

TACTICAL STUDY OF ATTACK ON CONVOY NEAR LAE

BY

KEITH A. McKEE

SECOND LIEUTENANT

AIR CORPS

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

TACTICAL STUDY OF ATTACK ON CONVOY NEAR LAE

by

LT. K. A. MCKEE

Lt. K. A. McKee - Pilot.
Lt. K. E. Rosebush - Co-Pilot.
S/Sgt. B. Estep - Gunner.
S/Sgt. J. W. Rowland - Radio Gunner.

Time of attack: On March 3, 1943 I was pilot of a B-25C-1 aircraft participating in a coordinated attack on the Japanese convoy approximately 60 miles east of Lae, New Guinea. The crew of this airplane was as follows: Pilot - Lt. K. A. McKee, Co-Pilot - Lt. K. R. Rosebush, Gunner - S/Sgt. B. Estep, Radio Operator - S/Sgt. J. W. Rowland. The attack was made between 10:00 and 10:10 L.

The vessel upon which we made our final run and dropped our bombs on was one which I estimated to be about a 5000 ton cargo vessel. This ship was on the eastern edge of the convoy, following at a moderate distance (possibly one third of a mile to closest) a destroyer and a light cruiser. It was not possible for me to judge accurately the speed which the ship was making, but judging solely from the amount of wake, I am sure that the ship was travelling at a very slow rate of speed, probably not over 5 or 6 knots. With this slow speed not much evasive action could be taken, however, the boat did swing its bow toward me, which made my run in easier if anything. While I was making my initial approach, the boat was under a strafing attack by a flight of Beaufighters, so as a result they were probably not too much concerned with taking evasive action from my approach.

I made the initial approach, where I was still too far to use my own guns on the boat, at about 75 to 100 feet altitude and using 2400 RPM and 36 to 38 of Manifold pressure. At first I headed toward a large troop transport near the middle of the convoy, however, it was soon evident that several planes had this same objective in mind. I then turned to my right and selected a cargo vessel which up to that point had no attackers. This new heading took me parallel to the course of the destroyer and cruiser, which had headed out to meet us. I did not change my heading at all, as I passed these two boats but did change my altitude about 25-30 feet at approximately 5 sec. intervals. These boats were both firing their anti-aircraft guns and machine guns at me, but the largest percentage of it was going behind me, as I moved past these boats I kept reducing my average altitude, until I was flying about 25-30 feet off the water.

As soon as it came within range of the cargo ship, I disregarded what fire was still coming from the warships and concentrated on the boat to be attacked. As mentioned before, by the time I was making my final approach, a flight of Beaufighters had started a strafing run on the boat. They came in broadside to the boat and gave me excellent cover, as I was coming in from the bow. The Beaufighters were followed by B-25 D aircraft, which dropped a string of 6 bombs from about 300 feet and missed completely, all being short. As soon as the Beaufighters were clear of the deck, I opened up with my forward firing machine guns and kept on firing until it was necessary to pull up over the boat to clear the masts. The co-pilot of the ship, Lt. Rosebush dropped the bombs. He also took care of all the bomb switches, bomb bay doors opening and closing, etc. He toggled all three bombs off in quick succession, as we passed over the boat. Our plan was to drop one short of the boat, one where we thought it would hit the waterline, and one which should drop on the deck. This system should take care of errors which would possibly arise if only one bomb was dropped at a time. In this case, the bombs were dropped a fraction of a second late

