

TACTICAL STUDY OF ATTACK ON CONVOY NEAR LAE, NEW GUINEA

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GENERAL:

The Allied success on March 3, 1943, was undoubtedly due to the precision, coordination, and variety of the tactics employed. The attack was made by heavy, medium, and light bombardment groups, with fighters used for cover and strafing. B-17s of the 43rd Group bombed from about 7000 feet, B-25s of the Thirteenth Squadron bombed from about 5000 feet, B-25s of the 38th Group bombed from about 200 feet, B-25C-1s of the Ninetieth Squadron and A-20s of the 89th Squadron used skip bombing and strafing tactics from mast head elevation. Beaufighters strafed from this same elevation and P-38s provided top cover. In the face of this perfect coordination the enemy anti-aircraft fire became erratic and inaccurate and the fighter opposition became confused and ineffective.

With the fighter cover mentioned above the medium altitude bombers began their attack at 1000/L from about 7000 feet, then came the Beaufighters strafing the decks of the vessels. Close behind were the A-20s and B-25C-1s: at this time the enemy was firing almost everywhere and hitting almost nothing.

This state of chaos enabled the planes of the 89th and 90th Squadrons to press home their attacks.

B-25C-1 ATTACK TACTICS:

The twelve planes of the Ninetieth Squadron were in three elements of four planes each in an echelon of flights formation, as the approach was made on the target area at 1000/1/3. Each pilot had been instructed to make an individual attack on a vessel or vessels in the convoy. Therefore, upon reaching the target, they began peeling off. The first five planes went across the front of the convoy (as shown on the attached maps) letting down from 2000 feet, constantly changing heading as an evasive action to the anti-aircraft fire from the four warships heading the convoy. The other seven planes came into the convoy from the front and east side as is also shown on the attached map.

Various types of approach were made by the B-25C-1s. Some letting down to about 500 to 200 feet and then lowering to masthead elevation about 4 to 600 yards from the target. Others made for water surface immediately and stayed at this elevation for the entire run on the target. Each aircraft began strafing the target from about 1000 yards and continued strafing until about 100 yards away. Emphasis should be placed on the fact that in every case the intensity of the fire from the enemy vessels was decreased when the B-25C-1s opened fire on them. The bombing run made by each aircraft was at an altitude of about 10 to 15 feet at an average speed of about 250 MPH. In most cases the bombs were toggled in rapid succession in order that one bomb would skip into the side of the vessel attacked and the other bomb would be placed on the deck.

This method of releasing the bombs almost positively assures a hit. If the first bomb falls short of the target, the second bomb will skip into the side of the vessel and if the target is overshoot slightly the first bomb will, in most cases, fall upon the deck of the vessel. In the attack on the morning of March 3, every aircraft that released its bombs scored a direct hit and in many cases two direct hits, on one bombing run. 37 bombs were dropped with 17 hits observed. 500 lb 5 sec. delay bombs were used.

As each B-25C-1 released its bombs it pulled up over the attacked vessel and immediately lowered to about 10 feet above the water. This

elevation was the best means of evading the anti-aircraft fire of both the warships and the cargo and transport vessels. Also attacks from enemy aircraft were cut to a minimum.

The ammunition used by the eight 50 caliber guns in the nose of each B-25C-1 aircraft consisted of 2 armour piercing, 2 incendiaries, and 1 tracer. 17,500 rounds of ammunition were expended by the 12 aircraft in the morning's attack.

Exactly the same bombing tactics were used by the 8 B-25C-1s in the afternoon of March 3. 24 bombs were dropped with 10 direct hits observed. 14,000 rounds of 50 caliber were expended. The tactics used in strafing lifeboats and rafts consisted mostly of diving from approximately 500 feet down to the target. This enabled the pilots to control their fire.

CONCLUSIONS AND REMARKS:

The success of the attack described above is self evident. The writer is of the opinion that without the coordination as employed, low level skip bombing attack as carried out by the Ninetieth Squadron would only meet with a mediocre degree of success.

As to the best approach and bombing run on a vessel, the pilots have expressed different opinions. In favor of the bow to stern run are the facts that the heaviest fire power of the vessel cannot be brought to bear, that the deck can easily be covered with machine gun fire, and that two bombs in train can be dropped on the vessel. Some of the pilots are of the opinion that a broadside approach is the best as it affords a better target for skip bombing.

The accuracy and intensity of firepower from Japanese warships can not be properly appraised by personnel of the Ninetieth Squadron because of the confusion of the enemy caused by the tactics used by the Air Force in this action.

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