

Dear.....

It can now be told that we of the USS BENNINGTON participated in the first carrier strikes against Tokyo, and then later, strikes against Iwo Jima, and finally, giving air coverage while the invasion of Iwo Jima was in progress. You have undoubtedly read all about it in the newspapers, for we out here, have received several clippings about our escapades.

And so, from the beginning. Over the ship's loudspeaker system, the day after our departure from the anchorage, came the word for all hands to assemble on the Flight Deck to listen to a few words from our Captain. After forming by divisions, Capt. J.W. Spivey, USN, stepped up to the microphone on the bridge and began his talk. "Give me your attention. This is the Captain speaking. Stand at ease or sit down if you like. We shall need all the rest we can get. Men, this is it. This is the war. This is what our ship was built for, what we have trained for, and what we are ready for. The carrier air operations that we are going into are what our Navy can do better than anyone else in the world; they are also what the Japanese fear most. The results of the strikes we are going in on now can easily be decisive in the war; not conclusive, for there will be a lot of sopping-up to be done, but they can make certain the end of formal war by Japan as an Empire. The Japs will come in heads down, slugging. We can out-think them; we can out-punch them; we must out-step them. Their tactics will be those of desperation, the wanton reckless, individual attacks that a weaker enemy has to resort to. We can afford the multiplied power of planned mass attacks; they can't. When the word is passed, move fast. There are no exceptions. General Quarters may be sounded at any time of day or night. When it is, it is business. Keep it in mind and be ready. Do as much of what is to be done as early as you can. Carry out as much as possible of each plan as early as possible. Don't leave to be done in the morning or when the order to launch is received, things that can be done earlier. Something else may be required then, and there won't be time. Speed up our foot-work. This may require some back-tracking, but it is better to have been ready at unnecessary times than not to be ready for the pay-off. All right; the Admiral takes us in; I'll get us out. But I shall need the instant, constant, and complete help of every man on board. You know your jobs. Do them smartly, quietly, and fast through hell and high water and we'll put our ship in the list of competent, battle-tested veterans. On your toes men; let's go; TOKYO."

Now that we knew just where we were headed all hands went to work seriously on the big job that lay ahead. The gun crews got all their equipment in ship-shape order for that day when many enemy planes would pour down out of the sky overhead, and these guns would be our only means of protection. The air crews worked day and night to see that every plane aboard was in A-1 flying condition - we could not afford to have a dud on the flight deck when the order to launch was passed. Ordnancemen in the magazines spent hour upon hour belting long chains of ammunition for the guns on the planes, prepared the bombs, rockets and other explosives for the time when they would be brought up and attached to the planes - the time when each split second would count; when each minute would seem like an hour. And the Engine crews were sure that all was in readiness to produce the maximum amount of efficiency that our great machinery plant was capable of producing. In fact the entire ship was comparable to a huge industrial city busy at work.

We were now on our way on a truly great mission, cruising along in the company of the largest task force ever assembled. We steamed North for a few days with each and every person contemplating all the horrible things that were in store for us. The weather got colder and colder as we progressed Northward. The cooling was low and the sky rather dark, which only tended to make everything seem more weird and gris than it actually was. Inasmuch as about 90% of the crew had never seen the type of action we expected to see, tension was very high. It is very hard to describe our feelings as we neared the Jap mainland the day before hostilities were to begin - that large number of ships silently creeping through cloud shrouded water, the uncertainty of whether or not we would return, for after all, we knew that this was the most daring mission to date, and none of us had any idea of what to expect; and we all knew that the Japs could use land-based planes to attack us, and that our carrier-based planes would hardly be a match for them. Then the afternoon before the attack so felt sure that they knew we were on the way. That night everyone slept with his clothes on expecting to be called to battle stations at any minute - but nothing happened.

The next morning we got up at reveille, ate a good breakfast, and went to our General Quarters Stations to await the first attack. Our planes took off early for