

By DP NARS, Date 11/1/97 U.S.S. NEW MEXICO (10-jdn)

BB40/A16-3
Serial 0140

Care Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, Calif.,
25 March 1944.

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From: The Commanding Officer.
To: The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via: (1) Commander Task Force THIRTY-SEVEN
(2) Commander South Pacific Force.
(3) Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas.

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R.S. No. 4 0515

Subject: Action Report, Bombardment of KAVIENG AREA, NEW IRELAND ISLAND, 20 March, 1944.

References: (a) Pacific Fleet Confidential Letter 2CL-44.
(b) CTF 37 Bombardment Order No. 4-44.

Enclosures: (A) Track Chart of Bombardment. - p. 8
(B) Executive Officer's Report of Bombardment. - p. 9
(C) Gunnery Officer's Report of Bombardment. - p. 10

In accordance with reference (a), the following Action Report is submitted:

PART ONE

1. General Narrative - (a) Japanese installations in the KAVIENG AREA of NEW IRELAND ISLAND were bombed 20 March, 1944, (East Longitude date) by main and secondary (five inch 51 caliber) batteries of the U.S.S. NEW MEXICO. The bombardment, first in the BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO in which battleships have participated, was diversionary to the occupation of EMIRAU ISLAND.

(b) Four battleships and two destroyer divisions were formed in two bombardment groups for the firing. The NEW MEXICO, MISSISSIPPI, and Destroyer Division FORTY-NINE were assigned targets in the vicinity of the town of KAVIENG; the TENNESSEE, IDAHO and Destroyer Division FIFTY had targets in the NORTH CAPE, KAVIENG AIRDROME and PANAPAI areas.

(c) Firing continued for approximately three and one-half hours. Eight firing runs were made. The main battery fired on the first, second, fifth and sixth runs, the secondary battery on the third, fourth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. The main battery expended all but one of its allowance of 276 fourteen inch high capacity projectiles; the secondary battery fired 980 of its allowance of 1200 rounds of high capacity projectiles.

(d) All of the target areas assigned the ship were well covered by main and secondary battery fire, the ship's aircraft spotter reported. He estimated 97 per cent of the main battery fire fell in the assigned areas. He was unable to make any estimate of the percentage of secondary battery fire that fell in assigned areas because other ships' firing interfered with his secondary spotting.

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(c) Enemy anti-aircraft fire was directed against the spotting aircraft but was not effective. There was no counter-battery fire against this ship. One minor material casualty (a five inch 51 caliber premature burst) which caused minor injuries to two men was the only non-routine occurrence.

2. Preliminaries - (a) Little more than 12 hours notice that a bombardment was scheduled preceded the departure of the NEW MEXICO and the other battleships from HAVANNAH HARBOR, EFATE, NEW HEBRIDES, at 0538 (Zone Minus 11), 15 March 1944. Ammunition was taken aboard from an ammunition ship during the night before the sortie.

(b) The battleships and eleven assigned destroyers were joined at 1420, 15 March, by Task Group THIRTY-SIX POINT THREE, comprising the MANILA BAY, NATOMA BAY and three destroyers. The joined forces hurried northward, slowing only for the fueling of destroyers on 18 March and a rendezvous with the DASHIELL (DD 659) on the evening of 18 March. The DASHIELL delivered last-minute directives and intelligence to Commander Task Force THIRTY-SEVEN (Rear Admiral R. M. GRIFFIN, Commander Battleship Division THREE) in the NEW MEXICO.

(c) The Bombardment Order, reference (b), was received just 24 hours before the bombardment began. The ship's plans, based on that order, are forwarded as Appendix 1 of Enclosure (C). The ship's mission, to destroy enemy installations and defenses in the vicinity of KAVIENG town, is detailed in that Appendix.

(d) Task Group THIRTY-SIX POINT THREE parted company with the battleships the evening of 19 March to operate northward of NEW IRELAND during the bombardment, when it provided combat air patrol and anti-submarine patrol.

