

Pacific Typhoon, 17-18 December 1944: Action Report Extract

USS *Monterey* (CVL 26)

"At 0813(I), 18 December, the formation course was changed from 060 degrees (T) to 160 degrees (T), which placed the wind and sea on the starboard quarter. The ship began rolling heavily at this time, flight quarters was sounded, and all hands in the Air Department, assisted by other off-watch personnel, were turned to, to chock and add to the securing lines and cables on the aircraft. It was, however, almost impossible for men to work on the flight deck, due to roll and heavy winds. At 0838, rolls of 34 degrees were recorded. At this time, four VF aircraft on the flight deck broke loose from their moorings and went over the port side at frame 143, carrying away the landing signal officer's platform and safety nets. At this time, the storm was increasing in intensity, with a wind of sixty-five knots, heavy seas, and barometer falling rapidly. At 0906, another VF airplane went overboard on the port side frame 130. At this time, men could no longer work on the flight deck, due to wind and roll.

At 0908, the hangar deck reported a plane adrift. At 0910 an explosion was felt, followed immediately by a report that a bad fire had broken out on the hangar deck in the vicinity of frame 77. Fire quarters was sounded immediately, followed by general quarters. The task group Commander was notified that a serious fire existed, and that the Commanding Officer intended to alter course to starboard in order to seek a heading on which the ship would ride more easily. The course as was changed to 240 degrees (T).

In the hangar deck a VF airplane had broken loose free its securing lines, and crashed into a plane on the port side, puncturing the gasoline tanks in both planes. The explosion and fire followed almost immediately. The planes had been degassed, but considerable residual gasoline remained in the after ends of all belly tanks, which cannot be evacuated by degassing suction. The fire spread rapidly throughout the hangar deck, but particularly through the central section, as loose planes crashed back end forth. The fire enveloped the conflagration station immediately, and an explosion blew open the trap door which permits access to this station from the hangar, and the sprinkling system could not be immediately energized. Loose wreckage ruptured supply ventilation ducts on the port side of the hangar, and permitted smoke to fill all engineering spaces except the after engine room within a period of two minutes, and forced the temporary abandonment of these spaces until rescue breathing apparatus could be donned. From then on, during the period of the fire, skeleton engineering crew manned the forward engine room and both firerooms, using rescue breathing apparatus. The entire hangar deck sprinkling system was operated from controls in the machinery spaces, and operated most efficiently, but water free this source added further to difficulties, due to flooding of machinery spaces through the ruptured supply ventilation ducts. Sufficient steam pressure was at all times maintained to operate auxiliary machinery, but since power was being lost due to smoke and flooding, the commanding officer, at 0924, put the ship dead in the water in order to conserve steam and ensure ability to continue fighting the fire. At 0918, an explosion occurred on the port side of the ship in the vicinity of frame 75 on the second and third deck, and a fire resulted from this explosion in the laundry space on the third deck. This was caused by the fire being transmitted to spaces below through ruptured supply ventilation ducts. The heat in the hangar was intense, endangering ready-service magazines around both sides of the flight deck amidships. These had been manned, and sprinklers operated, except on the 40mm and 20mm sec-

tors 1 and 2, where there was no water pressure. In these sectors, ready ammunition and ammunition in the ready service magazines was jettisoned by gun crews and air group pilots. At 0916, it was reported that the ship's gasoline system was secure, and that the gasoline pump rooms had been flooded properly with carbon dioxide.

Almost immediately after fire had broken out, two additional aircraft were lost overboard from the flight deck on the port side between frames 80 and 83, carrying away transmitting antennas and damaging 20mm guns.

At 0924 it was necessary to secure fires in No. 2 fire room, due to flooding by scalding water from the hangar deck via ruptured ventilation systems. At 0935, the fire was pretty well isolated to the central section of the hangar deck. At this time, the ship was hove to on a heading of approximately 255 degrees (T), and riding easily with a maximum roll of 11 degrees. The wind was increasing in intensity, and the seas becoming heavy. At 0942, Commander Task Group 38.1 directed the *New Orleans* (CA 32), *Twining* (DD 540), and *McCord* (DD 534) to stand by the *Monterey*. At 0950, the fire on the hangar deck was under control, with a total of ten hoses, all equipped with fog nozzles playing directly into the heart of the fire, and the entire sprinkling system rapidly cooling the hangar, permitting personnel to work more effectively. All fires were reported out at 1025. At this time, the wind had definitely commenced backing, and was from 330 degrees, force of 70 knots with gusts to 90 knots. The ship was riding easily on a southwesterly heading. At 1050 the ship was ready to go ahead on boilers No. 1 and 2, but due to the force of the storm, to hot wreckage throughout the hangar and the difficult task of safely securing this wreckage, it was considered best to remain dead in the water until the ship was in all respects considered safe. Possible shifting of wreckage in the hangar deck was a matter of grave concern to the commanding officer since it easily could have caused additional fires to break out. However, no additional damage resulted from the time the fires were out at 1025. All power and lighting on the hangar deck had been disconnected at the distribution boards...."

8. Damage included the loss of seven, aircraft from the flight deck, and 11 others on the hangar deck damaged beyond repair. Approximately two-thirds of the hangar was gutted, and considerable structural and electrical damage was suffered in the vicinity.

Source: [Naval History & Heritage Command](#)