

Bennington Enters World War II In Final Stages Of Pacific Campaign

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The ship started her shake-down cruise on October 16, bound for the Gulf of Paria, off the coast of Venezuela. The Bennington was back at Norfolk on November 14, getting its final working-over prior to shoving off for the war zone.

The transit of the Panama Canal was completed on December 22. After a brief stop in San Diego, the ship steamed westward on New Year's Day, 1945 in company with two destroyers. Seven days later, she reached Hawaii.

First Action

After three weeks in Pearl Harbor, the ship left for the Far East. The first taste of war came to the Bennington as the ship passed close to Jap-held Truk. Enemy planes were reported taking off from the island and the first general quarters was sounded. The attack never materialized however, and the ship continued unmolested into the anchorage at Ulithi where the huge armada of ships amazed even the old-timers.

Early in February the Bennington left Ulithi as a part of Task Force 58, bound for Tokyo and the first carrier offensive against the Japanese homeland. Strike objectives were the destruction of Jap planes, aircraft installations and shipping. Enemy planes were in the air sporadically but the combination of bad weather and surprise along with early neutralization of the airfields prevented any serious enemy air opposition. The flak was heavy over Tokyo and Yokosuka, however, and the Bennington lost her first plane.

Supports Invasion

On February 19, the air group's planes flew continuous beach-head support strikes over Iwo Jima, where invasion landings were already in progress. Constant air cover gave effective protection from Jap planes to the Marines and, in addition, served as aerial artillery in blasting enemy strong-points.

Kamakaze

The next big strike to materialize took place at Okinawa on the first of March. Following this were 10 days at anchor at Ulithi. It was while anchored here that a kamakaze plane slipped in one night, damaging the U.S.S. Randolph while she was at anchor a short distance away from the Bennington.

The ship headed north again and the 18th of March found her 80 miles off Kyushu on the Japanese homeland. The prime objective of this strike was the Japanese Air Force—in the air or on the ground. Fifty-seven enemy planes were definitely shot down or destroyed by strafing on March 18th and 19th, while another 35 were counted as damaged by Bennington planes. Also damaged off Kure was a Yamato class battleship.

Blasts Convoy

On March 23rd, the Bennington joined in an intensive, week-long assault on Okinawa in preparation for the invasion of that island fortress gateway to Japan. High mark of the week was the spotting of a Jap convoy in the East China Sea, including three heavily-loaded cargo ships escorted by a pair of destroyers. Bennington planes joined air groups from the other carriers of Task Force 58.1 in sinking the entire convoy.

Easter Day, 1945 came on April first, the day of the invasion of Okinawa. The air group's planes were in the air as the first waves of Marines stormed the beach, beginning an air support operation that was to continue for 70 days. During this period, stepped-up kamikaze raids provided several "field-days" for Bennington fighter pilots. On April 6th, 31 Nips were splashed with no loses. A week later, the squadron shot down 34 planes with only one Bennington pilot downed. He was later picked up by a rescue plane.

Over 300 carrier planes went into action against a Japanese task force off the tip of Kyushu on April 7th. The main target was the huge, modern battleship, Yamato. It was sunk in one of the fiercest air attacks in naval history.

Typhoon Strikes

The most serious damage the Bennington was to suffer in the war did not come at the hands of the Japanese. A typhoon with winds in excess of 90 knots overtook the ship at daybreak of June 5th. The powerful seas, with waves estimated at 40 to 50 feet from trough to crest, flooded the forecastle deck and wrecked the forward passageways and living quarters. The forward 25-foot section of the flight deck was buckled, putting both catapults out of commission.

The ship put into San Pedro Bay on June 11th and anchored for 20 days while repairs were made. Air Group 82 was detached for return to the States.

