

MISSION REPORT OF ATTACK ON JAPANESE CONVOY

by

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March 9, 1943

SUBJECT: Detailed Mission Report Covering Plane A20A# 40-89 of 89th Sq., 3rd Bomb Group, Piloted by Captain Edward J. Chudoba of 8th Sq., 3rd Bomb Group, In Attack On Japanese Convoy In Huon Gulf On 3 March, 1943.

TO : Irvine H. Shearer, Major, Air Corps,
Intelligence Officer, 3rd Bomb Group (D)

1. RESULT OF ATTACK: Capt. Chudoba made one skip bombing attack, dropping 2 x 500 lb. 4-5 sec. delay tailfused demolition bombs, both observed by his gunner as hits and strafing the deck with 300 x 50 and 800 x 30 cal., on a medium AK, later identified from photograph as the Taimei Maru.

2. DETAILED ACCOUNT OF MISSION BY CAPT. CHUDOBA: a. Capt. Edward J. Chudoba, with Tech. Sgt. Felix Larronde as tail gunner, both of the 8th Sq. 3rd Bomb Group, led the second element of the first flight of six planes, with Lieut. Mayo as Chudoba's wing man. Both flights reached the rendezvous point over Cape Ward Hunt at 0920 on 3 March 1943. There Chudoba observed Bostons, 2 squadrons of B 25s, many P 38s climbing and 8-9 Beaufighters; he observed no B 17s or P 40s.

b. Capt. Chudoba flew 345-347 degrees compass course to the target. En route he observed ahead a squadron of B 25s (13th Sq., 3rd Bomb Group), Beaufighters and then a B 25C-1 squadron (90th Sq., 3rd Bomb Group). He still did not observe any B 17s but "knew they were up there" because he saw a string of high level bombs salvoed into the sea some distance ahead.

c. His first view of the convoy was from 6000 feet, at which time it appeared as in sketch A, with 3 DD from the front or west end, turning hard on left rudder and showing long wakes curving toward the southeast. The APs and AKs were all headed west in relatively regular formation. There was one DD at the southeast edge of the convoy (DD#4) and another toward the northwest edge (DD#5), later identified by photograph as the Rubuki, attacked by Capt. Beck of the 89th Sq. and Lieut. Ruby of the 8th Sq., 3rd Bomb Group. He believes the convoy was approximately at Lat. 6 degrees 55' S., Long. 147 degrees 45' west in the Huon Gulf and was spread out over a distance of 5-8 miles.

d. As he dropped to about 4000 feet, Capt. Chudoba saw a large explosion ahead followed by a high black smoke column apparently resulting from a high level bomb hit. DD#4 emerged under his left wing from this smoke apparently undamaged, the hit seeming to have been on a small merchant ship or tanker which the DD had been alongside. The only AA observed at this time was at about 8000 feet on his right and left - medium, light. At this time the convoy formation was broken up and the merchant ships were taking evasive action by circling and zig-zagging in all directions as in sketch B, with the DD on the outside and forming a protective screen to the south in the line of approach of the aircraft.

e. Capt. Chudoba swung to his left on a course about 300 degrees compass after passing over DD#4 and losing altitude at about 1000 feet per minute. He headed for a small AK lettered A, probably passing under Capt. Clark and Lieut. Richardson at 2000 feet. He saw Capt. Lanbar attacking this ship, so turned to attack ship B, dived down and strafed it with 300 x .50 and 800 x .30 cal. at from 2000-200 yards while coming down from 200 feet to 50 feet. At mast level he flicked off both bombs beginning at 200 yards with 1/2 second interval. He crossed the ship just aft of amidships, denting his right wing on its radio mast or antenna. He did not observe his bomb hits but his gunner did. There was light AA fire from

this ship as he went in; he saw M.G. flashes from both forward and aft decks and one .30 cal. bullet entered the nose of his plane. These guns were silenced before the final bomb run, by the strafing of his and other attacking planes. Lieut. Mayo had meanwhile turned and attacked ship C and Capt. Clark and Lieut. Richardson also attacked ship A, behind Capt. Chudoba.

f. Capt. Chudoba took evasive action after the attack by zooming and turning sharply left to the west and then southwest toward Cape Ward Hunt. During this run he observed six ships burning. He also saw a Beaufighter shoot up ship D from stem to stern "beautifully" and a B 25 making a skip bombing run on ship E. He noted that the ships on the front or west end of the convoy were the largest - apparently the transports. He saw P 38s, P 40s and no other Beaufighters and observed no enemy fighters. But there were B 25s and A 20s "all over the place". He came out immediately after the attack as ordered but was behind the other A 20s and flew home alone.

