

CONFIDENTIAL

April 12, 1943.

From: The Commanding Officer, U.S.S. KANAWHA, Lieutenant Commander
Brainerd N. BOCK, U. S. Navy.
To: The Commander South Pacific Force.
Subject: Report of Action - U.S.S. KANAWHA.
References: (a) Article 712, U.S. Navy Regulations, 1920.
(b) Article 874(6), U.S. Navy Regulations, 1920.
Enclosure: (A) Statement of Executive Officer, U.S.S. KANAWHA,
Lieutenant William F. GANNARR, U.S. Naval Reserve.

1. In accordance with reference (a) you are hereby informed that an action took place at about 1526 LOT, 7 April 1943 between the U.S.S. KANAWHA, U.S.S. TAYLOR, U.S.S. PG 85, United States Aircraft, Shore Battery Tulagi and various district craft in which the U.S.S. KANAWHA was lost.

2. During the proceeding seven days the U.S.S. KANAWHA had been based at Tulagi and was engaged in fueling various units of the U.S. Fleet and furnishing logistic support to the shore based activities. Enemy aircraft activities had increased during this period, information was received by despatch of a contemplated large scale enemy air attack which would occur at about 0800 LOT, on 8 April 1943. At about 1230 LOT on 7 April 1943 a despatch was received stating that a large flight of enemy planes had left Bougainville and to be in an alert condition. The U.S.S. KANAWHA immediately assumed condition I and stayed in that condition until 1315 LOT at which time the port condition of readiness was assumed. During the period in which the ship was in condition I a despatch was received ordering all vessels of Task Force 32 and it is believed Task Unit 36.5 to retire immediately from the Guadalcanal Tulagi area. At about 1345 LOT a despatch was received directing the U.S.S. KANAWHA and various district units in the area to retire to the Eastward prior to the attack. The U.S.S. KANAWHA requested an escort from the U.S.S. WARD and was notified shortly afterward that two small vessels from Guadalcanal would act as escorts. The U.S.S. KANAWHA then got underway and commenced to stand out of the harbor at that time she was directed by the shore station to await the arrival of the two escort vessels and to provide them with fuel and water. At about 1445 LOT a message was received directing various units and the U.S.S. KANAWHA to exit immediately from the Guadalcanal Tulagi area. The shore station was informed that the U.S.S. KANAWHA was proceeding in accordance with this last despatch. The ship went to general quarters and commenced to stand out of the harbor. All cargo and bunker oil tanks were blanketed with CO₂ at this time.

3. At the time of departure from the harbor into the channel the U.S.S. PG 85 and the U.S.S. TAYLOR stood in, the U.S.S. TAYLOR was informed that the U.S.S. KANAWHA could maintain 12 knots at which time she turned about and proceeded the U.S.S. KANAWHA in the channel. The U.S.S. PG 85 stood out after the U.S.S. KANAWHA. Before the channel was cleared information was received by radio (voice) that sixty enemy aircraft were sighted over Savo Island and that forty-five "Hornets" were sighted over Guadalcanal, at that instant forty-eight planes were sighted bearing approximately 195° true. The ship at this time was making all possible speed, about 12.7 knots on course 185° true. The enemy aircraft formation consisted of two flights of nine planes each and of one flight of thirty planes. Within the space of a minute the nine flight planes turned North-west over Tulagi and Northeast over Purvis Bay. Fifteen planes of the thirty

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flight commenced to dive on the ship. All three ships, the Tulagi shore batteries and the various district craft opened fire, five planes released their boom loads which resulted in one near miss on the starboard bow, one near miss on either quarter, one hit under the bridge in cargo fuel oil tank A-113 and one or possibly two in the machinery spaces. When this attack had been delivered the five planes on each side of the attacking group pulled out and did not complete their dives.