(e) The distant approach was made with Battleship Division TWO (TENNESSEE and IDAHO) and Battleship Division THREE (NEW MEXICO and MISSISSIPPI) in line of division columns, Battleship Division THREE on the right, NEW MEXICO guide; Destroyer Squadron TWENTY-FIVE screening, Destroyer Division FORTY-NINE on the right flank, and Destroyer Division FIFTY on the left flank.

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P A R T T W O

CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF BOMBARDMENT

(All times are Zone Minus 11)

20 March 1944

- 0600 Went to General Quarters. Making approach on NORTH CAPE, NEW IRELAND, by radar fixes from SK Radar. Weather poor, heavy overcast and rain squalls ahead and to eastward, obscuring all of NEW IRELAND; wind calm; barometer 20.08; temperature, 73° F. dry bulb, 68° F. wet bulb; sky completely overcast, stratus clouds.
- 0631 Commenced ventilating Main Battery magazines and lower handling rooms.
- 0702 Sunrise.
- 0710 Sighted peaks of NEW HANOVER ISLAND, bearing between 228° (T) to 239° (T), distant about 44 miles.
- 0745 Catapulted stand-by spotting plane.
- 0753 Catapulted spotting plane.
- 0800 SG Radar, previously unable to range on land because of rain squalls in the area, reported NORTH CAPE bearing 194° (T), distant 39,000 yards. Ship's position: Lat. 02° 14.'3 S., Long. 150° 51.'2 E. Course 220° (T), speed 18 knots, 204 RPM.
- 0803 Ships right 20 degrees to 240° (T).
- 0814 Ships left 20 degrees to 220° (T).
- 0820 Ships left 50 degrees to 170° (T).
- 0824 Ships left 20 degrees to 150° (T).
- 0825 Secured ventilation to Main Battery magazines and handling rooms.
- 0835 Ships left 20 degrees to 130° (T).
- 0840 Ships left 30 degrees to 100° (T).

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0845 Changed speed to 16 knots, 181 RPM.

0846 Ships right 100 degrees to 200° (T).

0852 CTF 37 executed signal to deploy in accordance with previous plan. Battleship Division THREE made column movement to 250° (T). Battleship Division TWO changed course left to about 150° (T). Destroyers took stations for bombardment, Destroyer Division FORTY-NINE screening Battleship Division THREE, three destroyers ahead and two astern.

0856 All battleships resumed course 200° (T) by simultaneous ships turn movement.

0859 NORTH CAPE became visible.

0903 Battleship Division THREE executed ships right to 250° (T), the initial firing course for this division. Battleship Division TWO executed ships left to their firing course to cover the area to the eastward of NORTH CAPE.

0906 EDMAGO ISLAND became visible; first visual cuts plotted.

0911 Commenced firing Main Battery to port at target 607A (as numbered in CTF 31 Operation Order No. 3-44), a coast defense battery on NUSA ISLAND. After 27 rounds, shifted fire to targets in KAVIENG TOWN, where all subsequent fire was directed. (See appendix 3 to enclosure (C) for target numbering.)

0931 Ceased firing; first run ended; executed column left 180° to 070° (T).

0938 Commenced firing Main Battery to starboard.

0952 Ships right 20 degrees to 090° (T).

1004 Ceased firing; second run ended; ships right 160 degrees to 250° (T).

1008 Commenced firing five inch 51 caliber Secondary Battery to port.

1025 Ceased firing; third run ended; Ships right 200 degrees to 090° (T).

1031 Commenced firing five inch 51 caliber Secondary Battery to starboard.

1054 Ceased firing; fourth run ended.

(5) 1055 Ships left 180 degrees to 270° (T).

