

Op-16-B-5

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON 25 DC

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1 Mar 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the MV CAPE ROMANO, U.S. Freighter, 5105 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by Lykes Brothers Steamship Co.

1. The CAPE ROMANO was damaged by two air attacks while at anchor in San Pedro Bay, Leyte, P.I. - the first at approximately 2010 GCT, 27 Oct 44 and the second at 2315 GCT, 18 Nov 44. Vessel sailed from Hollandia 18 Oct in convoy and arrived at Tacloban, Leyte 24 Oct, cargo unknown. Vessel did not sink but returned to San Francisco 10 Jan 45 under her own power.

2. At time of first attack ship was anchored on a southwesterly heading 1500 yards due east of beach near San Ricardo, 2500 yards SE of Tacloban airstrip. Armed Guard standing by and sleeping at guns after 4 days of almost continuous general quarters. Weather was overcast, obscured half moon prevailing and visibility only a few hundred feet due to low hanging clouds and artificial smoke. At time of second attack ship was at anchor about 2,000 yards off Red Beach opposite the mouth of the Palo River, heading North; Armed Guard at general quarters. There was a low overcast with clouds obscuring visibility above 1000' altitude 1500'. During both attacks other ships in the harbor were visible.

3. At approximately 2010, 27 Oct, and while San Pedro Bay shipping was being subjected to a general air attack, a sneak bomber glided down with engines cut and passed over ship - estimated altitude 500'. Plane approached ship on the starboard quarter and was on a Southeasterly course. Bombs, variously estimated from 3-5, were dropped, 2 falling near the ship. First bomb fell on or near a USS vessel lying about 500 yards off the starboard quarter. Second bomb fell off the starboard bow at a distance estimated 15-50 yards, causing severe concussion and holing the hull in numerous places on starboard side. Third bomb fell about 50-100 yards off the port bow and, although the concussion from the explosion was severe, no material damage was suffered.

At 2315, 18 Nov, a flight of 3 Jap planes approached from dead astern, emerging from the cloud overcast, distance 2,500 - 5,000 yards, altitude 1,000' - 1,500'. When first sighted the 3 planes bore about 170° relative. One plane crash-dived the SS ALCOA PIONEER about 800 yards to port and one crash-dived the MV GENERAL FLEISCHER, about 1,000 yards to starboard. The third plane came in slightly to starboard of dead astern in a steady dive and, had it maintained its course, apparently would have hit the center of the bridge. Guns #3, #5, #7, #6, & #8 opened fire on the plane, range 1200-1300 yds. Two of the guns jammed but the other tracked the plane on down, firing constantly. No gun expended a full magazine. One gunner believed he killed the pilot a few hundred feet away and estimated that at least 30 shells from his gun went into the fuselage. Plane turned sharply to port 200' away and carried to port side of ship. Plane first struck the port side of the bridge, shearing 2' off plane's starboard wing; then struck gun tub stanchion and life rail on the deck below, shearing 6' more off the same wing and then crashed into the sea to port at a point opposite #3 hatch where it exploded immediately upon contact with the water. Explosion appeared to come from within the fuselage

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and blew small bits of the pilot, wing, fuselage and motor over the forward deck. Fragments from the explosion penetrated the port side in 11 places in the vicinity of #3 hatch, the largest hole being about 3" in diameter. Fragments penetrated almost horizontally at 6' level, and from there upward at varying angles, as evidenced by markings on the kingpost and mast. Some fragments penetrated the life rafts at the same angle at which they were mounted and passed through the tanks in a straight line from the lower end to the upper end of the raft. Although gasoline oil and water were thrown onto the deck, no fire resulted and no appreciable slick was observed where plane sank indicating that there was probably a very small supply of gasoline left in the plane. Mud as well as water was thrown onto the deck, indicating an underwater explosion. One survivor stated that he saw a bomb fall clear of the plane just before it crashed into the water and that there were 2 explosions one apparently the explosion of the plane itself and the other the explosion of the bomb. Plane did not strafe the ship. No information obtained regarding disposition of ship's confidential publications but it is assumed that they were retained on board.

4. Ship was not abandoned at any time. As a result of the first attack only 2 merchant crew and 2 Armed Guard were wounded and hospitalized. No casualties resulted from the second attack.

5. Plane making the first attack was believed to have been a Jap twin-engine "Betty". Planes making the second attack were identified as Jap "Zekes".

6. The Armed Guard officer believed fragmentation bombs were used in first attack as they exploded immediately upon contact with the water, making a vivid flash and causing sharp concussion in the air. The majority of bombs dropped in this area apparently exploded under water, causing little concussion in the air, but severe underwater concussion.

Survivors were of the opinion that the Jap plane in first attack had for its original target the Tacloban airstrip but when picked up by searchlights from shore installations shifted her attack to ships in the harbor. This observation is supported by the opinion that the bombs were fragmentation and anti-personnel bombs ordinarily not used against shipping in the Leyte Gulf area. Plane was not believed to have been hit by gunfire from shore-batteries and continued in a South-easterly direction.

At time of second attack ship was at anchor and there were no ships to the South of it for approximately 10 miles. There were no shore anti-aircraft installations to the South of Red Beach area making it possible for Jap planes to attack from the South without warning.

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Lieut., USNR.

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