

05863

ARMED GUARD UNIT
S.S. ABIGAIL ADAMS
Armed Guard Center (Pacific)
Treasure Island
San Francisco, California

CONFIDENTIAL

22 February, 1944

From: The Commanding Officer, Naval Armed Guard,
S.S. Abigail Adams, Gross tons: 7,176.

To: The Chief of Naval Operations.

Via: United States Naval Attache
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Subject: Report of Voyage, S.S. ABIGAIL ADAMS,
From Townsville, Queensland, Australia
to Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea;
From Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea
to Finschafen (Langemak Bay), North East New Guinea;
From Finschafen (Langemak Bay), North East New Guinea
to Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea; and
From Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea
to Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Reference: (a) General Instructions for Commanding Officers of Naval
Armed Guards on Merchant Ships, 1943, Paragraph 4301.

Enclosure: (A) List of Naval personnel on board during action with enemy.

1. In accordance with reference (a), the following information is
submitted:

(a) Name of vessel: S.S. ABIGAIL ADAMS. Type of vessel: Cargo (EC-2).
Gross tonnage: 7,176. Type of cargo: Misc. supplies and equipment for
Naval advance base/s. Owner of vessel: U.S.A. represented by War Ship-
ping Administration. Chartered to: De La Rama Steamship Co., Inc.

(b) 1. Departed Townsville, Queensland, Australia Nov. 11, 1943, in convoy of
10 ships, with 5 escort vessels. Ave. speed 7.1 Kts. Arrived Milne
Bay, Papua, New Guinea, Nov. 15, 1943.

2. Departed Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea, Jan. 11, 1944, in convoy of 4
ships, with 3 escort vessels. Ave. speed 8.1 Kts (Anchored, Buna Roads,
1530, 1-12-44 until 1000, 1-13-44). Arrived Finschafen (Langemak Bay),
North East New Guinea, Jan. 14, 1944.

3. Departed Finschafen (Langemak Bay), North East New Guinea, Feb. 7, 1944,
in convoy of 2 ships, with 2 escort vessels. Ave. speed 8.4 Kts. Ar-
rived Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea, Feb. 9, 1944.

(b) 4. Departed Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea, Feb. 12, 1944, sailing singly, with no escort vessels. Ave. speed 10.5 Kts. Arrived Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, Feb. 22, 1944.

(c) Contacts and action with enemy: (Local Time)

"Red" Air Raid Alerts at Milne Bay. No enemy aircraft sighted by ship's personnel. No bombs dropped. Each alert unofficially reported based on flight over Milne Bay of one Japanese reconnaissance plane.

Nov. 29, 1943:	1130-1145;	At anchor.
Dec. 6, 1943:	1004-1019;	Moored at wharf.
Dec. 14, 1943:	0200-0300;	At anchor.
Jan. 4, 1944:	2336-2352;	At anchor.

"Red" Air Raid Alerts at Finschafen (Langemak Bay): A standing order of the R.A.N.O.I.C. prohibited opening fire on enemy aircraft unless own ship directly menaced. All alerts occurred while ship was anchored in Langemak Bay, 500 yards off-shore, except as noted by an *.

During the following alerts, no enemy aircraft was identified by ship's personnel. Unofficial information is that each alert was occasioned by flight over the area of one or two Japanese fighter-type planes at altitudes of approximately 10,000 feet, usually dropping one small bomb, without damage in any instance.

