a tribute to the all-handedness of Montague's landing facilities. A few days later the officers and men of Air Group 82 were detached from the ship to return to the states and a well-earned rest. They had done a swell job. During its four and one-half months of combat duty, the Group had shot down 167 planes, destroyed 220 on the ground, and damaged an additional 150-200. A price had been paid for the chunk they tore out of the Jap Air Force. Forty pilots, 25% of the squadron complement, and thirteen aircrewmen were listed as lost or missing. No SB2C or TBM was hit by Jap fighters, a fact which is eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of our fighter cover.

On 30 June 1945, pursuant to his orders from BuPers, Captain J.B. Sykes departed ship to take up his new duties at the Naval Ordnance Test Station, Inyokern, California. Command of the Bennington was taken by his successor, Captain B.L. Braun.

Early on the morning of 1 July we got underway again, leaving San Pedro Bay, Leyte, with our new Air Group One aboard, and steaming in company with the other carriers Hancock and Lexington. Our old friends the Belleau Wood and San Jacinto were still with us too, and the BB South Dakota joined our Group's Massachusetts and Indiana. Our cruisers included the Atlanta, Topeka, Dayton, Oklahoma City, Amsterdam and San Juan, and tese were augmented by 19 DDs. This time the Bennington had the Flag, with ComCarDiv THREE, Rear Admiral T.L. Sprague, in tactical command. We were headed again for the Tokyo area, with Nip airfields as our main objective. The days enroute to our strike area were filled with gunnery exercises and training consisting of simulated strikes and maintenance of an interception of simulated Kamikaze attacks by the Air Group, and practice in sighting and avoiding Kamikaze attacks by the ship. On 10 July we were operating in an area approximately 120 miles southeast of the southern tip of Honshu. Strikes and sweeps made against

- 16 -