

Op-16-B-5

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

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20 Jan 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

ALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS JEREMIAH M. DAILY, American Freighter, 7176 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by American South African Line, Inc.

1. The JEREMIAH M. DAILY was damaged by an enemy aircraft at about 0616 GCT, 12 Nov 44, while at anchor in San Pedro Bay, Leyte Gulf, having sailed from Hollandia, New Guinea 5 Nov in a convoy for Leyte, Philippine Islands, loaded with approximately 800 U.S. Army troops as passengers, and a cargo consisting primarily of their gear which included quartermaster, engineering and hospital supplies, and a deck cargo of trucks loaded with gasoline and general supplies. Vessel did not sink but emergency repairs were made and ship departed Leyte Gulf 27 November.

2. Ship arrived in port at 0012 12 Nov and anchored in berth #30 at 0200; 8 lookouts were on watch. Weather was clear with low, scattered clouds; wind East force 2; sun at a height of 70° bearing 210° relative to the ship, which was lying on a NE heading, visibility good, and an estimated 100 ships at anchor in the area were in sight.

3. At 0616 lookouts reported 4 planes approaching from the NE over Samar Island. General quarters were immediately sounded. While men were taking their battle stations 2 of the planes flying together at a height about 1500' were seen to head towards the DAILY. When approximately 3 miles away the 2 planes commenced diving simultaneously at an angle of 45° with one of the planes continuing her dive and crashing into a Liberty ship lying approximately 1 mile to starboard. The other plane pulled out of the dive at 150' and dropped one or two bombs on a ship lying 1000 yards off the starboard bow, then swerved at mast height and crashed into the forward starboard corner of the wheelhouse of the DAILY. The plane crashed through the bridge protection into the wheelhouse and a bomb presumed to be incendiary from holes burned in the deck, was believed to have been knocked loose and exploded by a guy wire to the booms on #3 hatch, which were lowered. Flaming gasoline and parts of the plane ignited a quantity of range fuel which was stored abreast #3 hatch, port side, blocking the port alleyway. On the bridge deck the wheelhouse, chartroom Master's office and quarters, and all bridge equipment were completely destroyed by impact and fire from exploding plane. Radio room and equipment, Armed Guard officer's and radio operator's quarters were destroyed almost immediately by explosion and burning gasoline. On the boat deck the Chief Mate's quarters, starboard side forward, were completely destroyed by explosion and fragments of plane ripping through from topside. Cadet quarters forward amidships completely destroyed, and other officers' quarters on boat deck damaged from fire and fragments. Lifeboats No. 1 and No. 3 starboard side and davits were destroyed. On the main deck the range fuel stowed abreast No. 3 hatch caused fires throughout the deckhouse on the port side and caused extensive injuries and loss of life to Army personnel on deck in that vicinity and quartered in No. 3 hold. The main steam line and exhaust line forward and opposite No. 3 hatch, were punctured and torn. Only counter offensive offered was the #5 20 mm gun, forward starboard wing of bridge, which expended 15-20 rounds and was reported to have hit the plane before it crashed. Fire was brought

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under control in 4 hours with the assistance of a U.S. Navy fire boat. Troops and cargo were discharged and after emergency repairs ship sailed from Leyte Gulf. No information secured concerning disposition of confidential codes but it is assumed that they were retained on board.

4. Ship was not abandoned but the troops and the wounded were put ashore. Total complement on board was 868; including 39 merchant crew, 29 Armed Guard and approximately 800 U.S. Army troops as passengers. Three merchant crew, 2 Armed Guard & approximately 80-100 troops were killed. One merchant crew is missing and presumed dead. Fifteen merchant crew and Armed Guard were injured, 5 of whom were left in hospitals in forward areas and approximately 150 troops were injured. Flaming gasoline, parts of the plane, and fire from the range fuel caused a number of casualties among the troops on deck forward.

5. Description of the plane is not available. It is unknown whether plane had one or two engines. The majority of survivors believed the plane to be single engined although 2 men interviewed stated that they had pushed one engine overboard while one additional engine was still aboard upon arrival in San Francisco.

6. Survivors stated that they witnessed numerous additional bombing and crash dive attacks upon shipping in the area during their 16 days in port. They stated that in general crash dive attacks were made by single engine, fixed landing gear planes of Val or Mate type, although 2 engine bombers, when damaged, would also execute crash dive attacks. The pilots appeared to pick 2 targets, bombing the first and diving into the second. Dives were commenced from heights of 1500' to 4000' an angle of dive varied from 45° to 60°. Planes in most instances appeared to be undamaged when commencing their dives. Variance of this plan was observed in 2 instances when planes dropped their bombs on a target and then circled to ram the original target.

Survivors stated that ship's personnel was given no specific warning of the continued possibility of air raids in this area by the port authorities on arrival, with the result that guns were not more fully manned at the time general quarters were sounded and only one gun was in action at time of the attack.

Survivors stated that the material composing the bridge protection was reported to contain a large percentage of asphalt or some other petroleum product which burned fiercely when ignited by burning gasoline and was very difficult to extinguish. Several survivors suggested that this material should either be fire-proofed or, if that was not possible, a substitute material developed for this purpose.

It was reported that the Armed Guard officer sustained fatal burns from the flash of the explosion, which might have been avoided if he had been fully clothed.

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