Jan. 14, 1944:	2220-2230	Jan. 30, 1944:	0610-0629
" 16, "	: 2216-2238	" 30 "	: 1140-1215
" 17, "	: 0400-0415	" 30 "	: 1401-1455
" 20 "	: 2045-2055	" 30 "	: 2220-2400
" 20 "	: 2100-2109	" 31 "	: 0305-0440
" 23 "	: 2240-2324	" 31 "	: 1600-1626
" 24 "	: 0624-0649	" 31 "	: 2020-2039
" 24 "	: 2110-2125	Feb. 1, "	: 0430-0450
" 24 "	: 2130-2142	" 1 "	: 0630-0650
" 25 "	: 0335-0350	" 1 "	: 1433-1459
" 25 "	: 0630-0645	" 1 "	: 1950-2016
" 25 "	: 2020-2043	" 1 "	: 2028-2054
" 26 "	: 0620-0643	" 1 "	: 2250-2301
" 27 "	: 0614-0623	" 2 "	: 0950-1018
" 27 "	: 0645-0655	" 3 "	: 2157-2209
" 28 "	: 0300-0325	" 4 "	: 0956-1006
" 28 "	: 0330-0415	" 7 "	: 0120-0200
" 28 "	: 0650-0725	" 7 "	: 1605-1642
" 30 "	: 0355-0419	" 7 "	: 1854-1908*

*: Alert called by senior escort vessel, at sea, 5 miles SE from Langemak Bay, immediately after departure.

(c) Contacts and action with enemy (Cont'd). (Local time)

During the following enemy air raids (in two instances alerts were not signaled by R.A.N.O.I.C.), the ship was anchored 500 yards off-shore in Langemak Bay, subject to the order of R.A.N.O.I.C. not to open fire on enemy aircraft unless own ship directly menaced.

X Jan. 23, 1944, 2149-2228: Weather clear, no moon, medium haze, 80° f., smooth sea, Wind NE Force 1.

2149: A/A fire and two bomb blasts heard from beach, bearing 350 Mag., distant about 2,000 yards. Ship blacked out and all hands called to general quarters. 3-6 unidentified aircraft heard and sighted bearing 350 Mag. position angle 25°, estimated altitude 10,000 feet. Brisk A/A fire from beach, bearing 350 Mag. and U.S. Destroyer cruising in mouth of bay directed at A/C. A/C lost to sight.

Other ships in vicinity: Unidentified U.S. Destroyer cruising in mouth of bay. USS San Pablo anchored 400 yards away, bearing 170 Mag. USS Ganymede anchored 100 yards away, bearing 160 Mag. Unidentified British transport anchored 400 yards away, bearing 120 Mag. SS Cape Newenham moored at wharf 1500 yards away, bearing 340 Mag.

2155: Searchlights came on from both sides of bay (shore) playing beams converging at point bearing 350 Mag. and shifting eastward.

2204: Sounds of enemy aircraft heard approaching, from bearing 050 Mag. Shore AA batteries still firing briskly. USS San Pablo, and either USS Ganymede or the British transport opened fire with heavy AA batteries. Excessive humidity and shock of gunfire rendered sound powered battle-phones ineffective. Based on sounds of approaching aircraft and bursts from USS San Pablo's radar-controlled AA guns, position of aircraft judged to be bearing 050 Mag., Elev. 10,000 feet, position angle 45°. Megaphoned orders to both 3-inch guns for 6-second fuze and sight-angle of 600 m., placing guns under local control with orders to open fire if and when location of aircraft determined.

2205: Gun 10 (stern - nearest approaching aircraft) fired 7 rounds at rate of 20 R.P.M. USS San Pablo and shore batteries still firing. Sounds of A/C motors sheered off to their left and receded in direction of Dreger Bay. Three bomb blasts heard from shore, bearing 160 Mag. 1500-3000 yards away. Estimated size of bombs 500 lbs. and 100 lbs. Speed of planes estimated at 200 knots. British transport weighed anchor and steamed out of bay. All ships in bay ceased firing; shore batteries on south shore continued firing.

2206: Shore batteries ceased firing.

Unofficial report of damage (caused apparently by 3 bomb blasts bearing 160 Mag. between 2205 and 2206): Small bomb fell in No. 2 hold of SS John Muir, moored to wharf just across point of land separating Langemak and Dreger bays, wounding 4 men. One large bomb fell on shore alongside SS John Muir, perforating side of SS John Muir above water-line, killing 2 men and injuring 17. One large bomb fell on shore between Langemak and Dreger Bays near site where outdoor movie was in progress, killing 2 men and injuring 26.