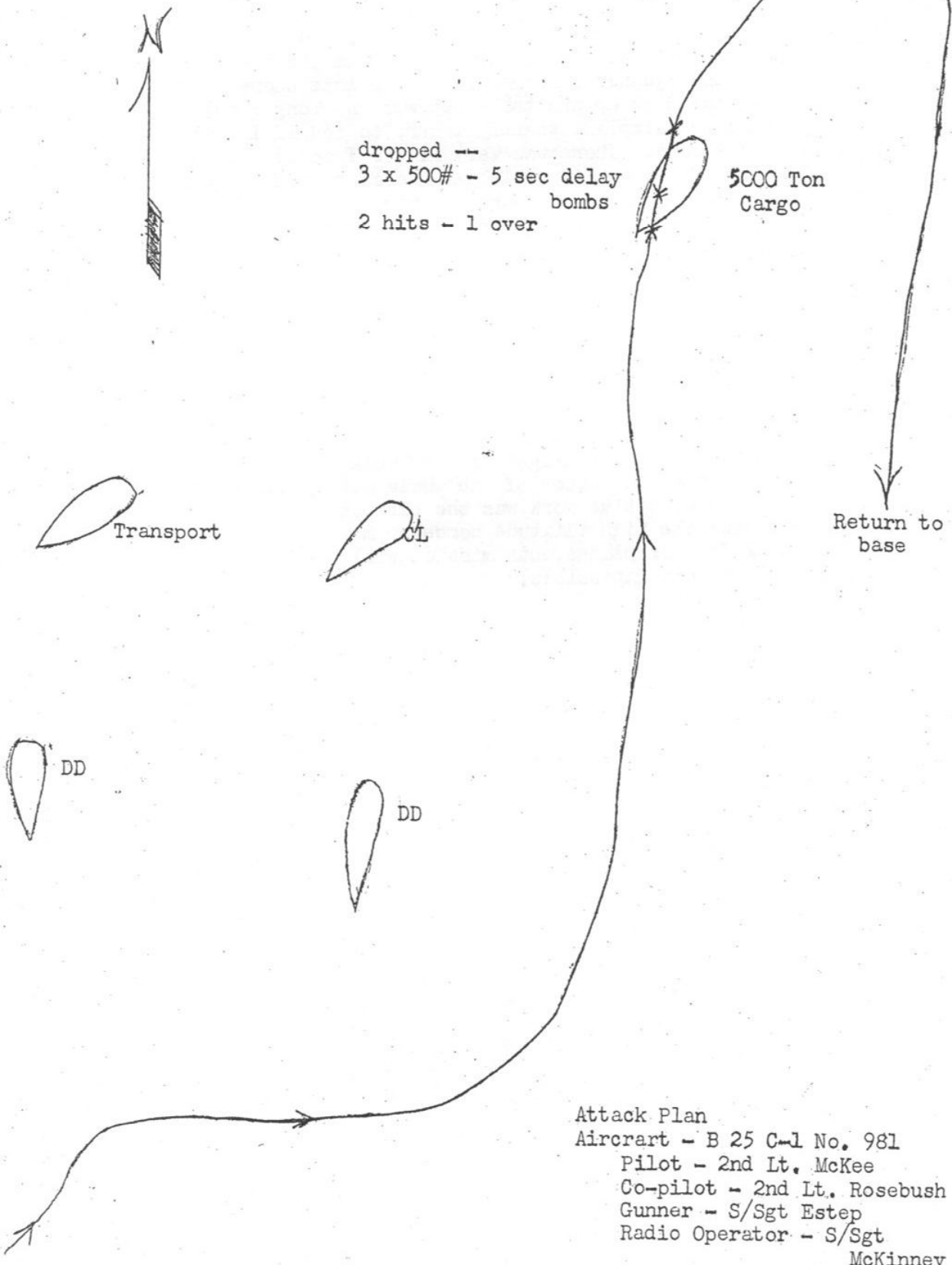
and the first bomb penetrated at the waterline, the second hit in the deck structure and penetrated through the boat to finally go off under the rear deck and the third bomb went over the deck and exploded about 20 yards from the stern. The two bombs in the boat went off together, throwing large masses of deck, equipment, guns, and men into the air. These bombs went off together, after we had passed over the boat and our upper gunner had an opportunity to fire only an estimated 6 rounds into a Bofor type gun on the rear deck.

As soon as I had passed over the mast, I again dropped down to the water and started an almost straight course away from the boat. However as soon as my upper gunner informed me on the interphone that our bombs had blown the deck up and that they were no longer able to fire at us, I banked the airplane sharply around to see if I could see the damage to the boat. There was very little I could see, however, except that there was considerable smoke coming from the boat and some debris was still sailing through the air. I flew around past the boat again and observed that it was starting to settle at the stern. I then headed for home, staying about 20' off the water.

In this attack we dropped 3 x 500 lb. bombs with 5 sec. delay fuses and expended 2000 rounds of .50 calibre machine gun ammunition.

During the brief period in which I was actually within range of the convoy, I was so occupied with my own duties that I did not have opportunity to observe results of other aircraft's attack to any great degree. The planes I did notice of course were the ones at my own altitude and those - the A-20s and the Beaufighters were doing a superb job. To my mind, the most significant factor of the whole attack and the one which enabled us to do effective work was the perfect coordination of the whole attack. Without the high altitude bombers, medium bombers and protective umbrella of fighter planes, our mission would have been unmeasurably more difficult if not impossible.

s/ KEITH A. MCKEE,
t/ KEITH A. MCKEE
2nd Lieutenant, Air Corps.



dropped --
 3 x 500# - 5 sec delay
 bombs
 2 hits - 1 over

5000 Ton
 Cargo

Transport

CL

DD

DD

Return to
 base

Attack Plan
 Aircraft - B 25 C-1 No. 981
 Pilot - 2nd Lt. McKee
 Co-pilot - 2nd Lt. Rosebush
 Gunner - S/Sgt Estep
 Radio Operator - S/Sgt
 McKinney