The immediate result of the attack was the setting afire of A-113 and the destruction of the engineroom and the loss of all power in the ship. The main deck and the cargo deck were almost completely covered with fuel oil from the force of the explosion of the forward boom. As soon as control was lost on the bridge an attempt was made to shift control to the after steering station on the superstructure deck. At this time it was realized that the engineroom had been demolished but as the booms had landed at approximately the same instant the damage to the after part of the ship was not realized until the attempt shift aft had been made. The force of the explosion aft caused the destruction of the sound powered telephone board and the leakage of sea water into the electrical work shop and gyro room, it blew open all cargo tank hatches from A-111 to A-118 inclusive and that of the forward starboard "summer tank" A-405. The superstructure deck, wardroom country and pay office were afire, there were no communications except by messenger, the entire after part of the ship and the bridge structure were filled with black smoke and soot. The Executive Officer at the after steering station observed a sheet of oil and water caused by the forward boom explosion which obscured the bridge structure from his sight. It is believed that the CO2 blanket on all oil tanks aided materially in preventing a general fire throughout the main deck. The ship did not list materially or appear to take on water rapidly. The forward magazine was flooded by leakage caused by a near miss on the starboard bow. The cargo pump room commenced to fill rapidly with oil and water from the cargo oil lines and from the sea. The main deck surrounding the engine room trunk was distorted and the trunk itself was expanded outward. A large quantity of steam issued from the engineroom spaces. All CO2 bottles were connected to the smothering system to the fuel oil tanks in an effort to extinguish the fire in A-113 and to prevent any spread of the fire. A-111 commenced to burn shortly after the fire started in A-113 this fire died out either from lack of fuel or from the application of CO2. An attempt was made to extinguish the fire aft by means of a bucket brigade but this means was ineffectual because of the small amount of water which could be applied and the fire gained rapidly. This condition was aggravated by the amount of fuel oil which was dipped up with the water. The forward gasoline powered handy billy pump was wrecked from the explosion and the after one could not be located from the same cause. In the meantime the wounded from the Generator Room and the Engineer and after repair parties were removed to weather decks. At the time that the control of the fires was lost the ship had come to an almost complete stop, the after magazine could not be flooded because of the absence of pressure on the salt water system. At this time the only vessel in the vicinity was the U.S.S. PC 85 which was about one mile on the port quarter. The Commanding Officer decided to abandon ship while there was still a slight way on her to remove the survivors from the hazard of burning oil on the surface. The Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, Ensign L. K. Sows, U.S. Naval Reserve and six men abandoned ship in the last raft left to leave. Prior to taking this step the Commanding Officer and the Executive Officer made an inspection of such parts that were accessible to determine if any survivors remained on board. No living men were seen and no noise was noted. When about two hundred yards astern of the ship two men were observed to jump into the water on the port side of the main deck at the break of the poop. As the

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rescue vessels and boats came out from Tulagi, Gavutu, Purvis Bay and various small bases they were directed to recover these two men. The U.S.S. Ape 33 picked up Lieutenant G. W. Brockway, U.S. Naval Reserve, First Lieutenant and Navigator and fourteen men, two were seriously injured. At his request, he and eleven men were transferred to the U.S.S. RAIL and were taken alongside the ship to determine if the fire could be brought under control. At this time the raft containing the Commanding Officer and Executive Officer was approximately one mile astern. After the U.S.S. RAIL had come alongside and had commenced to extinguish the fire with salt water the Commanding Officer and those with him were picked up by a picket boat which broke down. The Commanding Officer signalled the U.S.S. SO 531 to notify the U.S.S. RAIL of the immediate danger of the exploding of the after magazine. Shortly after this the Commanding Officer and those with him were taken to Gavutu Island, one of the ma in this party was injured and was hospitalized upon reaching the base. The fire in bridge structure was brought under control and was being fought on the superstructure deck. At this point the ammunition from the 20 mm and 3" .50 caliber ready boxes commenced to explode and the U.S.S. RAIL stood off. Shortly after this the after magazine took fire causing a flame of over two hundred feet in highth to issue from the after part of the ship. This intense heat set fire to a large patch of oil on the water and this separated from the ship while burning. The entire bridge structure was apparently gutted, as were the supply office, ship's office, wardroom country and captain's cabin. The wooden superstructure deck had burned and fallen in.

5. After the ship had been abandoned efforts were made by the U.S.S. CHESTNUT, U.S.S. RAIL, U.S.S. MONENOMEE and one L.C.T. to salvage the vessel but she sank at 0400 LOT, 8 April 1943, in 28 fathoms of water off the East bank of Sylvia Reef bearing 121° true from beacon "C" distance 750 yards. At about 1800 LOT on 7 April 1943 the members of the crew of the L.C.T. heard men rapping from the Bunker Pump Room. The cover of the duct leading to this compartment was opened and two men who had been trapped in there were removed. These men stated that they sought refuge in the bilges from the ruptured steam lines in the fireroom and that they did not leave the bilges until the leakage of water and oil drove them out. The fireroom leaked slowly from the engineroom through the air lock so that at the time of their removal there was approximately five feet of liquid over the floor plates. They did not signal until they heard the L.C.T. alongside. No indication of their presence was apparent the time the Commanding Officer and Executive Officer inspected the ship prior to abandoning it.

