

U. S. S. BENNINGTON (CV 20)

IN REPLY  
REFER TO

The Bennington first got underway on 12 September 1944, when she cleared Pier K, Berth 19, Navy Yard, New York, and stood down East River and Upper Bay, making the trip to the Bayonne drydock. We were moored in US Drydock No. 7, Bayonne Annex, N.Y. Navy Yard until the 21st of September when we switched berths at the Yard. On 24 September, we got underway again for Gravesend Bay, then Hampton Roads, Lambert's Point Departing Grib, and NOB Norfolk and the Chesapeake Bay operations.

Air Group 82 officially reported aboard for duty on 29 September 1944. On 2 October we landed our first aircraft; plane No. 97 of WF 82, piloted by Commander G.L. Heap, Commander Air Group 82. On that day also we launched our first plane in a free-run take-off, and had our first catapult take-off.

The shakedown schedule prescribed by Commander Fleet Air Norfolk was completed without incident of delay. The seventeendays open t in the Gulf of Paris provided almost ideal operating conditions for night and day air operations, and gunnery exercises. The Air Group demonstrated a high degree of competence, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ and in general, performance compared most favorably with that reported by other carriers for the comparably shakedown phase. The cruise down the coast ~~ing~~ ~~xxxx~~ and into the Caribbean was filled with drills and exercises, the air operations being paramount. During these operations, the ship's company was treated to their first sight of "gangbunge" - group attacks. On 19 October we lost our first pilot when Ensign T.J. Connors, A-V(N), USNR, in a Hellcat, crashed astern of the ship after a strafing run on a towed sled. Intensive search for his body proved unsuccessful.