

The Sinking of The Battleship Yamato *(First Strike Made By VB-82 Bennington Pilots)*

It was the largest warship ever built. So massive was its displacement that it literally dwarfed the American aircraft carriers that would launch the planes, which would bring its demise on 7 April 1945. The Battleship Yamato was the pride of the Japanese Imperial Navy and was intended to be a symbol of Japan's supremacy not only on the sea, but also over the races of mankind. It was most appropriate that the ship should bear the sacred and revered name of the province from which the ancient Japanese race originated.

At about 0830 hours on 7 April 1945, United States fighter planes were launched to pinpoint the location of the Japanese task force. By 1000 hours, the Yamato's radar picked up the US planes and a state of battle readiness was commanded. Within seven minutes all doors, hatches and ventilators were closed, and battle stations were fully manned. The super battleship was ready for the coming fury.

Planes from the carrier Hornet to comprise the group that would make first contact with the Japanese task force joined the strike force from Bennington. Bennington's VB-82 lead by Lieutenant Commander Hugh Wood was flying at 2,500 feet in heavy clouds on the bearing to intercept the ships. Although the radar indicated they were very close, the pilots were startled when they realized they were directly above the Japanese task force and within easy range of anti-aircraft fire. Lieutenant Commander Wood immediately pulled his Helldiver up into the clouds and made a sharp left turn. Wood's wingman was unable to stay with the formation, leaving Lieutenant (jg) Francis R. Ferry and Lieutenant (jg) Edward A. Sieber to follow Wood into the first strike on the Yamato.

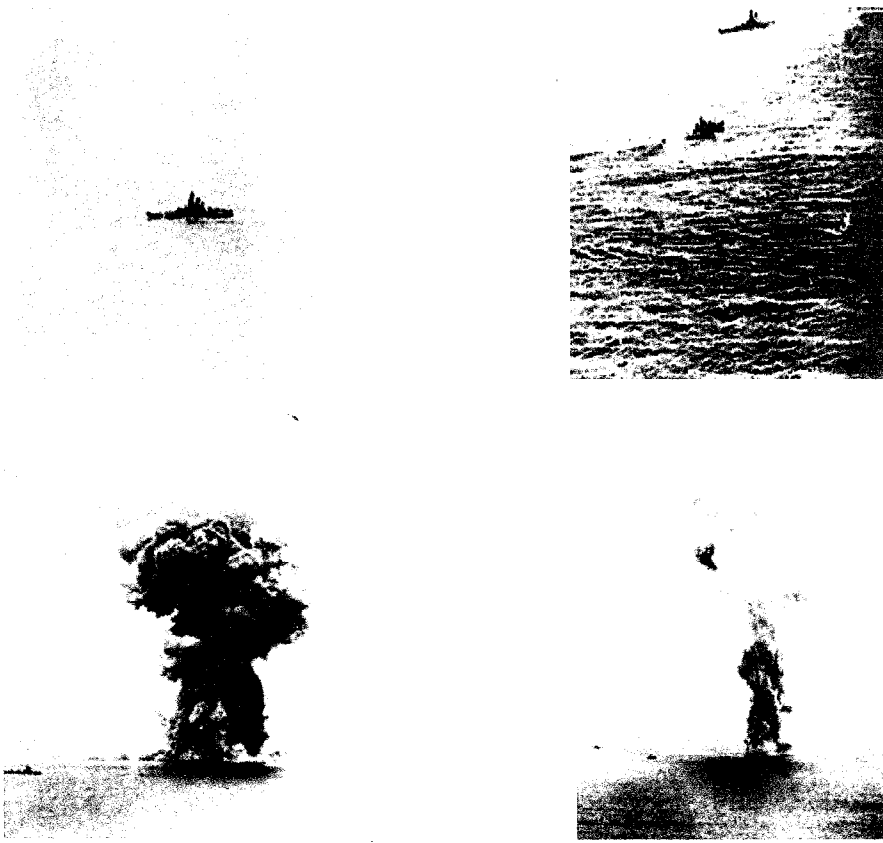
The dives began at 3,000 feet directly over the Yamato, bearing from stern to bow. Bombs were released at an altitude of less than 800 feet. The dives were made as close to a 90-degree angle as possible to avoid the 75-degree maximum angle of the anti-aircraft guns. Each of the three planes released eight five-inch rockets; two-armor piercing bombs and bursts of 20mm machine gun fire. Lt. (jg) Ferry remembers that, "at this distance a miss was impossible". The first two bombs dropped by Lt. Commander Wood hit on the starboard side of the weather deck, knocking out several of the 25mm machine guns and the high-angle gun turret and ripping a hole in the flying deck. Seconds later came the two bombs from Lt. (jg) Ferry, destroying secondary battery

