

TACTICAL STUDY

OF

ATTACK ON CONVOY

NEAR

LAE

SUBMITTED BY

LT. C. A. HOWE

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

Tactical Study of Attack on Convoy near Lae.

By LTJ Charles A. Howe

B-25-C1 # 980  
Lt. Howe - Pilot  
Lt. Jones - Co-pilot  
Cpl Burch - Gunner  
S/Sgt. Axt - Radio operator

On March 3 at 1000 L about 60 miles East South east of Salamaua, New Guinea I was pilot of one of 12 B-25-C1 which attacked a 22 ship Jap convoy in conjunction with about 150 other aircraft of various types. This attack was well coordinated.

As soon as the flight leader of my formation peeled off I began to look for a target among the maze of ships below me. As I peeled off and started down into the midst of the convoy, I finally picked a 5000 ton cargo vessel which was camouflaged with gray and white colors. This vessel was directly behind the first line of warships and seemed to be turning slowly to the west. In passing between the southernmost and foremost cruiser and a destroyer, I was forced to employ evasive action to an extreme heretofore never contemplated by this pilot. The anti-aircraft fire at this point was in my estimation at the peak of its threat to my aircraft, as all the guns of the aforementioned warships on either side of me were observed to be concentrated on the three other ships in my flight and my own. It is a question as to the advisability of diving at close range and attaining a high rate of speed, or commencing the dive sooner, calculated to bring the aircraft at minimum altitude upon nearing the vessels, and consequently sacrificing considerable airspeed.

At approximately 300 yds, having passed the warships, I began firing my forward guns and continued to fire until I was some 100 ft from the vessel and its broadside turned to me at minimum altitude I ceased firing and assumed a course and altitude which would be conducive to accurate bombing, and released two bombs. Upon clearing the vessel, I immediately dropped back down to the water and continued on the same course; as a result neither myself or any of my crew were able to observe the action of our bombs. After a period of three or four seconds spent in charging the guns to clear them, I turned 90 degrees to the right and at approximately 800 yds I opened fire with every forward gun on another cargo vessel of 4000 to 5000 tons which was plain dark brown in color and observed to have considerable loading equipment on its decks. The same approach as before was used and this time the bombs were observed by the gunner to be a near miss and a direct hit amidships, which presumably set off a powder magazine causing a terrific explosion, which all but cut the vessel in two. This vessel was left obviously in a sinking condition. Upon clearing this vessel, I immediately opened fire on another cargo vessel some 900 yds beyond and on a parallel course to the one previously attacked. On this run the incendiary shells of my guns were seen to enter the cabin and superstructure of the vessel, which was of the same general appearance as the one previous. After the strafing run on this vessel was completed, I took up a course of 180° and at an altitude of 20 ft left the convoy.

During this attack four-500 pound five second delay demolition bombs were dropped and 1500-x 50 rounds were fired.

B-25-C1 # 980

1330/L March 3

Lt. Howe - Pilot  
Lt. Jones - Co-pilot

Cpl Burch - Gunner  
S/Sgt Rowland, R. J. - Radio Operator.

On this attack the remnants of the convoy were in approximately the same position as in the morning. I counted seven vessels in the immediate vicinity, all either stationary or moving very slowly with the exception of one destroyer, which apparently had not suffered sufficient damage to impede its progress. The other six vessels were all burning in various degrees of intensity. I observed anti-aircraft fire from one 5000 ton transport, which seemed to be firing blindly through its own smoke. The most northerly vessel in the scene of destruction was a cruiser, which was obviously attempting to limp away at a very slow speed. I attacked this vessel from stern to stem in a slight quarter approach. After strafing in the same manner as before, I released two bombs on the vessel scoring a hit at the water line, which caused the weakened superstructure to collapse. Turning to the left, I then made a run broadsides to the same vessel. This bomb was dropped while the aircraft was in a diving altitude and as a result did not skip out but entered the water and went off below the surface some twenty feet from the vessel. My fourth bomb was dropped on a cargo vessel, which was burning in the aft section. This bomb was seen to score a direct hit on the boat causing a violet explosion similar to one observed in the morning, indicating the possibility of another powder magazine. At this time and during the aforementioned attacks my aircraft was attacked by enemy fighters assumed to be two formations, one two ship attack and one by three aircraft. The only evasive tactics employed by me were to drop sufficiently close to the water to protect the unarmed underside of my craft. The attacks were made from a high level in the form of diving passes from the rear, and were successfully repulsed by my top gunner. As the enemy fighters passed in front of me, I endeavored to bring my forward guns to bear on them, but the maneuverability of my aircraft hampered this action greatly; consequently I was unable to inflict any damage on them. Considerable time was spent after the release of all my bombs on strafing survivors and supplies which were strewn as far as the eye could see. On one strafing run against a previously damaged destroyer, I caught the survivors in the act of launching lifeboats. After firing for about 7 seconds, I ceased firing to find the lifeboats overturned and the crowd of men attempting to gain the lifeboats definitely out of action. Finally I turned to 180 degrees and left the convoy for the second time in six hours.

