

Description of Action By CHIEF CARPENTER JAMES W. HURD, USN (Deceased)

Chief Carpenter HURD, at the time of the explosions was attached to USS BENNINGTON (CVA-20) and was serving in the Engineering Department. He and COBB, George E. FP3, USN were on watch in Damage Control Central, located on the 6th deck. The only access to Damage Control Central, Central Station and the Interior Communications Room is a trunk leading down to the 6th deck from the vicinity of the Warrant Officer's Mess on the 3rd deck, in the most critical part of the damaged area. The explosions blew in the door to Damage Control Central and dense asphyxiating smoke engulfed that space. After receiving the first indications of the explosion and fires, and in spite of unbearable conditions existing in Damage Control Central (that imperiled his safety), Chief Carpenter HURD's first concern was for the safety of the ship. He immediately commenced damage control measures and, as he received them, made reports to the Bridge and Main Engine Control of the extent and amount of damage sustained in each area. Reconnaissance by his men and information from other sources revealed that the top of the access trunk to Damage Control Central was blocked by debris and smoke, and that all men with him were trapped. As the smoke got thicker Chief Carpenter HURD realized the seriousness of the situation but his primary concern continued to be the safety of the ship, the men who were trapped in isolated spaces throughout the ship and those who were with him in Damage Control Central and the adjoining spaces. Due to the situation existing in Damage Control Central, primary Damage Control supervision was shifted to the Assistant Damage Control Officer at Repair IV. Chief Carpenter HURD directed the men in the surrounding spaces to conserve the meager amounts of air remaining but despite the dense smoke and the certain prospect of asphyxiation he continued at his post, receiving calls for assistance and reports of damage, and relaying them to the Bridge and Secondary Damage Control at Repair IV. When rescue parties reached the area, about one hour after the explosions, Chief Carpenter HURD was still carrying on at his post although by this time he was weakening from the effects of the smoke. Without regard for his personal safety he repeatedly refused to be evacuated until all the men in Damage Control Central and the adjoining spaces had been removed. He specifically ordered the removal of COBB, FP3, who had continued to work with him until he collapsed unconscious, by saying, "take COBB, I'm all right." Upon ascertaining that COBB and the other eight men who were trapped in the area were being helped or carried out, Chief Carpenter HURD allowed DAVIS, FP3, to assist him out of Damage Control Central. However, upon reaching the foot of the ladder leading to the 5th deck, he ordered DAVIS to make a final inspection of the spaces for casualties. When DAVIS returned Chief Carpenter HURD had collapsed and was subsequently carried to Hanger Bay Three where he died. His courageous actions, leadership and devotion to duty resulted in the loss of his own life. They were primarily responsible for the prompt and effective initiation of Damage Control measures throughout the ship, this undoubtedly contributing toward saving the ship and the lives of countless numbers of shipmates.

ENCLOSURE (1)

SAMPLE CITATION FOR CHIEF CARPENTER JAMES W. HURD, USN (DECEASED)

” For highly outstanding heroism, courageous action, inspiring leadership and performance beyond the call of duty during the disastrous explosions and fires onboard the USS BENNINGTON (CVA-20) while serving as Damage Control Watch Officer. On 26 May 1954, the USS BENNINGTON (CVA-20) was conducting air operations 75 miles south of Newport, RI, when the ship experienced a series of violent explosions which spread fires, intense heat, and dense smoke throughout the forward section of the ship and caused death and injury to 220 officers and men. Chief Carpenter HURD was on watch in Damage Control Central and was trapped with several of his shipmates in that area. With full appreciation of the seriousness of the accident and despite the dense smoke he took immediate and effective steps to initiate damage control operations. Since the top of the access trunk was blocked by fires, debris and smoke, control was shifted to Repair IV where LTJG FOLEY took charge throughout the remainder of the morning. As the smoke got thicker, Mr. HURD realized the seriousness of the situation but his primary concern was the safety of the men trapped throughout the ship, and those trapped with him in Damage Control Central and the adjoining spaces. He directed the men in the surrounding spaces to conserve the meager amount of air remaining. Despite the dense smoke and asphyxiating conditions, he continued at his post receiving calls for assistance and reports of damage that he passed on to the BRIDGE and to Repair Stations. When rescue parties reached the area, about an hour after the explosions, CHCARP HURD was still carrying on at his post. Without regard for his personal safety, he repeatedly refused to be evacuated until all subordinates had been removed from Damage Control Central, Central Station and the Interior Communications Room. He specifically ordered the removal of COBB, FP3, who had continued to work with him until he collapsed unconscious, and eight other men who were trapped in the adjoining spaces. Upon ascertaining that all were being helped or carried out, CHCARP HURD allowed DAVIS, FP3 to assist him out of Damage Control Central. However, upon reaching the bottom of the ladder leading to the 5th deck, he ordered DAVIS to make a final inspection of the spaces for casualties. When DAVIS returned, CHCARP HURD had collapsed and was subsequently carried to Hanger Bay Three where he died. His courageous actions, leadership, and devotion to duty resulted in the loss of his own life. They were primarily responsible for the saving of lives of several of the men trapped with him, additional men trapped in Central Station and the Interior Communications Room and were in keeping with the very highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

ENCLOSURE (1)