

WENZEL, Terence P.

ADAN USN

USS BENNINGTON (CVA-20)

Rhode Island

RECOMMENDED: (SECNAV) LETTER OF COMMENDATION on Co USS BENNINGTON ltr ser 5025 of 8/26/54. Rec'd Bd D&M 12/14/54.

AWARDED: (SECNAV) LETTER OF COMMENDATION (WITHOUT RIBBON) by Sp Bd D&M Mtg, Ser 2 of 4 Jan '55. App SecNav 8 Jan 1955.

“For courageous action and performance beyond the call of duty in connection with the disastrous explosions and fires which occurred on the BENNINGTON while he was serving in Fighter Squadron 21. On 26 May '54, the BENNINGTON was conducting air operations 75 miles south of Newport, RI, when the ship experienced a series of violent explosions. These explosions spread flame, flash fires, intense heat, and dense smoke throughout the forward section of the ship causing severe damage to the ship and death or injury to 220 officers and men. WENZEL, with complete disregard for his own safety, unhesitatingly volunteered to go below into the devastated area and search for casualties and to help fight fires. Forcing his way through torn, jagged bulkheads and thick, choking smoke, he made his way to the second deck with a fire hose and immediately started fighting numerous flash fires that had sprung up in the scattered wreckage. He helped locate and carry out to safety one shipmate who was found in the water that covered much of the deck in that area. Knowing full well the dangers involved and the possibility of further explosions but still seeking ways to assist in rescue and damage control operations, he again found two more victims of the blasts and helped remove them to the hanger deck. WENZEL remained among the twisted metal and asphyxiating fumes throughout much of the morning continually searching for ways to be of assistance in removing the casualties and clearing debris-clogged passageways. His initiative and unflagging devotion to duty were highly instrumental in the expeditious removal of casualties and in minimizing damage to the ship. WENZEL's actions were always in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”