During this attack four - 500 pound five second delay demolition bombs were dropped and 1500 x 50 rounds were fired,

B-25C-1  
Lt. Howe - Pilot  
Lt. Jones - Copilot

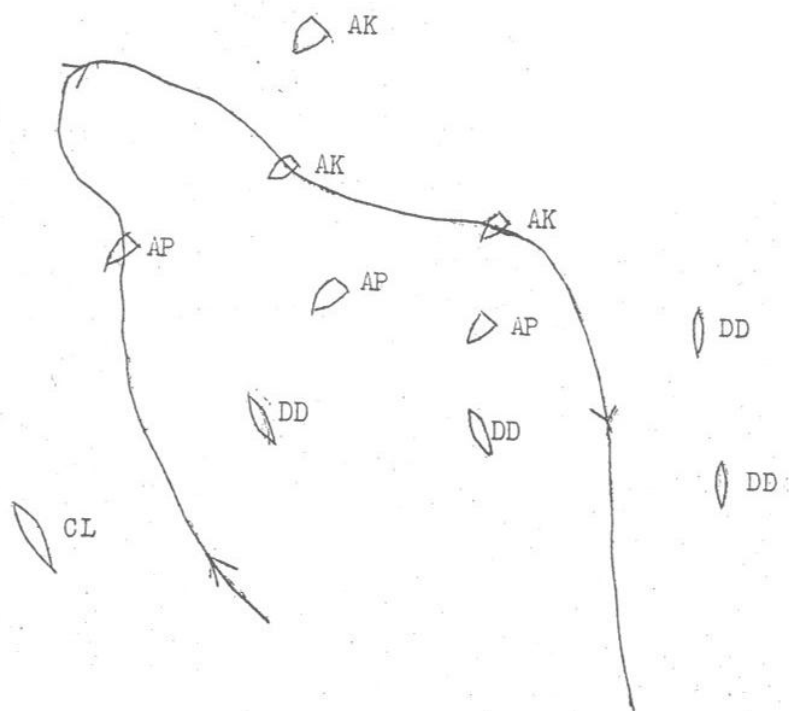
Afternoon March 4, 1943  
Cpl Burch - Gunner  
S/Sgt Axt - Radio Operator.

At 14:30 I took off as a part of a nine ship search mission to seek out the reported destroyer, last of the 22 ship convoy which was limping north; after leaving Cape Ward Hunt on a heading of 50 degrees we flew for 10 minutes, when I saw the destroyer off to my right. I had one 500 pound five second delay demolition bomb aboard. I again got into position for the now familiar attack and released the bomb, which after ripping its way across the top of the deck, fell in the water alongside and went off. The bow of the vessel seemed to jump out of the water. I then spent some 25 minutes strafing survivors and returned home to my base.

On this operation one 500 pound 5 second demolition bomb and 1000 rounds x 50 caliber, all guns jamming after five to ten minutes of strafing.