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- 1101 Commenced firing Main Battery to port.
- 1116 Ceased firing; fifth run ended; ships left 180 degrees to 090° (T).
- 1123 Commenced firing Main and Secondary Batteries to starboard.
- 1137 Ceased firing Main Battery.
- 1142 Ceased firing Secondary Battery; sixth run ended.
- 1143 Ships right 180 degrees to 270° (T).
- 1149 Commenced firing five inch 51 caliber Secondary Battery to port.
- 1159 Ships left 10 degrees to 260° (T).
- 1205 Ceased firing; seventh run ended.
- 1207 Ships left 170 degrees to 090° (T).
- 1212 Commenced firing five inch 51 caliber Secondary Battery to starboard.
- 1232 Changed speed to 18 knots, 204 RPM.
- 1235 Ceased firing, eighth and final run ended; bombardment completed. Ships left to 045° (T), began retirement from bombardment area.
- 1251 Secured from General Quarters.

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P A R T T H R E E

1. Performance of own ordnance material and equipment - For details see Gunnery Officer's Report of Bombardment, Enclosure (C).
2. Performance of enemy ordnance material and equipment - No information is available.

P A R T F O U R

1. Own battle damage - None
2. Enemy battle damage - The Commander South Pacific Force assessed this as an "effective plastering" of the KAVIENG area; the only information this command can provide on the enemy damage done by NEW MEXICO projectiles is given in the aircraft spotter's report, Appendix 2 of Enclosure (C).

P A R T F I V E

1. Special comment is made on the following:
 - (a) Communications were entirely satisfactory. There were no material or personnel casualties. Traffic on the TBS was held to a minimum. Excellent communications were established with the spotting planes upon launching and remained so throughout the bombardment.
 - (b) Navigation - The approach was made on radar ranges and bearings until a few minutes before opening fire. Rain squalls concealed all landmarks on NEW IRELAND ISLAND until 11 minutes before open fire, when NORTH CAPE became visible. Five minutes before open fire EDMAGO ISLAND became visible and the first two visual cuts were plotted. The mountains of NEW HANOVER ISLAND were visible earlier, but cuts on them could not be plotted for the final approach because they were too distant from the target areas to appear on the large scale chart used. The difficulties in obtaining opening gun range had been anticipated, but no means of circumventing them could be devised.
 - (c) Charts and maps - The Navigator, Plot, CIC, and other plotting stations used the Combat Navigation Chart of the KAVIENG AREA, NEW IRELAND, provided as part of Annex E to CTF 31 Operation Order No. 3-44. This was the only available chart of the scale of one inch equals one nautical mile. Provision of at least six charts of such scale materially reduces a ship's preliminary work in preparing for a bombardment. Last-minute intelligence is not essential on such charts, although it is helpful. In this case, target areas and the effective grid were transferred to the navigation charts provided. The information on mined areas overprinted on the navigation charts permitted a

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a check of the ship's information and reduced the work to be done aboard. Inclusion in the intelligence material of sets of photographs of a relief map, showing the approach appearance of the area from various directions, assisted the Navigator greatly in his preliminary planning. (The sets referred to are contained in Folder 25-21, prepared by Objective Data Section, Combat Intelligence Center, South Pacific Force.) Marking of all oblique photographs with the bearing from which taken, as the relief map photos were marked, would assist in study of them.

(d) Air operations were without event. The relatively small amount of anti-aircraft fire directed at the ship's aircraft spotter did not hamper his spotting.

(e) Engineering and Construction departments experienced no material casualties. Performance of both material and personnel was excellent in the two departments.

2. The Executive Officer's Report is submitted as Enclosure (B).
3. Lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations.

(a) Each of the NEW MEXICO's five previous bombardments has made officers and men eager to "do it again". This, the ship's sixth bombardment, intensified that desire. "Let's hit 'em often and hit 'em hard", is the informal recommendation of all hands. It is a well known fact of Japanese psychology that any unexpected offensive action has the effect of disrupting previous plans with serious diversionary effect.