6. The force of the wind at this time was 0-1 the direction was Northeast the cloud form was Alto-Cumulus amount .4 and their altitude approximately 5000-6000 feet. The ships position was 775 yards bearing 103° true from beacon "B" on SONGGON-NEGONA Island, Lat. 9-07.6 South, Long. 160-10.3 East.

7. The following casualties occurred to the guns of the U.S.S. KANAWHA: The starboard forecassle 20 mm gun sustained a broken firing pin which was not replaced; the port 20 mm gun jamed and was afterwards fixed and continued firing; No. 1 3" 50 caliber gun fired two rounds before the force of the explosions caused such a distortion that it could not be moved in elevation or trained. No. 2 and 3, 3" 50 caliber guns could be trained with difficulty because of the distorted gun foundation. The gun pointer of the after starboard bridge 20 mm machine gun was blown out of his gun by the rupture of the retaining strap but he recovered to continue firing. The gun crew of No. 4, 3" 50 caliber gun, were thrown from their feet from the force of explosion. This gun continued in action as did the after machine guns and the bridge guns until the action was completed.

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8. It is believed that the failure of successful salvage efforts on the parts of the various vessels concerned was caused by the failure of the watertight hatch leading from the shaft alley to the after parts of the ship.

9. The conduct of the officers and crew was exemplary. There was no confusion and the crew acted as a body in executing the removal of the wounded and in undertaking whatever efforts which could be made with the material at hand in controlling the damage. Jettisoning of the cargo oil to lighten the ship was not undertaken because of the hazard by burning oil on the surface to the survivors in the water. In view of the report subsequently received of the rupture of the oil lines in the cargo pump room it is believed that this step would have clearly aggravated the burning condition of the ship and would have further impeded the salvage efforts.

10. Government funds in the custody of the Disbursing Officer, approximately \$50,000.00 in cash, went down in the Disbursing Officer's two safes. Due to the conditions prevailing in the Supply Office it was impossible to secure these funds. There was no negligence on the part of the Disbursing Officer in the loss of these funds.

11. The U.S.S. KANAWHA can be definitely credited with the destruction of one Japanese plane and very probably with the destruction of two others. It has been almost certainly established that the attacking planes were signal engined low wing monoplanes with retractable landing gear, probably of the "Charlie" type. The size of the booms used could not be determined but it is thought that they were about two hundred pounds in weight.

12. The surviving Officers and men of the U.S.S. KANAWHA have expressed strong desire to be ordered as a body to New Construction (Tankers).

B. N. BOOK.

SECRET

April 12, 1943.

From: The Executive Officer, U.S.S. KANAWHA, Lieutenant William
F. CANNARR, D-M, U.S. Naval Reserve.
To: The Commanding Officer.
Subject: Report of Action - U.S.S. KANAWHA, Report of.

1. On April 7, 1943, approximately 1500 we rounded the Eastern tip of Tulagi Island and was standing out of the channel following the U.S.S. TAYLOR. All hands were at their battle stations. Approximately twenty to forty planes could be seen between Tulagi and Guadalcanal. We were making our best possible speed of about 12.7 knots. At 1500 fifteen planes started their dive on the ship in which five dropped their bombs, resulting in three near misses and two direct hits. The first near miss on the starboard side forward which started a leak in the forward magazine, forward compartment, and jammed Gun 1 (3"-50 Caliber) so it could not be trained or elevated. Also, all phones were put out of commission. The next two near misses were on the port and starboard quarter. The ship then took a direct hit in cargo oil tank A-113 under the bridge structure and started fire in the bridge structure, also, broke fire mains on deck. The next direct hit went through the superstructure deck and exploded in the engine room stopping all machinery, and starting a fire in the ship's office and wardroom country, which is of wood structure. Hoses were rigged but no water could be gotten in any part of the ship. By this time the bridge was all afire and the fire was gaining. Also the oil and hose on the starboard side of the main deck was afire. Word was passed to abandon ship before the fire reached the after 5" magazine. All hands deserve lots of credit for their excellent performance of duty in action.

W F Cannarr
W. F. CANNARR.

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ENCLOSURE (A)