

Op-16-B-5

NAVY DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
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MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

ALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS MATTHEW P. DEADY, American Freighter, 7176 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by American-Hawaiian Steamship Co.

1. The MATTHEW P. DEADY was damaged by Japanese aircraft at 2135 GCT, 2 Nov 1944, while at anchor in Tacloban Bay, Leyte, P.I., having sailed from Hollandia 23 Oct in convoy, arriving at San Pedro Bay, Leyte, P.I., 29 Oct; loaded with approximately 900 U.S. Army troops as passengers and a cargo of approximately 5500 tons consisting of the troops' gear, drums of gasoline, trucks, acetylene tanks, sulphuric acid and general military stores. On 2 Nov convoy moved anchorage to Tacloban Bay. Vessel did not sink and returned to Hollandia under her own power.

2. Ship was at anchor, crew at general quarters, completely blacked out. The sky was clear with scattered clouds, wind West force 2-3, visibility limited, about 10-15 ships in sight of about 100 ships in harbor. Moon, which was almost full, had just gone down and it was just before daybreak.

3. At about 2125 an air raid alert consisting of 3 star shells from shore, was observed by lookouts. General quarters was called and immediately thereafter several planes were heard in the harbor area. At 2135 a Jap plane was sighted approximately 1000 yards away, approaching ship 2 points on the starboard quarter. Plane dropped a stick of bombs about 100 yards astern and then started strafing ship with machine gun fire. Plane, strafing continually, swerved over ship's stern, passed to port and flew alongside, then swerved back and crashed into the #2 gun tub, which is situated abreast #1 hatch on the port side. Plane was taken under fire by #9 - 20 mm gun, as soon as it was sighted. Tracers from this gun showed that gunner was making direct hits, and a small flame was noted under the plane as it passed over the stern. Plane was then fired on by #2 gun which also made direct hits and which kept firing until the plane crashed into it. As the plane crashed into #2 gun tub there was an immediate explosion and then a second explosion as part of the plane hit #1 gun tub. First explosion set fire to gasoline, acetylene and oxygen tanks stored under and forward of #2 gun tub while the flash of the second explosion set fire to the remainder of the forward deck load, consisting of gasoline range fuel for the Army mess stoves and approximately 300 acetylene and oxygen tanks. The terrific heat produced caused 20 mm ammunition in the #2 ready boxes to explode, spraying the entire ship with fragments. Flames spread forward to the bow and threatened to engulf the 3" 50 ammunition magazine and ready boxes of the #1 gun. Master ordered abandon ship stations in order to assemble his crew, and from these stations he ordered crew to fire stations. Armed Guard stood by the guns in case of further attack, while members of the merchant crew played water over the entire area forward of #3 hatch and threw a wall of water around the gasoline, acetylene and oxygen tanks. Water was kept on the forward gun tub and ready boxes and the area of the forward magazine. Fire was brought under control within an hour.

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File 75 Matthew P. Deady (2)  
+ Survivors (12)  
x Navy Corps (15)  
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There was a hole 1' square in hull on starboard side aft just below aft ammunition magazine about 10' above water line and 40' forward of screw, believed to have been caused by stick of bombs dropped astern when plane started its strafing run. No. 2 gun and tub completely demolished and #1 gun position damaged due to fire and excessive heat. Deck buckled downward near #2 gun where plane hit; bulwark bent outward at that point; 2 small holes about 3" in diameter burned in deck as a result of burning acetylene. Horizontal and vertical framing, shell plating and upper strakes forward damaged as result of fire and heat. Cargo gear, booms and deck machinery for #1 and #2 burned and weakened. Interior of #1 hatch burned and #1 hatch cover boards destroyed. Main engines were not damaged. Machinery damage restricted to deck gear such as booms and winches on #1 and #2 hatches. At about 2150 five Jap dive bombers came in over ship and the immediate area, dropping anti-personnel bombs and strafing the ship and personnel in the water who had been blown over the side or had jumped to escape the fire. One of these planes was shot down by 20 mm guns aboard ship, and a second plane was listed as probably destroyed as it was smoking heavily when last seen. No information available regarding disposition of confidential codes but it is assumed that they were retained on board.

4. Ship was not ordered abandoned but some of the personnel was blown overboard by the explosion or jumped overboard to escape the fire. Total complement on board was 744, including 37 merchant crew, 27 Armed Guard and approximately 680 U.S. Army troops as passengers. Entire merchant crew survived. Two Armed Guard missing from #2 gun tub, 25 survived. Of the Army passengers, 22 were killed, 35 missing and an unknown number injured, 4 of whom subsequently died. About 220 troops had been discharged the previous day. Most of the Army casualties were the result of the initial crash and explosion. Army personnel sleeping on the main deck, port side, were burned by the first flash of the explosion, some were blown overboard and other jumped overboard to escape the fire. Fragments of the plane and bursting ammunition injured several, some were hit by strafing and a few were injured by 20 mm shells exploded by heat.

5. The Jap plane was described as having a single motor, four bladed propeller and resembling an "Oscar". Survivors were of the opinion that Jap pilots were out to do as much damage as possible before going into their final dives. During their stay in port numerous attacks were witnessed with planes usually making a bombing run on one ship, strafing a second and finally crashing into a third. Nearly all dives were made at steep angles of 45° to 70°, and in most cases planes appeared to be undamaged prior to their final dives. In describing the tactics carried out by the Jap dive squadrons, survivors stated that at about 0930, 12 Nov, 2 groups of Jap planes appeared at about 3000', one group consisting of 7 planes and the other of 6 planes. No air raid warning had been given by shore authorities. Two Jap planes were shot down by P-38's. The rest began circling and peeling off preparatory to diving on ships. Of the 11 planes, 5 were seen to crash into vessels while 6 missed their targets and crashed into the bay.

6. On 12 Nov 44, while anchored about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile off Dulag, Leyte, P.I., ship was again under attack. Because of the suddenness of this second attack, survivors were unable to give a full description of what happened. Three single-engine Japanese planes (probably Zeros) were seen coming in from the West. It was later learned that no air raid warning signal was given as the planes had followed in from the West some U.S. Army C-47's which were preparing to land. The planes immediately began diving

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SS MATTHEW P. DEADY

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upon and attacking 3 ships lying about 800 - 900 yards North and West of the MATTHEW P. DEADY. One of the planes came in on the starboard beam attempting to strafe ship. No. 9 gun took plane under fire at 300 yards. Plane was observed to catch fire. It drifted slightly upward and, overshooting the ship's superstructure, carried away the radio aerial and fell harmlessly into the water on the port side.

Survivors made the following comments and suggestions:

Military personnel carried as passengers on Liberty-type ships should be taken off immediately upon reaching the battle zones. Jap planes appear to single out for attack ships crowded with troops.

The air raid warning system ashore on Leyte is apparently not adequate, as ships were often under attack before the crew was aware an air raid was under way.

Barrage balloons should be used to combat the Jap dive planes.

U.S. Army troops should be provided with life jackets as many men were lost as they were unable to swim after being blown over the side. The Armed Guard crew passed out all spare life jackets available, but did not have nearly enough to take care of the number of men aboard.

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