

~~SECRET~~ DECLASSIFIED
ACTION REPORT

ORIGINAL

USS MISSISSINAWA
NO SERIAL

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AO 59

26 NOVEMBER 1944

ACTION REPORT.

[COVERS TORPEDOING WITH RESULTANT SINKING
WHILE AT ANCHOR IN ULITHI HARBOR, 20 NOVEMBER
1944.]

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EX-U.S.S. MISSISSINEWA (A059)

A059/A9-8/A12

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% Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, California,
26 November 1944.

From: The Commanding Officer.
To : The Commander in Chief, U.S. FLEET.
Via : (1) Commander Task Group 30.8
(2) Commander THIRD Fleet.
Subject: Action Report.
Reference: (a) CinCPac Confidential letter 3CL-44.
Enclosure: (A) Commanding Officer's action report.

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosure (A) is forwarded herewith.

Phillip G. Beck
PHILIP G. BECK.

CC: Cominch
CinCPAC
Comservron 8
Comservron 10

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911 6-15-64

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S-E-C-R-E-TCOMMANDING OFFICER'S ACTION REPORT

The Ex-USS MISSISSINEWA was attached to the third fleet, in Task Group 30.8, as part of Task Unit 30.8.2.

Commander Task Group 30.8, is Captain ACUFF, USN, in USS DEWEY.

The ship had arrived at Ulithi Atoll anchorage, Western Caroline Islands, Palau Group, on 15 November 1944, and anchored in 23 fathoms of water in berth #131, on the new chart. There was on board, at arrival, 404,000 gallons of aviation gasoline in #2 center tank and 9,000 barrels of Diesel Oil in #6 center tank. The #6 wing tanks, port and starboard, had sea water ballast in them to an ullage of 12 feet. A merchant tanker came alongside immediately after anchoring, and we started to load Navy Special Fuel Oil from this tanker. Loading was completed 16 November 1944 and the ship reported ready for sea with a standard load, to ComServRon TEN. Standard load for this type of ship was 404,000 gallons of aviation gas in #2 center tank; 9,000 bbls of diesel oil in #6 center tank and 90,000 bbls of Navy Special Fuel Oil in all remaining tanks, except #1 port and starboard and #3 and #9 center tanks, which were empty, but not gas free.

On the morning of 20 November 1944, reveille was held at 0530 as usual. I was in my bunk, just about ready to get up, at about 0545, when there was a heavy explosion, which appeared to be on the port side forward, followed immediately by a second very heavy explosion. I was thrown out of my bunk, against the after bulkhead of my cabin and landed, lying on the deck. Somehow or other I knew we had been torpedoed. On looking up, I saw flames shooting in through all the port holes, similar to a giant blow torch. To get up meant death by burning, so I crawled out into the passageway and stood up. It was very hot. There was a man lying on deck, in the passageway, apparently unconscious or dead. I dragged this man out on deck and down the ladder to the midship boat deck. There were two enlisted men running aft. I told them to take this man aft with them, put a life jacket on him and throw him over the stern and to pass the word for all hands to abandon ship over the stern. I noticed that the ship, at this time, was burning furiously from midships forward and moderately from midships aft and had started to sink by the head. Everything that would burn was on fire, hoses, lines, gun covers, lub oil, cargo deck, etc. There was not a soul in sight but I shouted into the officers quarters midships to abandon ship over the stern. I had on only pajama trousers and these were on fire so I discarded them and ran aft with the idea in mind to open the main steam smothering valve to the cargo tanks. When I got aft, I found it impossible to get to this valve, due to fire, wreckage and burst steam lines, with live steam pouring from them. I continued aft, through the after starboard crew's quarters, where I picked up a life jacket and put it on and made my way up two decks to the port after passage on the after boat deck. The heat was

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EX-USS MISSISSINEWA (A059)

COMMANDING OFFICER'S ACTION REPORT (Continued)

terrific. There were continual explosions, apparently from the ready ammunition. This port after passage way was the only livable place on the ship. The flames were closing in fast. Here I met Lieutenant (jg) STUTZMAN, badly injured, but still on his feet, Chief Machinist DOWNING, Chief Gunner's Mate CASS, and two enlisted men, who appeared uninjured. The forward door to this passageway was open, as were the port holes in the four rooms leading off the passageway. I ordered all these men to assist me in closing the door and ports so that we could gain a little time to save ourselves if possible. We had no sooner closed the door and ports when there was a very heavy explosion aft which tore everything apart, including the doors and ports. This explosion was apparently the after magazine or the center bunker tank, which was about half full. Twenty mms were going off and there was fire all around the 5 inch ready ammunition. The engine room had been abandoned and there was no pressure on the fire main. Even if there had been, it would have been of no use except to cool off our way to the poop deck. There were two 15 lb. CO2 fire extinguishers in the passageway. We used these to cool things off so we could get to the poop deck and jump overboard. I ordered the men with me to jump. We all jumped about the same time, except Ch.Mach., DOWNING and CASS, CGM, who went down a ladder hanging over the stern. There was a channel about 15 feet wide, which was not covered with burning oil and through this channel, we made our escape. Boats from the U.S.S. CACHE and the U.S.S. LACKAWANA, picked us up. I was taken aboard the USS CACHE with several other men, where we received medical attention, food and clothes. Most of us were naked or had our clothes burned off.

