

TACTICAL STUDY OF ATTACK ON CONVOY NEAR LAE, NEW GUINEA, 3/3/43

BY

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NINETIETH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (D)
THIRD BOMBARDMENT GROUP (D)

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HARLAN L. REID, 1st LIEUT. A. C.

Pilot - 1st Lieut. Harlan L. Reid
Co-pilot - F/Sgt. Langley, RAAF,
Upper Gunner - S/Sgt. Vernon C. Patterson.
Radio Gunner - Sgt. McCarthy, RAAF,

On March 3, 1943 the above crew while flying a B-25C-1 aircraft participated in a U.S.A. Air Force coordinated attack against a Japanese convoy in the Huron Gulf Area. The assembly point was Cape Ward Hunt and the force proceeded to the target. The heading was almost due north and the convoy was sighted about 50 miles off shore east of Lae. Our airplane was No. 4 in the third element of a twelve plane formation. About 15 miles out we started our decent from 5,000 feet in elements of four ships in echelon. The first element peeled off and attacked from the front. The second element peeled off and attacked from the side and the third element peeled off immediately after the second. Due to the fact that the other airplanes had already selected the first ships we were compelled to fly parallel to the convoy for some distance to attack from the rear. The convoy consisted of eight warships and seven cargo vessels and transports. I noticed intense anti-aircraft fire being directed at the high level bombers and very little at the low level attack planes. I was operating my engines at 2400 RPM, 38 inches M.P., mixture full rich, and cowl flaps closed. After peeling off I flew as close to the water as possible but allowing enough altitude for "jinking". At no time did I maintain straight and level flying. The ship I selected for my target was a transport of 7-8,000 tons moving at about 8 knots on a straight course.

I pulled up sharply to about 500 feet and made a steep diving turn to the left. I started my run about 1 1/2 miles from the ship in a broadside attack slightly to the stern from the port side. As evasive action I was changing course and altitude as rapidly as possible. When about 1800 yards from the target and at an altitude of about 150 feet I opened fire with a short burst. It fell short but a few rounds skipped into the side of the ship. The second burst from 1200 yards was on the target. By diving slightly and using rudder I was able to concentrate the fire on the deck and sweep the deck from stem to stern. The only defensive fire encountered was small caliber fire which ceased when I started my second burst. I held my fire as long as possible and leveled off at twenty feet at an air speed of 260 MPH. The co-pilot opened the bombay and I ceased firing and dropped all four bombs as close together as possible. The ship was loaded with four 500 lb. 5 sec. delay fused bombs. I dropped the bombs, pulled up sharply to miss the masts and dived for the water in a turn to the left. I looked back and observed one near miss and one direct hit on the port side and two misses on the starboard side. Evidently I dropped the last two bombs while pulling up and they went over the deck.

The ship appeared to be carrying large quantities of supplies and equipment on the decks and a large number of troops. The supplies and equipment were covered with canvas and the personnel took cover behind anything that they could. As soon as I was a short distance from the ship I pulled up to 100 feet and looked for the best opening out of the convoy. What I thought to be a clear opening was a course of 210°. I

was observing the convoy to the front and on my right and failed to see a cruiser which I was about to fly in front of. He opened fire and I dived to the water and made a 180 turn to the right and went back into the middle of the convoy. Because there were so many airplanes flying at minimum altitude I pulled up to about 200 feet. I sighted a cargo ship on my left and decided to strafe it. I made a sharp turn to the left and opened fire in a broadside attack. There was no defensive fire and the ship was almost stopped. As I passed over the ship I saw another directly in front of me and strafed it in the same manner. A third ship which lay ahead of me and the last one between me and a clear space was my next target. I strafed it and proceeded on a straight course of due west until I was a safe distance from the convoy.

The three ships that I strafed were barely moving, badly damaged, and burning fiercely. Great columns of black smoke were pouring out of them and none of them had any defensive fire power. Finding myself clear of the convoy I intercepted a B-25C-1 piloted by Major Lerner and continued to my home airdrome without any further action. As we passed Salamaua I noticed anti-aircraft fire which was being directed away from us.

