

SMITH, Robert A.

BM2

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 the Gunnery Department. The BENNINGTON while conducting air operations 75 miles south of Newport, RI, experienced a series of violent explosions. These explosions spread flame, flash fires, intense heat and dense smoke throughout the forward section of the ship, caused severe damage to the ship and the death or injury of 220 officers and men. Fully aware that great danger was involved but without regard for his own safety, SMITH volunteered to enter a most critical area where smoke, debris and threat of further explosions existed to assist in the removal of casualties. He repeatedly entered areas of dense smoke without the aid of an oxygen breathing apparatus to bring out dead or injured personnel. When near collapse from breathing the smoke he was ordered topside for fresh air and rest, but even here he continued helping carry casualties to a doctor's care. His courageous and untiring efforts were instrumental in the expeditions of removal of numerous casualties and undoubtedly resulted in the saving of lives. His actions were at all times in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”