

TACTICAL STUDY
OF
ATTACK ON CONVOY NEAR LAE

BY

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

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Pilot - Captain John P. Henébry.
Co-pilot - 2nd Lieut. Walter S. Lee,
Radio Gunner - S/Sgt. Richard S. McKinney,
Upper Gunner - S/Sgt. William H. Epperson.

1. B-25C-1 aircraft No 962, March 3, 1943, 1000/L to 1020/L in the Huon Gulf Area.

2. Attached are two sketches. One will show the disposition of the Jap convoy as this Squadron saw it about sixty miles west of Salamaua, New Guinea, on the morning of March 3, 1943. The second sketch will show the position of the remaining vessels as we saw them when we returned that afternoon.

3. The attack on the Convoy on the morning of March 3, 1943 was beautifully co-ordinated. All planes assembled at a predetermined point about fifteen minutes from the Jap sea force. There were P38s high above us for top cover. At eight thousand feet, there were B-17's and B-25's, at five thousand feet, there were more B-25's, Beaufighters, A-20's and our B-25C-1's. The B-17's lead off at 0930. We flew at our assigned altitude until we sighted our target. We then started to let down. Our Squadron had three four ship flights of B-25C-1's. We were supposed to follow the Beaufighters in on our target. They swung to the right of the Convoy, made a left turn under the B-17's and medium altitude B-25's. Their attack was in a south-westerly direction. The Beaufighters went in ahead of the other low altitude B-25's and A-20's, after the first wave of B-17's had dropped their bombs. They strafed the decks of all the ships that they came in contact with.

4. Five of our planes, of which I was one, saw some very good targets to our left, so we did not follow the other planes in. We turned left in front of the Convoy (which was heading south-east at this time). We were at about five hundred feet, Major Lerner gave the order and we split our formation. Each plane was to pick his own target and attack singly.

5. We were encountering some heavy ack-ack fire from the five warships leading the Convoy. Because of this, I dived and turned continuously until I came close enough to get a shot with my eight fifty cal. guns. I started for a large transport, but was cut out by one of our own planes, who had the same thing in mind. It was just as well, because there was another Jap transport directly to my right. I started my run on him in a slight dive. It was a broadside attack. We were indicating about 260 MPH when we passed over the target. I fired in as close as I could as the decks were covered with troops and supplies. Just before I pulled up to clear the mast, my co-pilot released two of our three five hundred pound bombs, one fell short and the other scored a direct hit into the side of the ship, at water line.

6. We had one more bomb so we pulled up to about three hundred feet and made a quarterly attack on a freighter that was sighted slightly to our left. This time my forward guns started a fire on the stern of the target. The bomb scored a near miss and I am sure it did some damage.

7. We received machine gun fire from both targets, but our plane was not hit.

8. I observed several hits on the ships in my area by both high and low level bombers. On one occasion, I had to get out of the way of the Beaufighters who were making a strafing run.

9. When leaving the target, I could see several dog fights above me and some enemy pursuit making passes at low altitude planes. On this mission my plane received no opposition from the Zeros.

10. That afternoon, we returned to the Convoy as part of a coordinated attack to finish off what was left. I got a direct hit with a five hundred pound bomb on a damaged destroyer. I strafed a couple of sinking ships, starting a fire on one and then made about fifteen strafing passes at small craft and survivors in the water.

11. We were attacked by six Zeros when we were flat out on the water. My rear gunner shot down one of them and for some unknown reason the other five failed to press the attack home.

