

On 22 March 1945, we took fuel, oil, and aviation gasoline from a tanker, and refilled our ammunition magazines from an ammunition ship. During this day, by breaching buoy from a destroyer, the USS Maddox, ComCarDiv THREE, Rear Admiral T.L. Sprague and staff, came aboard, filling for the first time, the numerous flag spaces aboard the ship. Then, on 23 March, we began an intensive week of blasting Okinawa and adjacent small islands to the west, in preparation for the Okinawa invasion of Love day soon to come.

During this time, our planes destroyed or damaged air fields, runways, and hangars, coastal defense installations, barracks, shops and radar stations, piers and warehouse, ~~it~~ gun emplacements, caves, gasoline dumps, groups of infantrymen, a shipyard. Irreparable damage was done to the ~~the~~ material and morale of the Japanese. Pilots were briefed from detailed photographic coverage of every square inch of the 500 square mile ~~island~~ island. Our pilots were told to "get everything that moves" on Okinawa the fortress gateway to Japan. And they did, with great enthusiasm. A high mark of the week was the spotting of a Jap convoy in the East China Sea, headed for Okinawa. Three of the ships were AK's loaded deep in the water, plus a pair of destroyers. The Bennington sent out fifteen fighters, twelve bombers, and twelve torpedo planes. Our planes, in company with planes from the Hornet, the San Jacinto and the Belleau Wood, sank the entire convoy. From photogtaphic evidence taken at the scene, it was evident that one of the Jap ships carried a lot of ammunition because when she was hit, she literally exploded in a column of smoke and debris some of which fanned the sky at 3000 feet.

27 March 1945 will be a never-forgotten day in the history of our ship. Just after dawn our radars detected several bogies coming in from the north flying high. At 0640 one of the Jap planes had been tracked in to within 15 miles of the ship, and was reported to be difinitely in the immediate vicinity of our formation.