

Joseph L. Pires  
USS Bennington Historian  
694 Iredel Court  
Calabash, NC 28467

Mr. James Edward Weaver  
1438 Cascade Drive  
Grove City, Ohio 43123

Subject: Honorary, USS Bennington Shipmate

Dear Mr. Weaver,

On 26 May, 1954, the USS Bennington, while underway from Norfolk, Virginia to Quonset Point, Rhode Island, was conducting Air Operations with Air Task Group 181. At about 0615 hours, when approximately 75 miles south of Newport, Rhode Island, the ship experienced a series of violent explosions as a result of a casualty to the port catapult. The forward section of the ship below the Hanger Deck was immediately engulfed in flame, heat and dense smoke, resulting in the deaths of 103 and injuring an additional 211 officers and men. The rescue of the trapped personnel and the recovery of casualties were extremely difficult. In addition, the dangers of these operations were further increased by the fact that the cause of the explosions was not immediately known and the possibility existed for additional explosions. Also, with such devastation, safety lines could not be used on rescue party members because they continually became fouled in the debris. Despite these obstacles and with full realization of the dangers that were present and having full disregard for your own safety, you volunteered your services demonstrating tremendous courage. This fact was conclusively proven by your actions and your effectiveness in saving lives.

"For your heroism, courageous action and performance beyond the call of duty in connection with the disastrous explosions and fires which occurred on Bennington and in keeping with the highest traditions and standards set forth by the United States Navy, you have been made an Honorary Lifetime Member of the USS Bennington Association." On behalf of the Board of Directors and its Officers, Welcome Aboard, Jim.....

Fraternally yours,

Joseph L. Pires  
USS Bennington Historian