddenly, at about 9:37 AM two sonic booms were heard and a minute later the spacecraft was sighted dangling from its three parachutes.

Then BENNINGTON's job began. Helicopters from Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron Eight were deployed with swimmers aboard. The swimmers jumped into the water from the helicopters and after deflating the chutes, attached a floatation collar to the spacecraft. Other helicopters were searching up and down wind for any additional floating equipment from the spacecraft. Meanwhile one of Benn's motor whaleboats and crew was lowered into the water to assist with recovery operations and to pick up the swimmers following the lifting of the spacecraft onboard BENNINGTON by her heavy duty crane.

Apollo 4 was onboard by noon and BENNINGTON headed back to Hawaii to deliver her prize. From there BENNINGTON returned to her homeport of Long Beach, California and the capsule to the major spacecraft contractor, North American Rockwell Corporation in Downey, California.

Preliminary reports indicated that the Saturn V/Apollo 4 did all it was supposed to do. A space official declared all the goals of the mission, "have been accomplished".

Apollo 4 was another successful phase of the program to put American Astronauts on the moon.

NOTE: The above was the actual press release from the USS BENNINGTON. It was retyped by me because it was extremely difficult to read and it couldn't be scanned in its original shape.

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USS BENNINGTON HISTORIAN