

TACTICAL STUDY
OF
ATTACK ON CONVOY

BY
ROBERT W. REED
FIRST LIEUTENANT
AIR CORPS

NINETEETH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (D)
THIRD BOMBARDMENT GROUP (D)

TACTICAL STUDY OF ATTACK ON CONVOY NEAR LAE, NEW GUINEA

by

1st Lt. ROBERT W. REED

Pilot - 1st Lieut. Robert W. Reed.
Co-Pilot - P.O. Johnco, RAAF.
Radio Gunner - S/Sgt. Paul W. Malite,
Upper Gunner - Pvt. John C. Boggs.

1. B-25C-1 aircraft No. 487, March 3, 1943, 10000/L to 1020 L in the Hunon Gulf Area.

2. Attached to this letter may be found a diagram showing course, of aircraft during attack, approximate altitudes, approximate location of shipping observed by pilot with type, course, and speed of each.

3. Follows a narrative report of attack as observed by pilot: In order that I may give a complete picture of my tactics used in the coordinated attack against Japanese shipping in the Bismark Sea, I shall begin with the squadron's receipt of the mission the morning of March 3, 1943.

Our mission consisted essentially of furnishing 12 B-25C-1 aircraft to make low level strafing and bombing attacks on a Japanese convoy reported to contain 15 ships, 8 of which were warships. The B-25C-1 aircraft is a modified B-25C equipped with 8 fixed, forward firing 50 caliber machine guns. My particular ship was loaded with 3 500 lb. demolition bombs with 5 second delay fuse and 4,000 rounds of 50 caliber ammunition in the 8 fixed guns. The upper turret contained 500 rounds of 50 caliber ammunition.

Major Larner instructed us that it was to be a coordinated attack with the B-17's leading. We were to rendezvous with the other aircraft in the attack over Cape Ward Hunt at 0900 o'clock and were to follow the Beaufighters. We were to make individual attacks at minimum altitude. Our 12 aircraft were divided into 3 flights of 4 ships each. A flight, led by Major Larner was to attack the convoy head on. B flight, led by Capt. Henebry, was to attack from the side, and C flight was to attack from the rear oblique.

Upon reaching Cape Ward Hunt a radio report was received on the position of the convoy. From Cape Ward Hunt we flew at 5,000 feet on a course of approximately 360°. When the convoy was sighted, Major Larner ordered the squadron to go into echelon to the right with flights in trail and started to let down. The convoy was to the left and while descending I observed heavy anti-aircraft fire coming from the warships circling in the front and on the sides of the convoy.

The attack was begun with individual peel offs to the left in rapid succession from about 2,000 feet. After peeling off I had to "S" back to my original heading and when I went in for my actual attack I was well back on the convoy.

When I started into the convoy I was at minimum altitude and as I went in I changed course and altitude every few seconds to evade anti-aircraft fire.

I flew between two warships, a light cruiser or heavy destroyer to my left and a destroyer to my right. Heavy anti-aircraft fire was coming from both. Beyond was an approximately 8,000 ton transport which I had chose as my target. It was headed on a course of approximately 210° at a speed of about 8 knots. The two masts were rather high with radio aerials extending between them. Before reaching my target I noticed several direct hits being scored by other B-25C-1 aircraft.

As I approached the target I was traveling at an indicated air speed of 260 to 270 MPH with the throttles set at 2400 RPM and 39 In. Hg. I kept "S"ing slightly and changing altitude. From a distance out I observed very light anti-aircraft fire from small caliber guns. When I opened fire with my guns the firing ceased. I fired two or three short bursts from about 1500 yards and from 1,000 to 400 yards I was firing continually dispersing the fire well over the decks. Before I started firing I had gone up to an altitude of about 100 feet and was diving slightly.

My co-pilot had been instructed to open the bombay doors when I began firing the guns. When I got in close to the vessel I leveled off at deck level, dropped my three bombs in very rapid succession, and pulled up sharply to miss the masts. When I pulled up, my upper gunner, Pvt. Boggs, strafed the deck from the upper turret. After crossing the target I let down to minimum altitude again and made a sharp turn to the left to avoid two warships ahead. As I turned I observed that I had gotten two direct hits admidships.

My heading was then about 180° and practically on course and to my left was a destroyer traveling at about 30 knots on a course of about 280°. I turned into it and strafed it from bow to stern, going into it from about a 30° angle to the longitudinal axis of the warship. As I approached I observed a burst of heavy anti-aircraft fire which was very inaccurate and P.O. Johnco saw a gun crew trying to bring a small caliber gun to bear upon us.

After crossing the destroyer I made a slight turn to the right, circled to the left and strafed a second destroyer which was trailing the first by about a mile at a speed of approximately 20 knots. As I flew broadside to it I noticed heavy anti-aircraft fire being fired from it. As I circled into the attack I observed that the transport I had strafed and bombed was burning violently. My attack was directly from bow to stern and after passing over it they fired at my aircraft with small caliber machine guns scoring three hits in the tail section.

Following this attack I turned to a heading of about 200° and at a minimum altitude headed for our rally point just south of Salamaua. I intercepted Major Larnér and Lieut. Reid and we returned to the field in a three ship formation.

During the attack I observed no enemy aircraft. I found that I had expended approximately 2000 rounds of 50 caliber ammunition. Every fifth round was a tracer with two incendiary and two ~~armor~~ piercing bullets between.

In conclusion I feel that the outstanding success of the mission was due primarily to the excellent coordination of the attack. High level bombers prevented the intense anti-aircraft fire from being concentrated on low level bombers which would otherwise have been easy targets. I saw one vessel literally blown to bits by bombs from high level. Our fighters did a very superior job of engaging the enemy aircraft and undoubtedly the Beaufighters knocked out many gun positions in strafing ahead of the B-25C-1's and A-20's. I feel that much credit is due Major Larnér for his superior job of leading the attack of the low level bombers. In a low level attack against shipping the desired attack is along the longitudinal axis of the vessel as less anti-aircraft fire can be concentrated on you.

s/ ROBERT W. REED,
t/ ROBERT W. REED,
1st. Lieut., Air Corps.

DIAGRAM OF ATTACK MADE BY LIEUT. REED IN 487

