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 exer-
cises 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 motored 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 run for
gunnery exercises and air operations among the Hawaiian Islands. On 13 January,
while shifting berths at the Navy Yard, the USS Saranno (AO 74) rammed into our
stern while passing, causing slight damage to the port side of our flight deck
overhang and gun aponsons. During most of our stay at Pearl Harbor, the Air
Group was based ashore at NAS Kualalani, on the island of Kauai. The crew enjoyed
several parties at Nimitz Beach, under the able direction of Lt. J.A. (Buddy)
Hassett, 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 approx-
imate latitude 17°N, 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.