

The date: April 30, 1968.  
The event: Western Pacific deployment  
The mood: Anxiety and anticipation.

A tear, a kiss, a brave smile characterized the foggy April 30 morning on which Benn got underway for her 11th WestPac deployment. This cruise being 192 days long.

Topout off the parting a little longer and to prepare the crew and ship for the deployment, the month of April was spent in port. But rumors had spread in late February and early March that the ship was scheduled to leave on March 8. Annual leaves were altered or cancelled and plans were stemmed up, but as March 8 rolled around, it became evident that the ship wasn't leaving until April 30, the date originally scheduled. The cause of these rumors was very real--the Pueblo Crisis.

The confirmation of the original date gave Benn men that needed time to settle their personal affairs, but it did little to erase the thought of being separated from their loved ones for six months. Leaving Long Beach in the morning, Bennington caught what was to be her last glimpse of the California coast line for six months late that afternoon when she pulled out of San Diego. With her Air Group embarked, Benn's next stop--Pearl Harbor.

Hawaii, the island State, saw Bennington on May 6, but only for a short time. The next day Benn was steaming once more. This time to complete her last step in preparation for the cruise--The Operational Readiness Exercise.

Teaming up with the New Zealand frigate, HMNZS Otago (F-111), Benn demonstrated her skill in anti-submarine warfare. Ten intensive days of drills involving all hands tested every system and man on the ship.

