

Op-16-B-5

NAVY DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
WASHINGTON 25 D C

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12 Jan 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

ALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS FORT DEARBORN, U.S. Tanker, 10,448 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, under charter to U.S. Navy.

1. The FORT DEARBORN was attacked by enemy aircraft at 0400 20 Nov 44 in 10.36N - 150.51E, having sailed from Ulithi 18 Nov enroute to Eniwetok in an escorted convoy with the SS BALL'S BLUFF and the SS MISSION BUENAVENTURA. Ship was in water ballast; mean draft 21'. Ship did not sink but continued under her own power to Eniwetok arriving 22 Nov.

2. Ship was on course 90°T; speed 14.5 knots; not zigzagging; radio silent; all hands at General Quarters. The weather was moderate with low clouds; sea smooth wind E, force 3; daylight, sun bearing about 240°T, height 20°, visibility 8 - 9 miles. The 3 ships were in a "V" formation - the BALL'S BLUFF and the FORT DEARBORN were abeam with the FORT DEARBORN on the starboard and the MISSION BUENAVENTURA astern. Approximately 1800' separated each ship. Another convoy was approximately 10 - 15 miles astern.

3. At 2400 19 Nov escorts gave warning that enemy planes were in the vicinity and at 0350 20 Nov that they were approaching. At 0355 planes appeared and attacked convoy for approximately 1½ hours making an estimated 15 separate attempts to bomb and strafe ship. Five to seven bombs were dropped - one striking the water 500' astern of ship. Only one run was successful and ship was strafed from astern to the bow. Ship suffered scarred marks on the aft gun tubs, mid forecastle and topside of bridge, forward covered deck and on the well deck. Two 20 mm magazines were ripped open and made unusable. Cargo light on the port side of the bridge and the tiller in #4 lifeboat were shattered. One stanchion on the navigational bridge was blown open. The mid forecastle bulkheads were dotted with 25 caliber and 20 mm hits. The radio antennae and one insulator were damaged. The damage to the ship did not impair its operation. At 0457 entire convoy made a 45° left turn, maintaining the "V" formation. At 0530 convoy altered course to 68°T and later resumed the base course of 90°T. No distress signal was sent. Fire was opened, range 6 miles and 35 rounds were fired by the 5"38; 4 rounds by the 3"50 and 4,000 rounds by the 20 mm. All the ships in the convoy threw up an effective curtain of fire. No hits on the planes were observed. Confidential codes were retained aboard.

Ship was not abandoned. Total ship's complement 86 including 49 merchant crew, 28 Armed Guard and 9 U.S.N. passengers. Four merchant crew and 1 Armed Guard were injured but all survived.

5. Survivors of the attack on the FORT DEARBORN stated convoy was attacked by an estimated 9 planes thought to be 3 Zekes and 6 Vals painted dark gray with a rising sun on both wings. Crew members of the SS BALL'S BLUFF, another ship in the convoy, stated that they were attacked by 4-6 planes painted dark gray or black with a red circle visible on the fuselage. One of the planes was identified as a Japanese type "O" Mark II "Hap". The rest were believed to be "Vals" or "Sonias". Members of the crew of the SS MISSION BUENAVENTURA, including the Armed Guard officer, believed the planes to be "Kates". Their color was described as dark green

*File Incl  
x 4 Survivors (19)  
x Navy Corp (19)*

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paw*

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Op-16-B-5

SS FORT DEARBORN

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with the Japanese red sun visible on the wings.

Survivors of the FORT DEARBORN stated that the planes used the clouds astern of the convoy to great advantage. Bombs were released while planes were 1,000 yards astern of ship bearing 180°. A 45° dive release was employed from 500'. The strafing attack on the FORT DEARBORN was made from a height of 500 yards bearing 180° relative. Crew members of the BALL'S BLUFF stated planes released bombs while 1,000' - 2,000' astern bearing 230° using a dive release from 3,000'. Crew members of the MISSION BUENAVENTURA stated that bombs were released while planes were 1,000' astern bearing 170° and that a 55° dive release was employed from approximately 1,000 yards.

Bombs were estimated to be from 100 to 500 pounds, exploding on contact with the water.

Planes departed at 0515 in the direction of Truk Island.

6. The Armed Guard officer of the FORT DEARBORN suggested that T.B.Y. sets be transferred from the bridge to his battle station on the flying bridge.

Members of the ship's complement of the SS BALL'S BLUFF stated that the attack occurred at 0410 20 Nov in position 10.45N - 150.48E while those aboard the SS MISSION BUENAVENTURA stated that they were attacked at 0335 20 Nov in position 10.37N - 150.40E. The SS BALL'S BLUFF suffered no damage or casualties in the attack. One bomb fell within an estimated 20 yards of the SS MISSION BUENAVENTURA, scarring the starboard #4 tank. No casualties were suffered aboard the ship nor was there further damage.

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