



Captain Graffy takes a close look at the scorched Apollo 4 spacecraft while enroute back to Pearl Harbor to drop the prize off. NASA representatives stand in the background.

#### Apollo (cont. from page 3)

During that time Benn's crew practiced for her mission using a mock capsule provided by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to perfect its procedures for the pickup.

The job involved keeping a steady flow of information between the tracking and recovery aircraft, the ship, Houston, and Hawaii. Simulated exercises were set up to evaluate this flow and to perfect procedures of contact, approach, and the actual pickup.

Benn's deck seamen, with whom the final pickup rested and under the supervision of WO1 T. W. Laing, the ship's boatswain, were busy too, preparing and splicing line to haul the 10,000-pound moon ship aboard.

In the midst of these preparations and regularly assigned duties, Benn's crew still found time to enjoy themselves in the island paradise of Hawaii.

Many of the men spent their off-duty hours touring the island of Oahu or just lying in the sun at Waikiki.

Unfortunately along with good times and hard work come some tragedies, and Bennington had her share. Several members of Benn's crew were assaulted during liberty hours, and one lost his life while respotting aircraft on the flight deck.

During final preparations for the actual

pickup Bennington hosted newsmen and guests for a dress rehearsal of the recovery on Oct. 24.

Finally, after months of waiting and many hours of hard work and practice, the day came for Bennington to start on her mission. Leaving Pearl Harbor on Nov. 6, for her station in the recovery area, she waited until the morning of Nov. 9, and the payoff for weeks of training.

The countdown went as scheduled, and the Apollo 4 spacecraft lifted off at 1 a.m. local time. At the conclusion of the eight and three-quarter-hour flight time all hands were tensely waiting for splashdown.

Suddenly, at about 9:37 a.m. two sonic booms were heard and a minute later the spacecraft was sighted by Seaman Apprentice James K. Bookhauf of OI Division dangling from its three parachutes.

Then Bennington's big job began. Helicopters from HS-5 were deployed with swimmers aboard. The swimmers jumped into the water from the helicopters and after deflating the chutes attached a floatation collar to the spacecraft. Other helicopters were searching up and down wind for any additional floating equipment from the spacecraft. Meanwhile one of Benn's motor whaleboats and crew was lowered into the water to assist with recovery operations,

and to pick up the swimmers following the lifting of the spacecraft on board Benn by her heavy duty crane and deck seamen.

The seas were rough that day and getting the heavy moon ship attached to the hook of the crane became a difficult task. Line-handlers were standing by holding the spacecraft in position, but were continually bobbed back and forth with the sea. The weight of the capsule and the force of the sea finally broke the line. Part of the block and tackle almost hit a UDT man working on the craft. Seamen holding the line went sprawling, and another swell caused the craft's antenna to strike Benn's elevator and break. The capsule started drifting dangerously close to Benn, but quick action on the bridge prevented a collision. Captain Graffy ordered a right turn and Benn prepared for another approach. This time all went as planned and by noon Apollo 4 was on board and Bennington was headed back to Hawaii to deliver her prize.

From there Bennington began her long trek back to her homeport of Long Beach, Calif., and the capsule was headed back to the major spacecraft contractor, North American Rockwell Corp., in Downey, Calif.

In the late afternoon of Nov. 17, Bennington returned home after dropping her air group off in San Diego. There to greet her with open arms were families and friends.

Preliminary reports indicated that the Saturn 5/Apollo 4 did all it was supposed to and was another successful phase of the program to put American astronauts on the moon.

The pride of Bennington's crew in this successful mission is reflected in the following pages of this magazine, but no pride can replace that of returning home after a long deployment and a job well done.

## In Memory Of AN Walter

Even though the Apollo 4 recovery was a success, and the ship was home-ward bound, many Bennington sailors mourned the loss of a fallen shipmate, Airman Robert L. Walter, 20, of Springfield, N. J. Airman Walter of V-1 Division lost his life while moving a SH-3A helicopter across Benn's flight deck on Oct. 24.

Bennington colors flew at halfmast, while two close friends of Airman Walter committed the traditional wreath to the sea. As the ship's company stood in reverent attention, the Marine Honor Guard fired a three-volley salute, and the baglar sounded taps on Oct. 31 in memory of the well-known sailor.