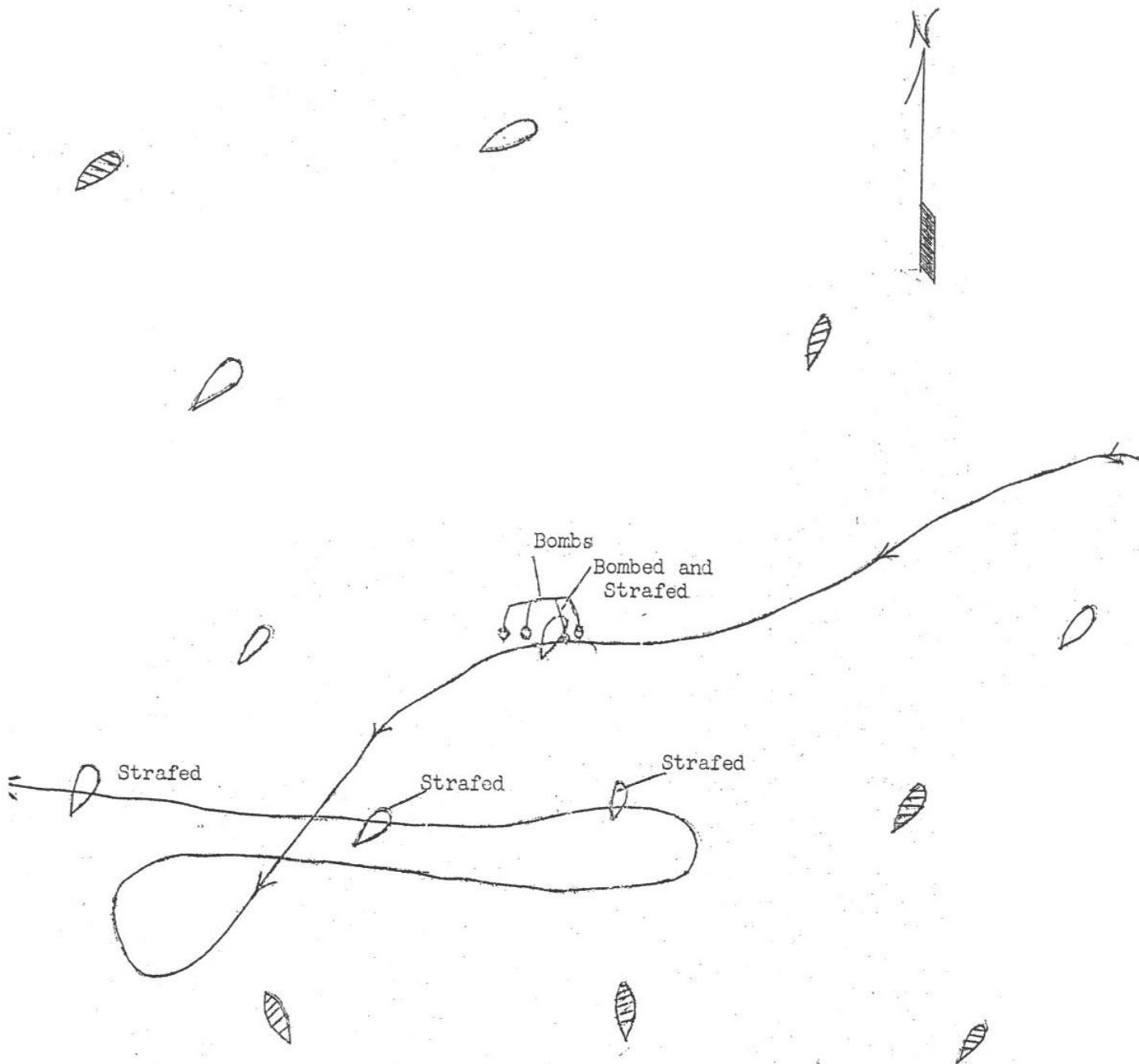
On reaching the home airdrome a check of the ammunition revealed that 2000 rounds of 50 caliber machine gun ammunition had been expended. This was fired through the eight forward fixed guns. The gunner did not fire his guns. The loading consisted of 1 tracer, 2 armour piercing, and two incendiary rounds. There was no malfunctioning of any equipment and my airplane was unhit by enemy fire.





During the attack the high level got only one direct hit that I observed and several near misses. At the time that we went in the majority of the ships were undamaged and the warships were throwing up a terrific barrage of anti-aircraft fire. Very little heavy anti-aircraft was used on the attack ships, and it was inaccurate. The Beaufighters did a magnificent job of strafing and the A-29s working in pairs strafed and bombed. I observed three direct hits made by A-20s on cargo ships.

The success of the mission was due to the carefully planned coordinated attack. The high level bombers dispersed the convoy and attracted most of the anti-aircraft fire. Their hits and near misses prevented accurate fire from heavy guns while the Beaufighters must have knocked out a lot of the small caliber fire. The defensive fire at my ship was practically nil. I did not see any enemy aircraft and was not attacked by any. The pursuit protection gave us a chance to reach the target in formation and unmolested.

s/ HARLAN L. REID;
t/ HARLAN L. REID,
1st Lieut., Air Corps.

Pilot - Lt. Reid
Co-Pilot - F/Sgt Lanley, RAAF
Gunner - S/Sgt Patterson
Radio Gunner - Sgt McCarthy, RAAF



- LEGEND
-  Warships
 -  Cargo or Transport
 -  Air plane's Track
 -  Where Bombs fell

NOTE: Due to lack of space for proper spacing of ships it is necessary to state that the airplane is out of range of small guns.