

miles off Kyushu on the Japanese mainland. This time the Japs had snoooped our approach during the night. General Quarters was sounded ten minutes ahead of schedule, when GIC reported the approach of the first bogies. By the time all guns were manned and ready, Jap flares, on parachutes, were dropping through the solid overcast. The day's first strike, of 16 Corsairs, slated to go against Kanoya East Airfield, was warming up engines when Bannington's gunners got their first "kill." A two-engined Betty flew in low over the screen. Several ships opened with five-inch guns, the guns of a cruiser starting a small spurt of flame from one of the enemy plane's engines. The Jap, hit and losing altitude, turned into wind our starboard quarter in an obvious attempt to crash-dive our deck. All starboard machine guns which could train opened up with a murderous fire, and the Betty hit the sea 200 yards from our starboard beam in a great ball of orange flame.

This day, and again the next day farther north off the Kure Naval Base, the prime objective was the Japanese Air Force - in the air, on the ground, wherever it could be found. Fifty-seven enemy planes were definitely shot down or were destroyed by strafing on the 18th and 19th of March, while another 35 were counted as damaged by Air Group 82. Extensive ruin was spread among several Jap Air Centers. Off Kure, to damage a Yamato class battleship, the Bannington's bombers and fighters went through the Heaviest anti-aircraft flak the Jap fleet and shore batteries could throw up. On the 18th, bogies were around the Task Force all morning. Many were splashed; a total of 8 kills by other ships were reported within the Task Group. Our neighbor, the Hornet, had several extremely close calls from suiciders and dive-bombers. The 19th of March will always be remembered as the day the USS Franklin burned. We saw her smoke just over the horizon shortly after sunrise. Later, when several of the last Sb2C