

U. S. S. BENNINGTON (CV-20)

BEN-TRAV-LOG NO. 4

Dear

From the last letter you no doubt realized that they didn't put the Bennington on the Second Team. They put us on the first team and . . .

Well, to me it was like going into a football game as a substitute, reporting to the Referee, looking around to see where everybody was and before I could see anyone or anything, I was all mixed up in the next play. For before we knew it the Big "B" was in there blocking, charging, cutting in, slipping by the opponent, cutting out again, playing a great big Left End practically all by herself. Pacific War was new to us but we gave no odds and asked for none. A long time we were in there battling, fighting for all we were worth, never, once calling 'time out' or needing the 'water boy.'

Tokyo was the first play. Then came Chichi Jima, Haha Jima, Iwo, and Tokyo again. We ran the ends, hit the middle of the line, screened and were screened, as our Airmen swept off the deck with the timing and precision of a Rockne coached All-American Wonder Team. If the play called for Rockets every man lent his help, from the 'Black-gang' in the engine room to the messengers on the Bridge. If the play called for bombs every man shared, helping the Ordnance Department tie on the load for the pilots to carry away. Nothing succeeds like success and the Bennington received one "WELL DONE" after another from the Admiral. WELL DONE'S weren't what we were after. They just came in spite of us. We were out here to help win the war, and when men stick by their stations long days and longer nights and work like our gang did, you can't help but be successful.

After Tokyo-the very heart of the Japanese homeland; after Iwo it's island citadel, we couldn't imagine what could be left for us. No one had given Okinawa much thought. But we soon learned that that strip of Jap-held island had to be worked over. Iwo was bloody and murderous; but this was worse. Iwo was small - this wasn't. Here were long bloody miles of caves and coulees filled with fanatical Japs. Here were tombs without number, rock-hewn shelters, once sacred to the 'ashes of illustrious ancestors' but now converted into pillboxes and rat holes for the enemy to hide in. Here were 'Sugar Loaf Hill,' 'Conical Hill,' 'Chocolate Drop Hill' - three Suribachis! Here was a wide-upswEEPing plateau stretching over a large area of the southern end of the Island on which the Japs were established with long range guns and their death dealing mortars; up whose death-reeking slopes our Dogfaces and Gyrenes had to squirm and sweat and crawl, facing death all the way. Stories of valor will be numberless when the history of this war is written, but none will exceed "in guts and courage", as Ernie Pyle so well said, "the inched conquest of Bloody Okinawa."

Here, there was plenty for us to do. The Busy 'BEE' with her brood of fighters, torpedoes, bombers had to help close the airways to the "Rising Sun"; had to do her share of intercepting invaders come to rain ruin on the heroic ground troops; had to help those land fighters, by bombing and blasting the rock-bound caves and tombs, raking the ravines and sheltered lees. No man can fight an enemy he cannot see. Japrats on Okinawa were buried, hidden from sight, sniping and blasting from slits in the earth. To even the odds our planes flew day after day over those caves, literally down the barrels of guns unseen, at levels that meant danger every minute. Fighter pilots were in the air day and night blasting from the sky every enemy who dared test their skill and courage.