

many extra planes as cargo. The seven-day trip to Pearl Harbor was blessed with good weather, and was uneventful except for the various ship's drills and exercises which were conducted in putting final touches on our war routine. We cleared the island of Oahu on schedule on 7 January, and passed off Honolulu into the narrow entry to Pearl Harbor. We moored alongside Ford Island, NAS, Pearl Harbor, one of our bow lines being secured to the hulk of the old Battleship Utah, lying where she was sunk by the Japs on 7 December 1941.

We spent the next three weeks at Pearl, including a three day practice gun for gunnery exercises and air operations among the Hawaiian Islands. On 13 January, while shifting berths at the Navy Yard, the USS Saranac (AO 74) rammed into our stern while passing, causing slight damage to the port side of our flight deck overhang and gun apsons. During most of our stay at Pearl Harbor, the Air Group was based ashore at NAS Kabalui, on the island of Kani. The crew enjoyed several parties at Nimitz Beach, under the able direction of Lt. J.A. (Buddy) Bassett, former Big League ball player, and Recreation and Athletic Office for the Bennington.

On 29 January, in a drizzle of rain, we got underway for Ulithi in company with the Carriers Saratoga (F), Bunker Hill, Randolph, Belleau Wood, and the battle cruiser Alaska. Passing close to Truk on night, enemy planes were reported taking off from that island. We manned our battle stations, but the raid never materialized.

On 1-2 February 1945, we crossed the 180th meridian of Longitude, at approximate latitude 17-4N, losing a day in the deal. Came 8 February and our hook was down in Ulithi Island anchorage. It is believed that even our old-timers were awed by the size of the fleet they saw anchored there.