

Of the 60 men-of-war which attempted to crush the 3rd and 7th Fleets, only 2 retired without damage. Thus ended the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea with the Jap surface Navy no longer a powerful fighting force.

The closing six months of the war should still be fresh in our memories since our proud lady the "Busy Bee" was right in the thick of these "knock-out" operations which brought the war to a close.

As you recall the BENNINGTON left Pearl Harbor in January '45 and joined the Fifth Fleet at Ulithi as part of the fast carrier task force - Task Force 58.

On 16 February 1945 carrier aircraft attacked Tokyo exactly one year after the first carrier strike on Truk and fulfilled the cherished desire of every officer and man in the Pacific Fleet. The two-day attack on Tokyo was made with complete tactical surprise. The enemy losses included 509 aircraft, 9 coastal vessels, one DD, two DE's, and a cargo ship as well as severe damage to factories and airfields, as against the loss of 49 carrier planes.

After three days of intensive bombardment by surface ships of the Fifth Fleet and bombing by Navy carrier planes our Marines landed on Iwo Jima on 19 February. Throughout the operation the Marines received close support of carrier aircraft and naval gunfire. Here the CVE BISHOP SEA was sunk the night of the 21st, and the SABLETON damaged.

Tokyo was again attacked by Admiral Mitscher's fast carrier task force on 25 February, although weather conditions were extremely adverse. At least 158 enemy planes were destroyed and 5 small vessels sunk. Our forces lost 9 fighter planes in combat.

On 1 March the carrier force struck airfields on Okinawa, Ie Shima and shipping off Miyako, inflicting more damage close to the Japs homeland.

In March, the capture of Iwo Jima reached its final stages and the Fifth Fleet again struck Japan.

On 18 and 19 March our carrier planes inflicted crippling damage against objectives in Kyushu and southern Honshu. Results: Damaged enemy ships; 2 CVE's, 2 CVE's, 2 CVE's, 1 CL, 1 CL, 4 DD's, 1 SS and 1 DE. Enemy planes destroyed - 156. Our losses: 5 planes shot down, FRANKLIN seriously damaged and our running mate the WESP damaged. This strike greatly reduced the Jap "Task Force".

From 23-31 March 1945, the fast carrier task force bombarded and bombed Okinawa and surrounding islands, in preparation for the Okinawa invasion on 1 April. Our Pacific fleet furnished the Marines and the Army close support throughout the occupation. It was here, as you plainly remember, that the Japs tried to keep us awake from dusk to dawn by attacking throughout the night.

While supporting this operation, our carrier planes assisted in the sinking of the Jap BB YAMATO, 2 CL's, and 3 DD's in the East China Sea. A British Task Group joined our fleet at this time to help increase our naval power even more.

From 12-14 May our Third Fleet carrier planes hit airfields and industrial targets on Kyushu. A total of 284 enemy planes were destroyed, industrial targets severely damaged and several small craft sunk or damaged. It was south of Kyushu in this operation that the BUNKER HILL was damaged.

On the 24th, while supporting the land forces on Okinawa, our carrier based planes again raided the Kyushu airfields. The Japs had hidden their planes, and as a result of this and bad weather conditions, only 20 enemy planes were destroyed. On 2 June Admiral Halsey's fast carrier force under Admiral McCain made a two-day strike on Kyushu airfields destroying 47 planes and damaging 25. Here the Japs started using their "hot pilots" in the new fighter plane - "Jack" - and shot down 16 of our planes. Another attack was