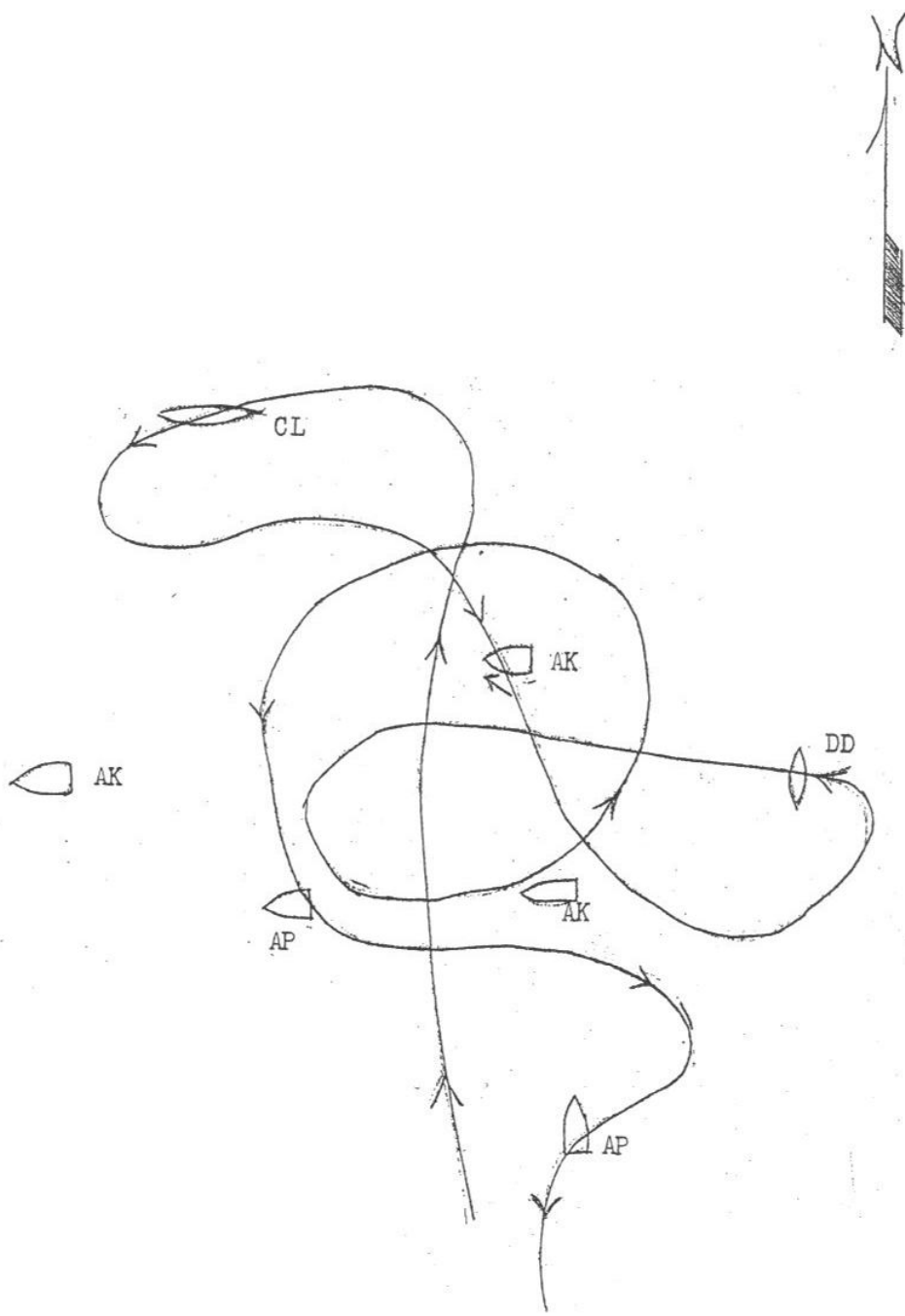
In closing I wish to put forth my opinion on this type of attack against shipping. In view of the fact that complete annihilation of an armed convoy was heretofore unheard of I believe that the low level attack made by myself and members of my squadron was at least partly responsible for this success, and I felt that greater accuracy can be had with fewer bombs using this attack. Also the devastating power of eight fixed guns cannot be overlooked.

CHARLES A. HOWE;  
CHARLES A. HOWE,  
2nd Lieutenant, A.C.



Surface Vessels Observed.  
 March 3, 1943 1015/L B-25-C1 No. 980

Pilot - 2nd Lt. Charles W. Howe  
 Co-Pilot - 2nd Lt. Lee H. Jones  
 Gunner - Cpl Samuel B. Burch  
 Radio Operator - S/Sgt Harold Axt.



Surface Vessels Observed,  
March 3, 1943 1500/L B-25-C1 No. 980

Pilot - 2nd Lt. Charles Howe  
Co-pilot - 2nd Lt. Lee Jones  
Gunner - Cpl Samuel Burch  
Radio Operator - S/Sgt R. J. Rowland