

Handclasp

Capt. Reynolds To Depart

BENNINGTON, and it's some 2,000 men, will be visiting many ports during the coming six-months and will have an opportunity to take part in "Operation Handclasp," a program designed to aid people in foreign countries and help promote educational standards abroad.

Prior to the ship's departure from Long Beach, five tons of textbooks were taken aboard. The books, given by local schools to the Long Beach Naval Station, consist of elementary and high school texts.

"Big BENN" will donate the books to schools and orphanages personally while the crew, if the opportunity arises, will devote short periods in the schools teaching English.

In-port periods in the Philippines, Japan, and Hong Kong will give BENNINGTON's crew a chance to unload her cargo to those in need of textbooks.

Thus, BENN will be playing a major part in the United States' attempt to better national society by extending it's hand across the oceans, endeavoring to bring international relations to a better understanding.

A year ago last September the most rewarding tour of my 25 years of Navy life began. As with all good things it must soon end. For me it will be quite symbolically a sad Friday the 13th.

Despite the frustrations of the yard overhaul, underway training, and the preparation for our many varied and complex exercises, there have been multiple overshadowing experiences which have reduced them to insignificance. From the violent, high speed turns in rough seas during Post Repair Trials when we all apprehensively watched the huge new antenna on the mast shudder as it met and passed its tests to the tranquil crossing we have just completed, our tour together has been eventful. Never will I forget the sad departure from our homes in Bremerton, nor the warm reception of our entry into the new homeport of Long Beach.

Of course the harsh world of reality quickly returned as we drove ourselves to the limit during refresher training in San Diego. Fortunately that training was exactly what we needed, and we came out of it once again a ship capable of taking our proud place in a fighting fleet. With only a few exercises under our belts we were selected to lead the fleet in the Seattle Seafair celebration and represent our Navy in Alaska. Big BENN and her Air Group rang up a rewarding first by being the only carrier ever to visit the capital city of our great 49th state. It was an exciting trip and one all of us will long remember.

Close on the heels of Alaska came the eventful MidPac Hawaiian trip, which though commencing in tragedy for the nation, ended in a completely successful and valuable training period for us. The Administrative / Material Inspection and the Operational Readiness Inspections rounded out the training needed to qualify us to be placed "on the line" in WestPac.

Now we are about to enter the graduation exercise under the close scrutiny of COMASWFORPAC. The Operational Readiness Evaluation that we will be engaged in for the next few weeks will test our stamina and endurance during extended simulated wartime conditions. It will give Admiral Hayward and us the opportunity to show what we are made of as a fighting team. Having been intimately associated with you all for as long as I have, I am confident of our ability to show everyone how the best ASW carrier in the fleet operates.

When we have successfully demonstrated our wares, I shall regretfully take my leave of you. Fortunately, you will have Cdr. Monson, an exceptionally able officer to take my place. With Admiral Caldwell and his capable staff directing the overall operations, and Capt. Hill in command, there can be only one kind of cruise, the BENNINGTON best. As you go West continue that driving, willing spirit that has exemplified your every effort and overcome all obstacles. Render unto Cdr. Monson the same enthusiastic and deeply appreciated cooperation you have always shown me, and BENNINGTON will continue to be the best in the fleet.

May God be with you in your deployment and in your devoted service to our wonderful country.



Nearly five tons of elementary and high school textbooks were loaded onto BENNINGTON prior to departing.

E. E. Reynolds
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