

THE STAIN OF THE FRANKLIN

by Darren Large



Pictured above is a photograph (NHHC 80-G-K-3815) of a short-bow Essex class carrier anchored in Ulithi. In foreground is USS Bullard (DD-660). The camouflage is Measure 21 (Overall Navy Gray). The date is given as “late March ‘45”. I had always thought this to be the Franklin but could not definitively prove this until now.

In March 1945, Task Force 58 was at Ulithi only once between the operations against Iwo Jima in February and Okinawa in April. At this time, most Essex carriers were still wearing dazzle camouflage schemes and in response to the kamikaze threat, were gradually changed back to Measure 21. Three short-hull Essex carriers had Measure 21 in March 1945 and were present at Ulithi: The Essex, Franklin and Bunker Hill. Lexington and Ticonderoga were state-side at this time.

Essex can be eliminated due to the fact that she never had 40mm sponsons fitted below the island. It is more difficult to distinguish between Franklin and Bunker Hill. Both were short hull Essex class, both had received the standard late war modifications and both were painted in Measure 21.

The reveal came when I stumbled across National Archive footage of Franklin pulling into Pearl Harbor in February 1945. She had just completed her refit at Puget Sound after receiving a kamikaze hit off the Philippines, the previous October and was returning to the forward area. It was during this refit that her camo scheme was changed from Measure 32/6A to Measure 21. I was intrigued to notice on her bow a great deal of paint peeling on her fresh camo scheme.

The damaged paint work on the February 28 footage matches exactly with the carrier in 80-G-K-3815 and with the photo of her bombing on March 19. This to me is conclusive proof that the carrier pictured above is the Franklin.

What's more, the date must surely be 13 March, 1945. The Franklin departed Pearl on 03 March 1945 in company with Intrepid, Bataan and Guam as Task Group 12.2. The group arrived at Ulithi on the morning of 13 March and Franklin dropped anchor in berth #21 at 0844, according to her war log. She sortied with Task Force 58 the following morning at 0800.

Photo evidence of bow stain:



Franklin pulling alongside Fox-2 at Pearl Harbor on 28 Feb 1945 (still from National Archive reel: 428-npc-8601).



Franklin anchored at Ulithi, 13 March 1945 (cropped from 80-G-K-3815).

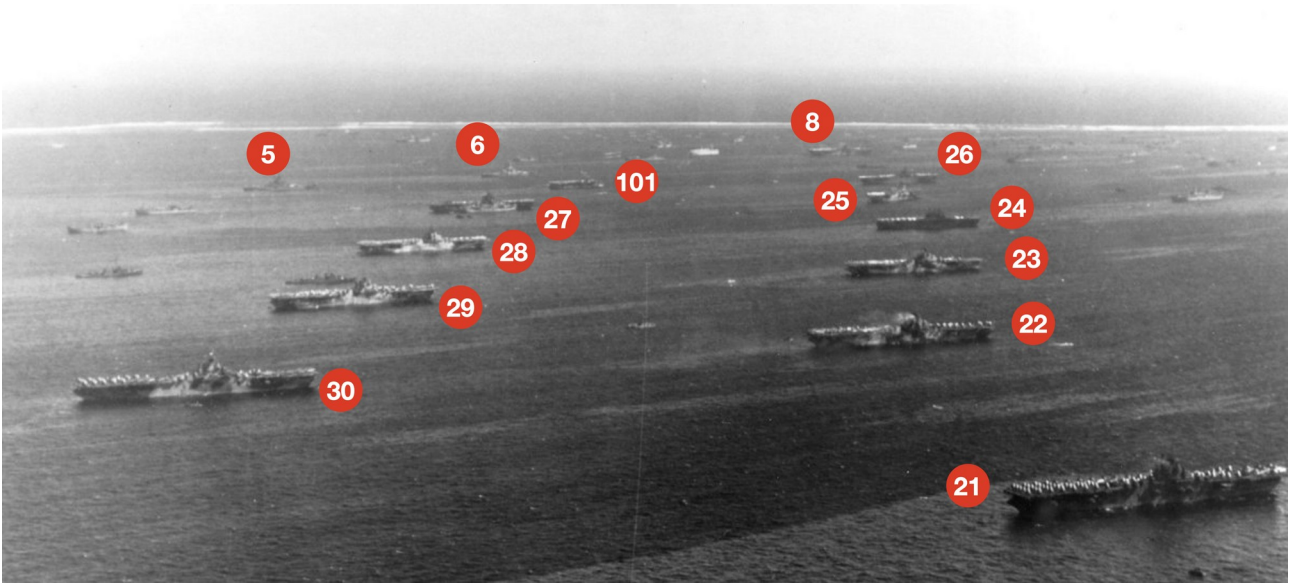


Franklin burning and listing in Japanese waters on 19 March 1945 (NHHC 80-G-273880).

This identification enables us to connect it to other pictures taken at the same time with help of the Ulithi mooring plan.



Probably the ultimate "Murderers' Row" photo with 10 Essex Class carriers plus the Enterprise in the anchorage. It must also have been taken on the 13th March 1945 shortly after the arrival of Task Group 12.2. The Randolph in berth #27 had been hit two days previously whilst at anchor by a long range kamikaze strike. The repair ship USS Jason (AR-8) is visible alongside (unknown source).



