



Bunker Hill flight jacket patch.

BUNKER HILL'S LAST STAND

FIGHTING TOWARD THE HOME ISLANDS, THIS ESSEX-CLASS CARRIER
WOULD FALL VICTIM TO A SAVAGE KAMIKAZE ATTACK

BY GEORGE BUTLER

As the New Year dawned for 1945, the United States Navy was driving hard towards the Home Islands of the Japanese Empire. Island by bloody island, American forces were defeating the Japanese in the air, on the ground, and on the sea. The losses on both sides were horrendous yet for the young sailors aboard the USS *Bunker Hill* (CV-17) there was constant talk in the mess that perhaps the end of the damn war might come about in 1946 or 1947 and then they could go home to their loved ones and resume a normal life — for those that survived. Averaging 19-years-old, these young men aboard the carrier were motivated, hard-working, and completely dedicated to each other as they fought their way across the Pacific.

One of two dozen *Essex*-class carriers built during World War II, the ship was named for the Battle of Bunker Hill that took place during the Revolutionary War. Part of America's massive carrier-building program, *Bunker Hill* was commissioned on 25 May 1943 with Capt. J.J. Ballentine in



Magnificent view of *Bunker Hill* just after launching as a Navy blimp circles overhead while filming the event.

command and was headed to the Pacific Theater of Operations where she would participate in the hard-won battles in the Southwest Pacific, Central Pacific, and the drive towards Japan.

At the end of June 1943, *Bunker Hill* took aboard her air group at Norfolk, Virginia, and then headed to Trinidad for her shakedown cruise. Like any major warship, there was a lot of work to be done before she would sail through the Panama Canal on the way to war. Problems had to be overcome, the air group had to get used to the new

carrier through constant landings and takeoffs, and all battle systems had to be tested and retested. It was a 24/7 work schedule but the crew of the carrier that carried one of the most famous names in American history was up to the task and to a man they were itching to avenge Pearl Harbor.

The shakedown cruise lasted some three weeks and then *Bunker Hill* returned to Norfolk for final work before heading out on 4 September for the long voyage to the Panama Canal, San Diego, Pearl Harbor, and then into



One of the most famous photos of the Second World War, USS *Bunker Hill* begins to savagely burn after two kamikaze strikes.