

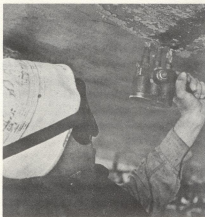
Dirt, Dust And Hard Work Depict Benn's Shipyard Work

Knucklebusters, nylon webbing, life jackets and sheer muscle power applied in force against a ship's sides equals first-order paint chipping. Add a period of electric sanding and a few hundred gallons of red lead primer and haze grey paint, and it all adds up to a new paint job on an old warhorse.

The responsibility of painting the skin of this 24-year-old aircraft carrier partly falls to the men of the Second Division. The men sit on a latticework of nylon webbing suspended from eyelets protruding from the steel skin. Using "knucklebusters" (pneumatic paint chippers), the old paint is stripped off, the remaining paint particles are ground down with sanders, then the bare metal appears. The next step is the application of rust-preventative red lead primer.

One of the more difficult areas to chip is the underside of the carrier's angle deck which juts out over the side. Nets suspended from eyelets enable the men to sit down while working on the angle deck's underside. The men are required to wear flotation gear in the event of a fall to the water some 80 feet below. Flying particles of paint generated by knucklebuster action also makes the wearing of goggles mandatory. The intensely loud rattling noise made as the knucklebuster teeth strike the steel plates is deafening. "When our work for the day is done," said one, "the silence is disquieting. You can't hear anything."

Although the nets on which the men work are about three years old, they haven't been known to break and drop someone into the drink.



CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK--RDS-1 Wayne J. Cooper, 23, chips off a section of paint from the underside of Benn's angle deck.



HOW DOES IT?--Checking on the work's progress are SN Gary Pretzer, 21, left, and SA Andrew B. Galaktionoff.