P A R T S I X

1. There were no personnel casualties during the action, except the two minor injuries listed in Enclosure (C).

2. All officers and men performed their duties satisfactorily during the action.


E. M. ZACHARIAS.

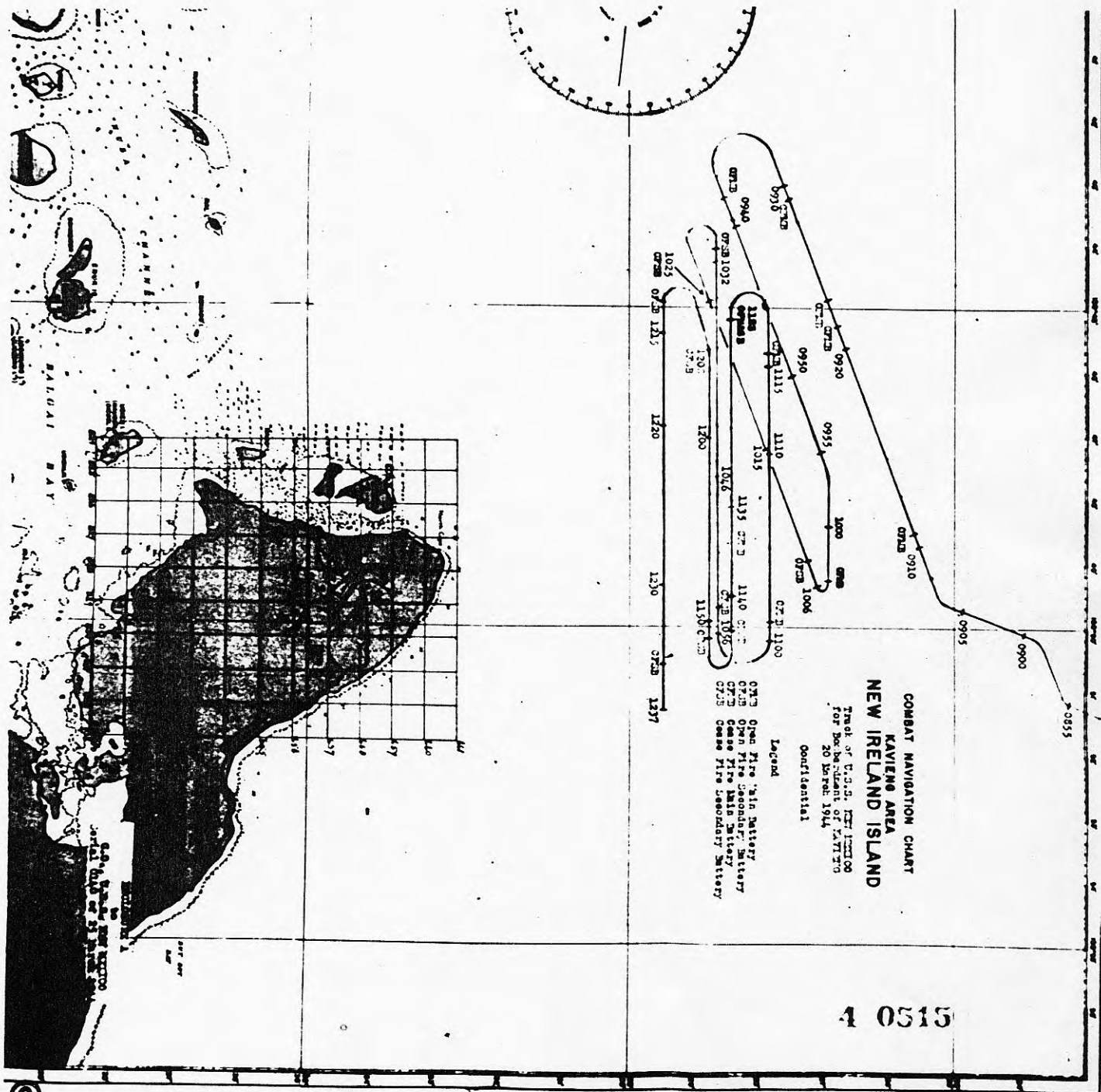
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ENCLOSURE A