3. DETAILED ACCOUNT OF MISSION BY T/SGT. LARRONDE: a. T/Sgt. Felix Larronde, Capt. Chudoba's gunner, sighted the convoy at a point he thought was about 40-45 miles south of Cape Creten and in the Huon Gulf as the plane approached it from the south. The first two ships reached were warships of some sort. The nearest was headed southwest. It turned south to come toward the plane but didn't appear to fire at it. Just before the A 20 reached this ship a string of 8 bombs fell across it amidships and it disappeared under the engine nacelles in a cloud of smoke. The plane was then at 4000 feet and had just started down. It turned toward the northwest and he then saw 6-7 merchantmen and warships to his right or west. Heavy AA was light and inaccurate. He didn't know who they were firing at. It burst 2000 feet above the A 20.

b. As Chudoba's plane came down and in to attack, a ship to the gunner's left (C on diagram) fired on the plane but was silenced by a direct bomb hit. The gunner believes this was from an A 20 or B 25 at low level because there was only one bomb. Capt. Chudoba passed right over the middle of a merchant ship at less than 50 feet. The gunner definitely observed both bombs after he felt their release. The first bounded up in the air in a deflected wobble and skipped toward the bow of the ship. The other skipped straight and struck directly amidships. The latter exploded first in about 5 sec. and was followed by a tremendous flash at the bow as the second exploded. Immediately after the attack the plane bore left and he could not observe what happened to this ship. He saw other ships but no AA. He observed two big explosions, one to his right and one to his left, as they turned for home, but couldn't identify the ships. He observed five large separate black columns of smoke, possibly from six different ships. Most of the ships were stopped. He fired no rounds. He started to strafe one ship but a B 25 and a Beaufighter came over it.

c. Sgt. Larronde observed a Beaufighter following his plane for about five minutes and another Beaufighter to his left or north strafing another ship. He saw a B 25 attacked by a Zero at 100 feet elevation to his right just after his plane's attack. The Zero dove on the B 25 from above; the B 25 emitting some smoke but kept on and the Zero broke off and zoomed up. He saw 3 P 38s directly above the Zero. He also saw a B 25 to his left or north doing a steep bank on top of the water just as Chudoba's plane started down.

4. EVALUATION OF PLAN OF ATTACK, ETC: Capt. Chudoba believes that Capt. Clark's plan of attack at least in pairs is best since it doubles the strafing fire-power for neutralizing deck gunfire, divides the enemy AA firepower and gives a much better chance of getting at least two bomb hits. If he had known how light the AA and fighter opposition would be he easily could have made other strafing runs since he had 300 .50 and 1000 .30 cal. unexpended. The ship he attacked was the one identified by photographs as the Taimai Maru. Capt. Chudoba believes that the bomb spray or explosion amidships on its port side, opposite the bridge, was caused by one of his bombs, since it is exactly in the path of his flight.

s/ RIGMAL W. BALDWIN
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Office of the Intelligence Officer
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March 9, 1943

SUBJECT: Detailed Mission Report Covering Plane A20A #40-139 of 89th Sq., 3rd Bomb. Group, Piloted by Lieut. Richard G. Ruby of the 8th Sq., 3rd Bomb. Group In Attack On Japanese Convoy In Huon Gulf 3 March, 1943.

TO : Irvine H. Shearer, Major, Air Corps,
Intelligence Officer, 3rd Bomb. Group (D).

1. RESULT OF MISSION: Lieut. Ruby made one skip bombing attack on one enemy merchantman but his bombs failed to release. He made one strafing pass expending 200 x .50 and 200 x .30 cal. from bow to stern on an enemy destroyer, later identified from photograph as the Hubuki.

