

Op-16-B-5

NAVY DEPARTMENT

CONFIDENTIAL

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

7 April 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statement by Survivors of the SS KYLE V. JOHNSON, U.S. Freighter, 7247 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by the Waterman Steamship Co.

1. The KYLE V. JOHNSON was damaged by a Jap plane at approximately 1030 GCT, 12 Jan 45, D.R. position 15.12N - 119.30E, having sailed from Hollandia 3 Jan in convoy arriving at Lingayen Gulf, P.I. 13 Jan, carrying approximately 500 U.S. Army personnel and about 2500 tons of vehicles and gasoline in drums; vehicles and gasoline in all the lower holds, Army personnel and vehicles in all the 'tween decks; draft 13'2" forward, 17'4" aft, 15'3" mean. Vessel arrived in port, cargo was discharged, casualties removed, troops disembarked and temporary repairs effected to enable ship to return to the United States.

2. Ship was on course approximately due North, speed 9 - 9.5 knots, not zig-zagging, gun crew at condition 2, merchant crew lookouts on the forecandle, in the crow's nest and on the bridge and, in addition, 6 Army lookouts were on duty. Weather was cloudy, smooth sea and swell, wind NE force 2, daylight but sun had set. Convoy consisted of about 100 ships, including 40 merchant ships and about the same number of LSTs, rest consisting of PT boats. Escorts consisted of approximately 9 DDs and DEs. Convoy was in 3 sections; forward section of LSTs, next section of 5 columns of merchant ships, JOHNSON's position #51, first ship in starboard column; the PT boats followed astern.

3. At approximately 1030 convoy was attacked without warning by 4-10 Jap planes. Planes when first sighted were at an estimated altitude of 5,000-7,000', distant about 2-3 miles, and approached from several directions. As range closed, fire was opened by the bow 3" 50 cal. gun, which was directed at a plane approaching from the port bow. A plane was then observed bearing 040°R diving toward the ship at an estimated angle of 35°. The 3" 50 cal. gun was trained to starboard and with the 20 mm's brought the attacking plane under fire. Nos. 3 and 9 20 mm guns jammed on the first drum and were not subsequently fired. Hits were observed from the #5 and #7 20 mm guns, and plane was seen to be smoking as it dived for the ship. Plane crashed into the starboard side in way of #3 'tween deck immediately aft of the #3 forward bulkhead, the wing hit the bulwark, plane went through the shell plating into the 'tween deck compartment and through the #3 'tween deck into the lower hold. There was a blinding flash and an explosion so heavy it blew the steel hatch beams above the flying bridge. Fire immediately broke out and extended from aft of the #2 hatch to aft of the midship housing on the starboard side. Speed was immediately reduced from 58 to 20 revolutions and vessel dropped out of the convoy to starboard to fight the fire with a DE standing by. Approximately 7 fire hoses with good pressure were put in operation, #3 hold was flooded and within 15 minutes the fire was brought under control. Within an hour or two it had been substantially extinguished and vessel rejoined the convoy. After flooding, ship's draft increased to 16' forward, 18'10" aft and 17'5" mean. Principal items of damage included the following: hole in starboard side of shell plating in way of the forward end of #3 'tween deck about 10' in diameter; hole in starboard side forward end of #3 'tween deck from the forward bulkhead extending aft 20'; degaussing burned; forward bulkhead #3 'tween deck starboard side bulged forward;

CONFIDENTIAL

file fine

All copies
 1. Summary
 2. Summary
 3. Summary
 4. Summary
 5. Summary
 6. Summary
 7. Summary
 8. Summary
 9. Summary
 10. Summary
 11. Summary
 12. Summary
 13. Summary
 14. Summary
 15. Summary
 16. Summary
 17. Summary
 18. Summary
 19. Summary
 20. Summary
 21. Summary
 22. Summary
 23. Summary
 24. Summary
 25. Summary
 26. Summary
 27. Summary
 28. Summary
 29. Summary
 30. Summary
 31. Summary
 32. Summary
 33. Summary
 34. Summary
 35. Summary
 36. Summary
 37. Summary
 38. Summary
 39. Summary
 40. Summary
 41. Summary
 42. Summary
 43. Summary
 44. Summary
 45. Summary
 46. Summary
 47. Summary
 48. Summary
 49. Summary
 50. Summary
 51. Summary
 52. Summary
 53. Summary
 54. Summary
 55. Summary
 56. Summary
 57. Summary
 58. Summary
 59. Summary
 60. Summary
 61. Summary
 62. Summary
 63. Summary
 64. Summary
 65. Summary
 66. Summary
 67. Summary
 68. Summary
 69. Summary
 70. Summary
 71. Summary
 72. Summary
 73. Summary
 74. Summary
 75. Summary
 76. Summary
 77. Summary
 78. Summary
 79. Summary
 80. Summary
 81. Summary
 82. Summary
 83. Summary
 84. Summary
 85. Summary
 86. Summary
 87. Summary
 88. Summary
 89. Summary
 90. Summary
 91. Summary
 92. Summary
 93. Summary
 94. Summary
 95. Summary
 96. Summary
 97. Summary
 98. Summary
 99. Summary
 100. Summary

SS KYLE V. JOHNSON (US), Contd.

