

U. S. S. BENNINGTON (CV 20)

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made simulated attacks on the Canal locks, and the demonstration was effective.

We made the canal transit on 21 December in the elapsed time of eleven hours and thirty-one minutes, mooring at Balboa in the late afternoon. Leaving Balboa on 22 December we began our cruise up the west coast. Rough seas off the Gulf of Tehautepec, and the consequent threat of seasickness among the crew, caused our Christmas dinner to be postponed a couple of days, but we nevertheless enjoyed the sumptuous ~~ix~~ repast finally served. The trip up was filled with flight operations and gunnery exercises and emergency drills. On 29 December we entered the swept channel to San Diego Harbor, and moored to Berth K, NAS San Diego. During our short stay in this port we loaded planes, fuel oil, provisions, and ammunition and embarked new ship's personnel and passengers. We also took aboard the 36 F4Us of the Marine squadrons VMF 112 and 123 whose personnel reported aboard for duty with CAG 82 on 31 December.

The change in the Air Group compliment came as a result of a recent action in the far Pacific. Increased speed of new types of enemy planes and closing distances to enemy land-based targets indicated the desirability of additional fighter protection and the need of a fast, fighter-bomber of the Corsair type. The inclusion of Marine fighter squadrons in a carrier air group was an innovation and the performance of the squadrons and of the group was therefore to be watched with considerable interest.

On 1 January 1945 we cleared the dock at North Island, heading west, with the destroyer USS ADAMS (DM 27) in company. We were heavily loaded, carrying