Ulithi Anchorage looking north: Berth #5: USS South Dakota (BB-57), #6 USS Massachusetts (BB-59), #8 USS Bunker Hill, #101 USS San Jacinto (CVL-30), #27 USS Randolph (CV-15) and USS Jason (AR-8), #28 USS Hornet (CV-12), #29 USS Wasp (CV-18), #30 USS Bennington (CV-20), #26 USS Essex (CV-9), #25 USS Intrepid (CV-11), #24 USS Enterprise (CV-6), #23 USS Yorktown (CV10), #22 USS Hancock (CV-19), #21 USS Franklin (CV-13). (All positions correlate with war logs of each ship and the mooring plan – last image)



13 March 1945: USS Shannon (DM-25) crosses in front of USS Flint (CL-97) and USS Miami (CL-89). In the distance (L-R) is the Enterprise in #24, Intrepid #25, Essex #26 and Bunker Hill #8 (NHHC 80-G-K-3813).

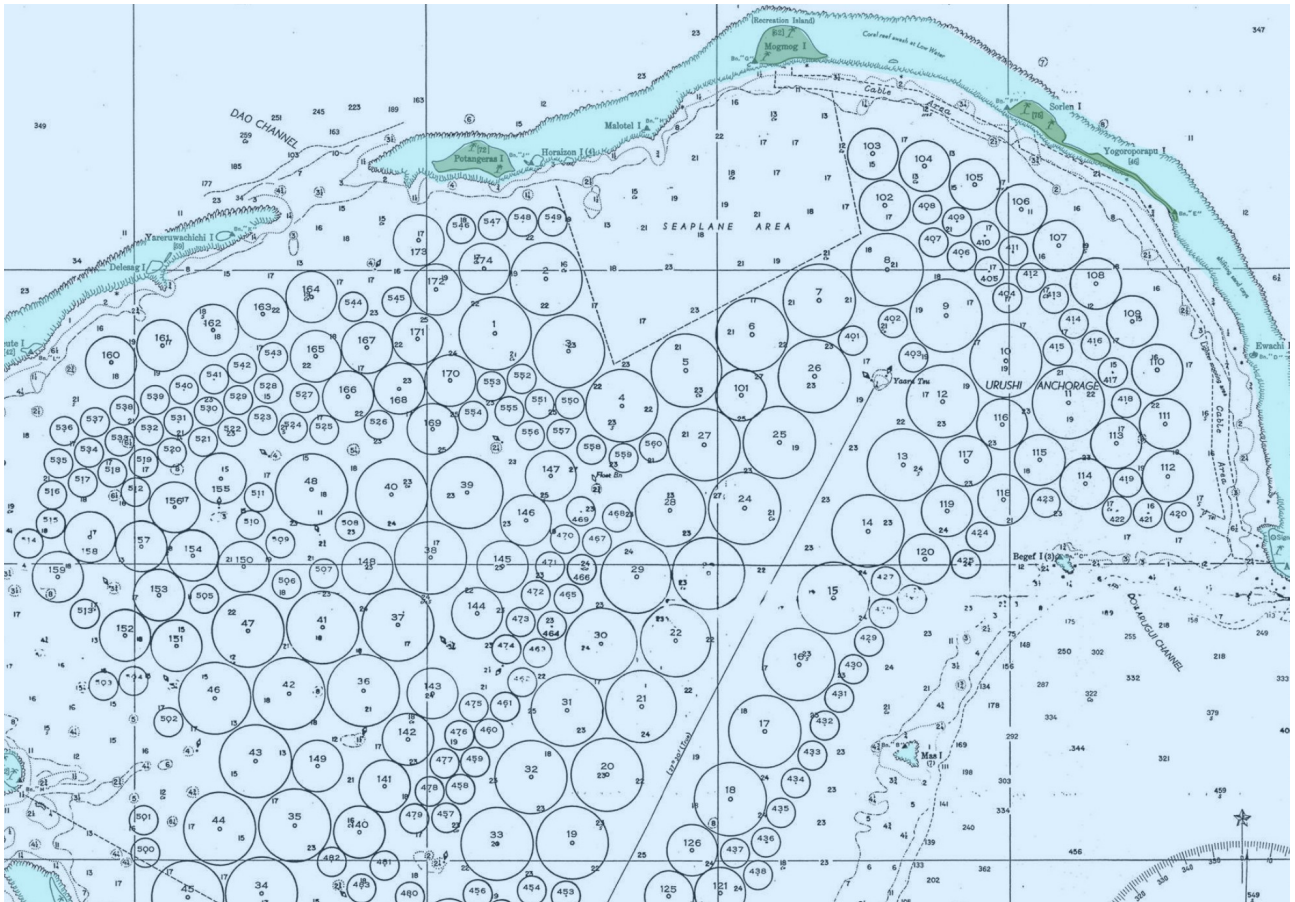


Cropped picture from the previous image showing USS Flint in front of USS Intrepid. USS Tennessee (BB-43) is just visible in #7 behind Intrepid's bow.



13 March 1945: USS Hancock (CV-19) in #22 in front of USS Wasp (CV-18) in #29 (NHHC 80-G-K-3814).

These incredible color images at Ulithi were taken by the USS West Virginia (as captioned on the NHHC website). According to her war log she was anchored in berth #39 and on the 13th March 1945 shifted berths at 0700 to the southern anchorage for gunnery practice before returning at 1600. It quite likely that these photos were taken in the late afternoon as the Franklin arrived around 0900 on the 13th.



Mooring Plan of Ulithi Northern Anchorage.