7 April 1945

after bulkhead starboard side #3 'tween deck bulged aft and holed; 2 hatch beams lost and 2 badly bent; 5 vertical frames on the starboard side of #3 lower hold burned and bent; 12 vertical frames on the after bulkhead of #3 lower hold bent; after bulkhead in #3 lower hold sprung; starboard side bulwark in way of #2 mast stove in; #3 main deck and 'tween deck hatch covers missing; wireless antenna carried away; inward bulge in hull on starboard side from halfway aft of #2 hatch extending aft about 60' and miscellaneous damage to ship's gear, wiring, sounding pipes, stanchions, tarpaulins, life boats, signal equipment, ventilators, telephones, etc. Temporary repairs were made in port and ship has returned to the United States. Within a few minutes after ship was damaged other planes were observed attacking. One was showing a green light and approached from the port side. It was claimed the aft 5" 38 cal. gun shot this plane down. By this time it had become dark. It was estimated the entire action lasted about 15 minutes. Three planes, including the one which crashed into the ship, were claimed destroyed. Total ammunition expended: 18 rounds of 5", 38 rounds of 3", and 596 rounds of 20 mm. During the action there was intense gunfire by other ships of the convoy. No information was secured concerning disposition of confidential codes but it is assumed that they were retained aboard the ship.

4. Ship was not abandoned but upon arriving in port casualties were disembarked. Of the U.S. Army troops aboard, 128 were killed or missing and presumed dead. One merchant crew missing presumed dead and one injured. All of the Armed Guard survived - one wounded and hospitalized. There were heavy casualties among the Army troops quartered in #3 'tween deck.

5. Plane was described as a low wing monoplane, single, radial engine, retractable landing gear, painted dark green, no gun turrets observed. Propeller hub found after the crash indicated it had 4 blades.

6. Survivors believed that the plane carried incendiaries, and reported that phosphorus was seen floating on the surface of the water of #3 hold after flooding. In view of the extreme mutilation of many bodies, apparently by concussion, the fact that the steel hatch beams were blown over the flying bridge and the occurrence of other similar incidents all evidencing a terrific explosion, it was assumed that the plane also carried explosives. Since no bombs were seen as the plane dived for the ship, it was believed that explosives might have been carried in the fuselage.

Survivors criticized the convoy position assigned to subject vessel, first ship of the starboard column in the merchant ship section. It was recommended that vessels carrying large numbers of troops be given the better protection afforded by a position in the interior of the convoy.

The Master expressed the opinion that the loss of life might have been reduced somewhat if the troops had been more evenly distributed among the various ships rather than concentrated in a few. He asserted that although there were 40 or more merchant ships only a few had troops aboard.

Survivors criticized placing all the LST's in one section of the convoy. This distribution concentrated the heaviest fire power in one section, leaving the merchant ship section astern relatively unprotected. Survivors said that since LST's are equipped with 40-mm's and more 20-mm's and have much heavier fire power than merchant ships, planes often avoid them when other targets are available. They asserted that a more even protection for all ships would be afforded by distributing LST's throughout the convoy.

CONFIDENTIAL

SS KYLE V. JOHNSON (US), Contd.

7 April 45

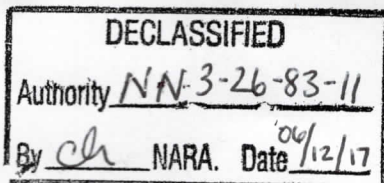
Survivors, including the gunnery officer, agreed that 20-mm guns are powerless to repel dive-bomb attacks. They stated that a plane in a dive cannot be downed unless it is blown apart by 40-mm or heavier gunfire, and urged that vessels routed to areas where such attacks are likely be equipped with 40-mm's wherever possible.

Survivors related that during the voyage from Hollandia to a point approximately abeam of Manila Bay, the convoy had the benefit of air coverage. Escorting planes made a practice of flying over the convoy rather than circling in the distance. During the voyage north of Manila Bay no air coverage was furnished. When enemy planes attacked, at first some confusion arose as to their nationality since the tactics of the escorting planes had been not unlike those of the Japanese planes when preparing to attack. It was recommended that escorting planes be instructed to stay at a reasonable distance from the convoy so that whenever planes passed directly over the convoy it could be assumed that they were enemy planes.

It was pointed out that in many instances planes had crashed in the area of No. 3 hatch, presumably because of its proximity to the midship housing and bridge. In view of such experiences it was recommended that troops not be quartered in No. 3 hold.

The stowing of gasoline beneath troops was criticized. Gasoline was stowed in No. 5 lower hold with troops quartered in No. 5 'tween deck. It was believed that had this condition existed in No. 3 hold where the plane crashed, there would have been even heavier casualties.

BARBARA CONARD
Lt. (jg) USNR



DISSEMINATION: Op-16-E-2, 16-P-1, 16-PT, 16-Z(5 copies), Op-20-G, Op-23-L, Op-30-M, Op-39-P-3(2 copies), COMINCH F-20, F-21, F-41, FX-43, FX-45, AFASU, BuOrd, CG(4 cop) Coord Res & Dev, DIO 1, 3, 4, 5(2 copies), 6, 7(3 copies), 8(2 copies), 10(4 copies) 11(3 copies), 13, 14(4 copies), 15NDs, BuPers-535.