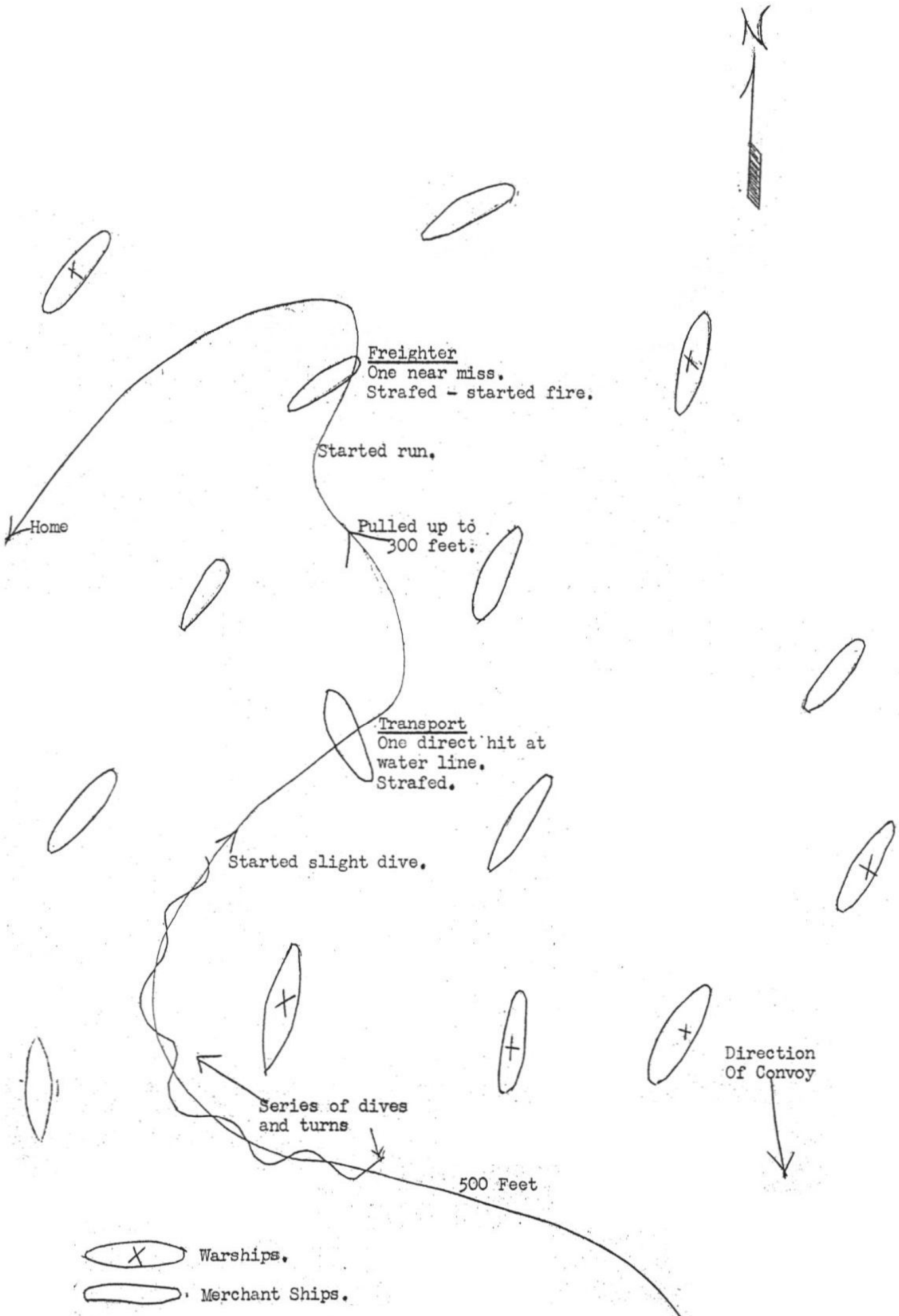
12. The next afternoon, nine planes from this Squadron made a sweep of the battle area. We finished off one floating destroyer (I hit it with one five hundred pound bomb which failed to explode) and then strafed many small life boats and rafts.

13. It is my opinion that low altitude strafing and mast head bombing of sea targets is the most accurate and effective. On the morning of the third of March, this Squadron dropped thirty-six, five hundred pound bombs and scored seventeen hits. That is certainly an exceptional score.