2. DETAILED ACCOUNT OF MISSION BY LIEUT RUBY: a. First Lieut. Richard G. Ruby, with Corp. Allport as tail gunner, both of the 8th squadron, 3rd Bomb. Group, was wing man in the second element of the second flight of 6 A 20s with Capt. William Beck of the 89th Sq. leading. He met the other A 20s at the rendezvous point over Cape Ward Hunt at 0920 on 3 March, 1943. There he observed 12 B 25s (strafing type) and many P 38s and P 40s but he couldn't see the B 17s. The A 20s flew north at about 360 degrees compass for about 15 minutes at 200 miles per hour.

b. He sighted the convoy suddenly while at about 3000 feet just south of due east of Lae. B 25s were already skip bombing. He believed the B 17s were there because he had seen bombs jettisoned about half way en route to the convoy. The ships were not in line nor in any formation. It appeared to be more or less of a rout already. All ships were in a circle about 3 miles in diameter. He saw one small CL or large DD on the south edge of the convoy steaming south toward the planes and another DD or CL on the northwest edge of the ring which was the one he later attacked. The first mentioned warship, or a small vessel beside it, was hit by a B 25 just before Ruby's approach. The warship pulled away and went into a left turn to attack broadside. This warship appeared high in front, low in the back and sloped back to the waterline, with only one funnel (?).

c. Lieut Ruby followed Capt. Beck due north through the left or west end of the convoy and attacked an 8000 ton ship that looked like a passenger vessel (2 funnels and white painted superstructure on a black hull). The attack was at mast height. The ship took no evasive action. "It was just sitting there probably with no power". Lieut. Ruby tried to release his bombs at mast height and assumed they had released. They then passed across the ship and zig-zagged around still at mast height. There had been no AA from the ship attacked. There was some light AA from the warship to the northwest. He could see gun flashes but no tracers.

d. Capt. Beck and Lieut. Ruby then proceeded north of the circle of ships but passed over no others. They circled to the west and then south toward the DD or CL first observed at the northwest corner of the convoy. As they kept coming at it the warship kept turning to starboard to utilize the broadside of its aft guns. The planes veered around toward the east, then banked sharply and turned into the warship from its front. They passed over it from fore to aft and strafed at about 50 feet. Lieut. Ruby saw Capt. Beck's tracers striking the bridge. The warship had then completed a turn of about 45 degrees as shown in Diagram C.

e. According to Corp. Allport, tail gunner, this destroyer exploded with much black smoke just after the two planes passed. Allport couldn't state the cause. Lieut. Ruby expended 200 x .50 and 200 x .30 cal. His rear gunner did not strafe. He had two 500 lb. demo. bombs with 5- and 8-

11 second delay fuzes. He did not try a second time to drop them on the DD, assuming they had gone on the AP since his gunner did not notify him by intercom phone that they had not dropped. The gunner said he tried to tell Lieut. Ruby but the interphonew did not work. His plane was not attacked by enemy planes and he saw none. He stuck to the extreme left end of the convoy and did not observe what occurred to his right. There was another AP of about 8000 ton to the south and east of the AP he first attacked, which had heavy smoke over its front end. There was an even larger AP headed N.W. to the West of the AP attacked. This did not appear to have been hit. (See diagram C.)

Note #1 - It is suggested that the DD strafed by Capt. Beck and Lieut. Ruby and identified from photograph as of the Hubuki class, was probably the Hubuki itself. The two white stripes shown on the aft stack and mentioned in the A-2 Periodic Report - #63 of 3/3/43 as having "a meaning unknown to this department", appear similarly in a photograph of the Hubuki taken from Janes "Fighting Ships" and reproduced in "Japanese Naval and Military Sea Craft Identification From the Air". Other pictures of ships of the same class have 1-3 white stripes on their fore or aft stacks but none other pictured has two on the aft stack.

Note #2 - In the photograph the two guns of the #2 or next to rear turret, are pointing forward on the port side at low elevation and are believed to be in the act of firing, indicating that the DD desired to maneuver as described to bring these guns into play against an attack off the bow.

s/ RIGNAL W. BALDWIN,
t/ RIGNAL W. BALDWIN,
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