As stated in this report, I knew some how or other that we had been torpedoed on the port side, forward. This proved correct, after speaking to eye witnesses on board the CACHE, including her commanding officer, who has made a separate report concerning the foregoing. The CACHE was anchored about 600 yards on our port beam.

I cannot report on anything such as Gunnery Department, Engineering Department, Medical Department, etc., as the entire episode took place so fast and furiously that there was no time for anything except to abandon ship as quickly as possible.

The five men mentioned herein and myself were the last to leave the ship. Insofar as anyone can account for time under such conditions, it is my opinion that we left the ship about

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EX-USS MISSISSINEWA (A059)

COMMANDING OFFICER'S ACTION REPORT (Continued)

15 minutes after the first two explosions.

From the deck of the CACHE, I saw my ship completely enveloped in flames over 100 ft high. Tugs arrived at the scene and were pumping furiously on the flames, but to no avail. At about 1000 the ship slowly turned over and disappeared from sight.

Comments and recommendations:

Considering the suddenness of the explosions and the intense fire, it is nothing less than a miracle that more lives were not lost. Out of a total complement of 298 there were three officers and fifty-seven enlisted personnel lost. Many of these would have survived, had the forward doors and ports of the entire midship house been closed. The flames from the initial explosions entered the midship living quarters followed by a flood of burning gasoline and oil. All those men in the midship crews quarters were immediately burned to death. In the officers quarters, just above, all officers came through, except two. Of those who came through, one was critically burned and three severely burned. Of these last three, one was last seen on the poop deck. It is presumed he drowned after jumping from the ship. The one critically burned ran out immediately following the explosions yet another officer in the same room waited a few seconds until the flames from the concussion had subsided and came through with minor blisters. The two who did not come through were in a room opposite a room in which were three officers. These three officers came through with no injuries whatsoever. Their report is as follows: " We opened the door to the passageway and it was all flames so we slammed the door shut and put our clothes on including shoes. We again opened the door and there were no flames, so we ran aft and jumped over the stern." My own case was similar. Being thrown from my bunk as previously stated, landing on deck, looking up at the flames pouring into the port holes and crawling out into the passageway, without a doubt saved my life.

There were approximately 15 enlisted personnel sleeping on the forward main deck, right in the way of the explosion. They of course never knew what hit them.

From the foregoing the following is recommended, especially on oilers which carry aviation gasoline forward:

1. Close all forward doors and ports of the midship house, regardless of whether it is hot or cold, at sea or in port.

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EX-USS MISSISSINEWA (A059)

COMMANDING OFFICER'S ACTION REPORT (Continued)

2. Forbid all sleeping on deck at all times, except on the poop deck.
3. Train all hands to wait just a few seconds after the initial explosions and then come out and save themselves. During this short wait to put clothes on. Trousers, shirt and shoes. The arch of my right foot was practically cooked because I had no shoes on.
4. The jacket type of life preserver is the only safe one. Several men who got away from the ship safely were drowned because they could not swim well enough and blow up their life belt at the same time.
5. Keep instilling in the minds of all hands that fire is the greatest hazzard. If the fire is forward, go aft to abandon ship and if the fire is aft, go forward and always jump into the wind and swim like hell.

I made it a practice to give all hands a pep talk every two or three weeks. In these talks, I would tell them how good they were and point out the weak spots, and remind them of what to do in case of fire, serious enough to abandon ship. It paid dividends when we actually has to do so.

SER-6 (bl)
A16-3

COMMANDER SERVICE SQUADRON SIX
SERVICE FORCE, PACIFIC FLEET

Serial: 0088

25 June 1945

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FIRST ENDORSEMENT on
C.O., EX-USS MISSISSIPPI
(AO 59), Secret ltr. AO59/
A9-8/A12, dated 26 November
1944.

From: Commander Task Group 30.8.
(Commander Logistics Support Group).
To: Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet.
Via: Commander THIRD Fleet.

Subject: Action Report.

1. Forwarded.
2. Captain ACUFF was Task Group Commander 30.8 when the incident reported in basic letter occurred.

D. B. Heary
D. B. HEARY

cc:
Cominch
CinCPac
ComServRon EIGHT
ComServRon TEN

FILE

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UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
THIRD FLEET

dm

Serial 00224

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JUL 7 1945

2nd Endorsement on
CO, USS MISSISSINEMA
Secret ltr. A059/A9-8/
A12 dated 26 November
1944.

From: Commander THIRD Fleet.
To : Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via : Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Pacific Fleet.

Subject: Action Report.

- 1. Forwarded.

Robert B. Carney

ROBT. B. CARNEY,
Chief of Staff.

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3rd Endorsement
CinC Pacific Fleet
To: Cominch

19 JUL 1945

- 1. Forwarded.

O. L. Thorne
O. L. THORNE,
By direction

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