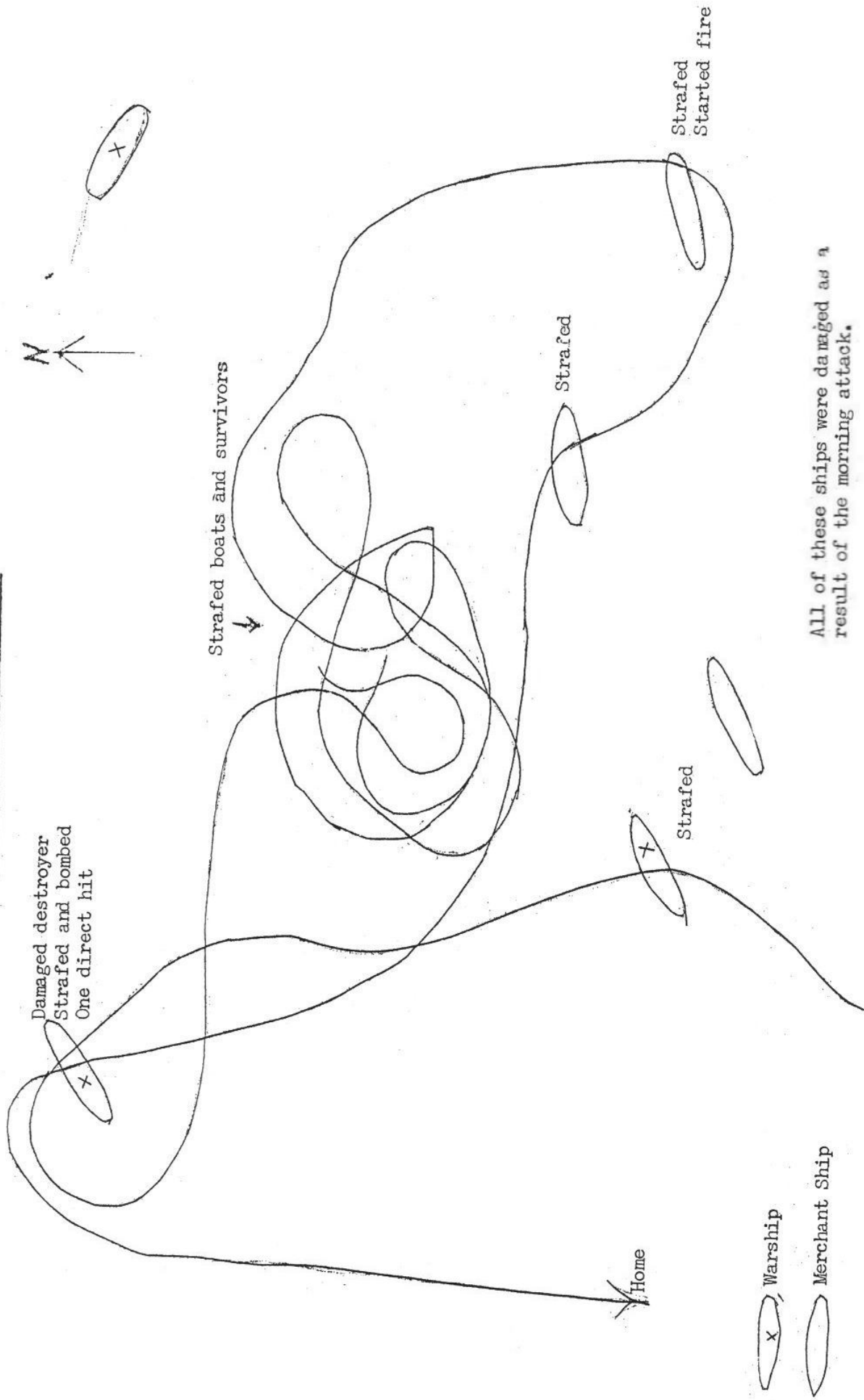
14. It must be remembered, however, that a low altitude attack such as this Squadron made would not be nearly so successful without our pursuit to call off the "dogs" and high or medium altitude bombers to divert enemy fire simply by their presence and disrupt fire control on our targets with their hits and near misses.

s/ JOHN P. HENEERY
t/ JOHN P. HENEERY,
Captain, Air Corps,
Pilot.

PATH OF MY PLANE AND POSITION OF JAP SHIPS IN CONVOY. MORNING OF 3/3/43.



REMAINDER OF JAP CONVOY AFTERNOON 3, MARCH 1943



Damaged destroyer
Strafed and bombed
One direct hit

Strafed boats and survivors

Strafed

Strafed
Started fire

Strafed

Home

X Warship

Merchant Ship

All of these ships were damaged as a result of the morning attack.