Log #4112

(c) Contacts and action with enemy (Cont'd). (Local time)

2228: All clear signaled by R.A.N.O.I.C. NOTE: No signal for an alert was received. Apparently the enemy aircraft closely followed a returning flight of U.S. Army night-fighters and thus avoided detection by Radar.

Jan. 24, 1944, 2005-2105:

2005: R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled Red Alert. Ship blacked out, and all hands called to general quarters.

2010: A/A fire and several bomb blasts heard ashore, bearing 315 True.

2015: A/A fire heard ashore, bearing 135 True

2105: R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled All clear. Received no report of damage, if any. NOTE: Weather clear, smooth sea, wind NW force 2, 88°f.

Jan. 29, 1944, 1601-1617:

1601: R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled Red Alert. Called all hands to general quarters. Weather heavy overcast, wind calm, smooth sea, 78°f.

1604: One heavy explosion heard to southward. Unofficial information is that one bomb was dropped and fell in Dreger Bay near a U.S. LC-T, killing 2 men and injuring others, in the LC-T.

1617: R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled All Clear.

Jan. 31, 1944, 1425-1505: Weather heavy overcast, wind calm, smooth sea, 90°f.

1425: One small, fighter-type monoplane, closely resembling the U.S. Army fighter "Thunderbolt", flying eastward at about 250 knots came over the nearest hill on shore, bearing 270° True, at tree-top level, swooped down at little more than mast-height level directly over this ship. The approach was so swift and unexpected that its markings, if any, were not distinguished by the 3 A/A lookouts on duty. "Thunderbolts" had been flying about during the day, and the lookouts took the aircraft to be a "Thunderbolt" until it passed so close above the ship. All hands called to general quarters. The aircraft continued eastward, climbing to about 2,500 feet, passing directly over an unidentified EC-2 cargo ship under way with no way upon her, bearing 090° True about 1500 yards from own ship, dropping one bomb. (Unofficial information indicates that the bomb exploded on the other side of the EC-2 cargo ship, a near miss, killing one man and injuring several others).

1426: The enemy plane disappeared in the overcast flying eastward, U.S. Army fighters taking off in pursuit. (Unofficial information indicates that the enemy plane was shot down by one of the pursuing fighters.)

1505: R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled All Clear. (No signal for an Alert was ever received).

Feb. 3, 1944, 1950-1954: Partly cloudy, smooth sea, wind E force 1, 84°f.

1950: Sound of brisk A/A fire heard from north side of bay. All hands called to general quarters. No aircraft sighted.

1954: R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled All Clear.

(c) Contacts and action with enemy (Cont'd) (Local time)

- Feb. 6, 1944; Feb. 7, 1944, 2250-0005: Cloudy, calm, smooth sea, thin spotty overcast, 80°f., faint diffused moonlight.
- 2250: Heard sounds of several aircraft passing overhead, above clouds, from North to South. Two unidentified aircraft seen to pass overhead, under clouds, North to South. Estimated speed 200 knots. A/A batteries on South shore opened fire on described aircraft. Blacked out ship. Called all hands to general quarters.
- 2251: Several of other ships in bay (thought to include USS San Pablo, anchored 400 yards, bearing 170 Mag. from own ship, and USS Gany-mede, anchored 100 yards, bearing 160 Mag. from own ship) opened fire with major A/A batteries. Searchlights from North and South shores of bay played on departing aircraft.
- 2252: A/A fire from ships in bay ceased. R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled Red Alert. Sporadic A/A fire continued from batteries on South shore of bay. Four explosions heard to Southward. (Unofficial information indicates that four bombs fell on shore near U.S. Army air strip, but without damage.)
- 2253: All A/A fire ceased.
- 0005: (Feb. 7): R.A.N.O.I.C. signaled All Clear.

