

Two days later, on 10 February, now a unit of Task Group 58.1 we got underway for the first carrier attacks on the Tokyo area. When flight quarters and General Quarters were sounded on the early morning of 16 February, we were about 80 miles off the Japanese coast, and the weather was worse than uncomfortable. It was biting cold, and the rain added to our discomfort. The temperature was 47°. At 0630 the ceiling was ragged at 800 feet. At 0810 our first fighter strike reported over the target. At 0812 Radio Tokyo went off the air. At 0825 we were advised that the States had the word. The Bennington was the westernmost unit of the Task Group, thus making ours the closest carrier to Jap soil at all times. The combination of surprise, and early and active neutralization of enemy air fields protected us from any serious or effective enemy air opposition. Boggles were in the air sporadically, and during the morning three planes were seen to go down in flames to the fire of our Combat Air Patrol planes, which were far out over the destroyers on the picket line. No ship of Task Group 58.1 fired a round of ammunition that day or the next. This lack of opposition was not shared by our attacking planes. The flak had been heavy and accurate over Tokyo and Yokosuka. We lost our first plane to enemy action during these strikes.

Retiring from Tokyo area on 18 February, the Bennington's planes took part in a profitable picket-boat hunt, and, following our refueling on 19 February, we flew continuous beach-head support strikes over the island of Iwo Jima, where invasion landings were already in progress. We maintained constant air cover over the island, keeping Jap planes off the backs of the Marines, and acting as air borne artillery, on instant call for pin point bombing of block houses, rocketing of caves, and fire bombing strategic points. On the night of 22 February, other Task Groups of our Force sustained heavy Kamikaze attacks, but the guns of our ship remained cold.