fire control station as they blew through the flying deck and starting a fire, which was never extinguished. This fire continued to spread and is believed to have caused the explosion of the main ammunition magazine as the Yamato capsized some two hours later. Hot on the Ferry's tail was Lt. (jg) Sieber, delivering two bomb hits forward of the island, ripping more holes in the decks in the vicinity of the number three main gun turret. Within minutes of the Helldivers' bombing, the Yamato suffered three torpedo hits to her port side and began listing.

Over the next two hours, two more attacks would be launched, pounding the Yamato with torpedoes and bombs. Shortly after 1400 hours, the commanding officer gave the word to prepare to abandon ship. As the ship listed beyond a 90-degree angle and began sinking, a gigantic explosion of the stern ammunition magazines tore the ship apart. The huge mushroom of fire and smoke exploded almost four miles into the air and the fire was seen by sentries 125 miles away on Kagoshima Island. Only 280 of the Yamato's 2,778-man crew were rescued from the sinking ship. The end had come for the Yamato, foreshadowing the coming end of the Imperial Japanese Military.

To The Members Of Air Group 82,

"I hope this will, in small way, keep the memories of VB-82 alive, forever".



Yamato Epilog

According to the WWII cruise book, *USS Bennington CV-20*, there were 27 planes launched from the *Bennington* for the *Yamato* mission. The following are the known pilots that took off from the *Benny* beginning at 1017 that morning.

AG-82 Commander George L. Heap— Commander Heap was to command the attack on the *Yamato*, when he had to return to ship because his plane developed fuel system problems, command of the mission was transferred to Commander Edmund G. Konrad of the *Hornet*. Lt. Commander Edward E. DeGarmo took over command of the *Bennington*'s planes.

VB-82

Lt. Comdr. Hugh Wood Jr.
Lt. (jg) Francis "R" Ferry
Lt. (jg) Edward A. Sieber
Ens. Jack Fuller (declared MIA after attack)
Lt. (jg) Richard L. Corey
Lt. Jack A. Derby
Lt. (jg) William E. Murphy
Lt. (jg) R.E. Schumacher
Lt. (jg) William R. Kuhn
Lt. (jg) Robert B. Cahill
Lt. Harry R. McRae



Photo of Yamato
by Lt. (jg) Samuel Sturgis

VF-82

Lt. Comdr. Edward W. Hessell
Lt. (jg) Gerald M. Huffman
Lt. (jg) Samuel P. Sturgis
Lt. (jg) Clarence E. Davies
Lt. (jg) Melvin R. Carter

VMF-112

2nd Lt. Kenneth Huntington

VT-82

Lt. Comdr. Edward E. DeGarmo
Lt. Norman A. Wiese
Lt. (jg) Donald B. Barber
Lt. Charles R. Walton
Lt. Jesse W. Naul
Lt. (jg) John E. Gilreath
Lt. (jg) Robert L. Mini
Lt. Wilfred O. McDowell
Lt. (jg) John D. Walker



VF-82 photo pilots— standing l-r:
Bud Gear, Paul Spradling; Ashby Harper
(held the world's record for senior men's 1
mile freestyle); Pinkey McDonell; John
Chandler; and Mark "Bong" Davies. Sam
Sturgis is bent over with camera on his
back.