

into the ship at the water line. The same day, the bow of the BENNINGTON was struck a sneak blow by a whale. He was impaled on our bow for several hours, until the ship had a chance to back down and free the carcass.

On 15 May the Executive Officer, Commander E. J. Drew, was promoted to the rank of Captain, and was detached from the ship, leaving on the first leg of his journey by breeches-buoy. Commander E. E. Colestock, former Air Officer, became the ship's new Executive Officer, and Commander C. D. Hoover became the new Air Officer.

On 5 June we had an experience the memory of which will long live with us. A tussle with a Typhoon. We had run away from the storm for the preceding 24 hours, but with no avail. The typhoon overtook us at daybreak, and the center of the storm passed in our vicinity at between 0700 and 0800. It was like being in on the end of the world. The winds were terrific, at times reaching 90 knots, which was as high as our instruments would register. The waves were mountainous, literally reaching 40 to 50 feet in height from trough to crest. It was almost a blackout; we could see only a few hundred yards. The big "B" moaned and groaned and sometimes it felt as though the ship was tearing apart. Until noon the storm raged, then began to subside. Gradually the sea and the ship got back to normal. When we had a chance to investigate, we found that approximately 35 feet of our flight deck had buckled and hung over the bow like a squashed pancake, and that both of our catapults were damaged. Despite the damage, and thanks to our efficient damage control boys, we were able to launch planes from our flight deck the next day. We immediately started south to Leyte however, arriving there on 11 June, and anchored off Tacloban in Leyte Gulf. Work immediately commenced on our collapsed flight deck, and other storm damage.

A few days later, the officers and men of Air Group 82 were detached for return to the States, and a well-earned rest. They had done a swell job. During their 4½ months aboard, the Group shot down about 167 Jap planes, destroyed approximately 220 on the ground, and damaged an additional 150-200.

On 30 June, Captain Sykes was detached from the ship to take up his new duties at the Naval Ordnance Test Station at Inyokern, California, and Captain B. L. Braun, our new skipper, took over command of the BENNINGTON.

On 1 July we got underway again, leaving San Pedro Bay early in the morning, having aboard with us our new Air Group One. We steamed in company with the USS HANCOCK, USS LEXINGTON, and our old friends the USS BELLEAU WOOD, and USS SAN JACINTO. To the battleships INDIANA and MASSACHUSETTS of our group were added the mighty USS SOUTH DAKOTA. Our cruisers included the ATLANTA, TOPEKA, DAYTON, OKLAHOMA CITY, AMSTERDAM and SAN JUAN. Nineteen destroyers completed the new Task Group 38.1, with ComCarDiv 3, Rear Admiral T. L. Sprague aboard the BENNINGTON, in tactical command. We were off again for the Tokyo area, this time to concentrate on Nip airfields and Nip planes in the air and on the ground — anywhere we could find them.

July 10 found us operating in an area approximately 120 miles southeast of the eastern tip of Honshu. BENNINGTON planes were estimated to have damaged or destroyed 98 airplanes at the airfields visited. Bogeys were reported during the afternoon and two were shot down not far from the ship. The next day we retired from the area and headed toward the fueling rendezvous. In the late afternoon we changed our course for Hokkaido and prepared to launch offensives there. Bad weather, however, forced cancellation of the scheduled strikes. During the next few days many strikes were made on enemy facilities in and around the Kamaishi area. The 14th of July is especially notable for us because of our participation in the naval bombardment of Kamaishi. Our planes provided air patrol for the bombarding units and maintained spotting planes over the target to help direct gun fire. This was the first naval bombardment of the Jap homeland. On the 17th of July we operated east of the Mito area of Honshu, and despite bad weather, the enemy felt the sting of our planes' guns and bombs. On the 18th, our planes joined in the big offensive against Jap ships at the Yokosuka naval base. Among Jap heavy units damaged were the battleship NAGATO, which was left in flames, and several destroyers. During these attacks, the enemy AA fire was intense and accurate.

On the 24 and 25th of July we were approximately 100 miles south of the eastern tip of Honshu again, conducting strikes against airfields, factories, railroad yards