New Skipper

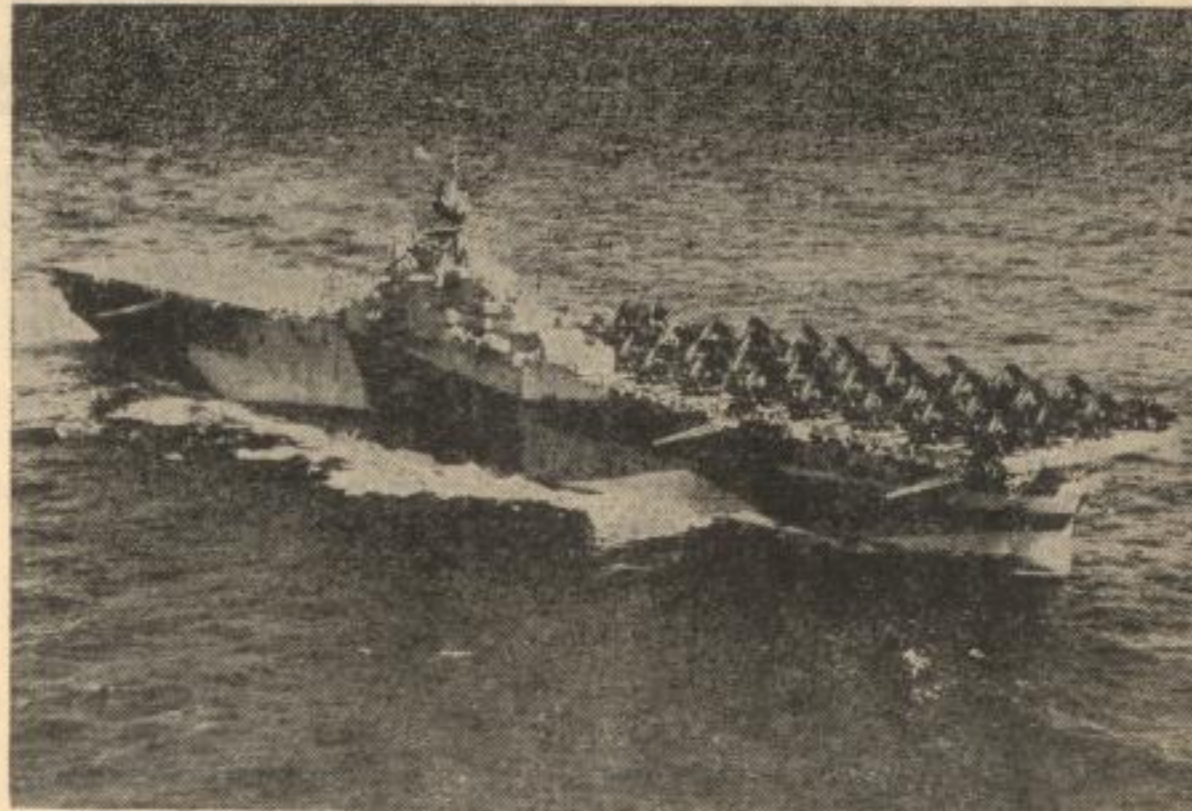
On June 30, 1945 Captain Sykes was relieved of the Bennington's command by Captain B. L. Brann.

The Bennington returned to action of the first of July with her new Air Group One aboard. For the next six weeks, operations were conducted against the Japanese homeland. On the 9th and 10th of August, the planes unleashed an attack on the airfields and shipping in Northern Honshu.

Near the war's conclusion, events happened at an accelerated pace. The U.S.S.R. entered the war against Japan and the world was soon amazed at the tremendous blasts of the atomic bomb.

News of the war's end came to the Bennington on August 15th. A first strike of planes damaged airfields at the Hyakurigahara Airfield and a second strike of planes was on its way to the target. A "Judy" was reported shot down over another task group and the momentous news of the end of

CVA-20 In "War-Paint"



On the prowl in Pacific waters during World War II, the Bennington edges close to the Japanese homeland. Carrier Air Group 82's planes, flying from the Bennington's deck, took part in the first carrier strikes against Tokyo as a part of Task Force 58.

the war seemed in doubt until Admiral Halsey broadcast the news of the surrender of all Japanese forces.

The Bennington was represented at the scene of the surrender as her planes joined hundreds of others when they roared overhead in a grand gesture of victory.

Returns Home

The ship remained in the forward area until she returned to Pearl Harbor on October 29, 1945. She returned to the United States November 7, 1945, putting in at San Francisco.

One more trip to Pearl Harbor to transport planes and personnel was made, the ship returning to San Francisco on March 30, 1946. She crossed the Panama Canal in mid-April and arrived at Norfolk on April 22nd. A short run to Yorktown to unload ammunition was the last for the Bennington before she was inactivated at Norfolk on November 8, 1946.

The Bennington was "moth-balled" in the Atlantic Reserve Fleet at Norfolk until she returned to the Brooklyn Navy Yard on October 30, 1950 for conversion.

Bomb Release Fails

The luck of the Bennington was emphasized on the morning of March 27, 1945. Just after dawn radar detected several Japanese planes coming down from the north, high. At 0640 one had been tracked in to 15 miles, and was reported in the vicinity of the formation. Four minutes later, with no warning, a "Judy" broke out of a low cloud in a shallow dive, at a range of less than 2,000 yards. The few 20 mm. guns which could train on him in time opened fire, but failed to stop him. The Jap then proceeded to complete a perfect run the entire length of the plane-packed flight deck, at a height of 300 feet, and pulled out over the stern. No bombs. No strafing. No nothing! He was later shot down six miles away by carrier air patrol planes. The only logical assumption was that honorable Nipponese bomb-release became stuck.

Perfect Record

Lieutenant R. F. Klingerman, night fighter pilot of VF-82, hung up a most outstanding record on April 13, 1945 while flying from the Bennington. Lt. Klingerman was vectored out after four different Jap snoop-er planes. He located each of them, trailed, attacked and shot down all four!

From _____



To _____

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