Enclosure (A) names all Naval Armed Guard, and Communications Liason personnel on board during the alerts and raids described above.

Burke { (d) General resume of voyage: Average speeds: Townsville to Milne Bay 7.1 K.; Milne Bay to Finschafen (Langemak Bay) 8.1 K.; Finschafen (Langemak Bay) to Milne Bay 8.4 K.; Milne Bay to Melbourne 10.5 K. Lights shown: Running, mast-head and range lights (shown only inside Great Barrier Reef and off East coast of New Guinea as instructed by routing instructions.). Vessel zig-zagged in accordance with routing instructions. /Received, Dec. 21, 1943, from Ordnance Officer, Naval Base, Milne Bay, two .30 Cal. Remington (Springfield model) service rifles, complete with bayonets, scabbards, cartridge belts, and 600 rounds of ammunition. While anchored in Milne Bay, Dec. 22, 1943, Cathcart, Roy Edward, SI/c, 631 07 96, on duty as security watch, was accidentally shot through both thighs with a lead bullet from a .38 Cal. revolver (no misconduct). Hospitalized at 84th C.B. Naval Dispensary, Gamadodo, until January 10, 1944. Recovery complete and uneventful. /At 0056, Jan. 12, 1944, en route from Milne Bay to Finschafen, own ship side-swiped SS Schwartenhondt in rain and fog. Only superficial damage to both vessels. SS Schwartenhondt, apparently stopped, was out of station in convoy, and was not burning running lights, masthead or range lights, or stern light. Own ship was in station and burning running, masthead, range, and stern lights at diminished brilliancy in accordance with instructions. SS Schwartenhondt was invisible from forecastle head and bridge of own ship until too near to avoid contact. Serious damage was narrowly averted only by prompt action in putting rudder of own ship right full.

(e) Delays in port: Vessel was anchored for 29 days in the harbor at Townsville, Queensland, Australia, awaiting orders to proceed to Milne Bay, Papua, New Guinea. Vessel was anchored and moored in Milne Bay for 58 days, during which period the vessel was almost completely discharged, and then reloaded with most of the cargo discharged, plus additional cargo. Vessel was anchored in Langemak Bay (Finschafen) for 25 days, during which period it was completely discharged. As nearly as can be determined from observation and enquiry, all of the delays were due to lack of port facilities, and lack of adequate and experienced longshoremen at Milne Bay and Finschafen. The deficiencies in port facilities and number of longshoremen are rapidly being repaired. The value of experience in the work of discharging cargo is being lost at Milne Bay (Australian personnel excepted) because working parties engaged in discharging cargo are continually being transferred to other work, and replaced by other inexperienced men.


(f) The commercial radio operator appeared to carry out wartime radio instructions for merchant vessels, in all respects.

(g) Defects and deficiencies: 20MM machine gun No. 8 still lacks a telephone outlet (jack-box). Telephone outlet (jack-box) at bow 3" 50 Cal. gun should be transferred from forward splinter shield to base of gun mount.

(h) Master, and ship's officers carried out "Wartime Instructions for United States Merchant Vessels", - with the exception of the Second Officer, Mr. Herbert W. Bender (Book or Certificate of Identification No. Z-15811), who, despite warnings and complaints to the Master, frequently persists in smoking and using an open flashlight after dark on the flying bridge, and in failing to man his assigned battle station when the signal is sounded for "All hands to general quarters". This has occasioned no ill-will. It is simply a matter of fact.

(i) Recommendations: None.

(j) Improper procedure on the part of friendly aircraft: None.


JOHN H. TODD
Lieut., D-V(S), U.S.N.R.

RECEIVED

OFFICE OF NAVAL ATTACHE

31 SEPTEMBER 1945

NAVY DEPARTMENT