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DECLASSIFIED

USS LCI(L)-216

SERIAL L-121

29 OCTOBER 1943

MINING OF LCI(L)-237

REPORT OF MINING OF LCI(L)-237 WHILE
IN CONVOY ENROUTE TARANTO, ITALY TO
CATANIA, SICILY.

NAVAL HISTORY DIVISION

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 962133
BY NARA Date 11-15-08

U.S.S. LCI (L) 216

29 October 1943

Serial: L-121

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BY: 18 DATE 3-2-60

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From: Commanding Officer.
To : Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet.
Via : Commander Group Five, LCI (L) Flotilla Two,
Commander LCI (L) Flotilla Two.
Commander Landing Craft and Bases, 8th Amphibious Fleet.
Commander United States Naval Forces, Northwest
African Waters.

Subject: U.S.S. LCI (L) 237 - mining of.

Enclosure: (A) Statement of Executive Officer of U.S.S.
LCI (L) 216, Lieut. (jg) Ralph W. Wright,
D-V(S), USNR.
(B) Report of U.S.S. SC 1044.
(C) Report of Captain James Borthwick, Black Watch,
PR2 o/c Troops aboard U.S.S. LCI (L) 237.

1. LCI (L)'s 216, 15, 192, and 237 were enroute 27 October 1943 Taranto, Italy to Catania, Sicily, carrying British troops as passengers, information as follows - SC 1044, LCI(L) 15, 216, 192, 237. LCI 237 struck drifting mine about 1930A 27 October in position 38 degrees 54' north - 17 degrees 19 minutes east. This position according to QBB 246 was definitely in swept channel and clear of nearest known mine fields by 11 miles. Position was definitely established by SC 1044 who took radar bearings. Depth of water at this point according to chart was about 628 fathoms. Entire Bow and No. 1 troop space demolished; 1 LCI 237 man missing, 21 British troops dead or missing. LCI (L) 237 towed to Catania by LCI (L)'s 15 and 192; LCI (L)'s 216 and SC1044 evacuating surviving and wounded British troops.

2. About 1930A 27 October, loud explosion heard astern of this vessel by officer of the deck, Lt. (jg) R.W. Wright, USNR. It was immediately reported to me by him and I at once came to the bridge. 1940A saw visual S.O.S. from USS LCI (L) 237. Ordered speed reduced and the SC 1044 to return to aid LCI 237. LCI 192 also turned about to aid. About 1943A saw another blinker message from LCI 237 of which one word "sinking" was understood. Immediately ordered LCI 15 to return to scene and this vessel also returned at flank speed.

3. Arriving at scene, stood in close to LCI 237 with LCI's 15 and 192 standing by also. It was then determined that LCI 237 had apparently struck a floating mine. Ordered all hands topside with lines and life rings, as it was believed that men were in water. Used searchlight but none were seen. I told LCI 237 that I was coming alongside but he warned me off saying that he thought there was a cable with other mines beneath his ship. At 2030 received message from LCI 237 to come alongside his starboard quarter,

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U.S.S. LCI (L) 216

and we moored to him at 2040. The SC 1044 was already alongside his port quarter and was taking off seriously wounded. I sent the executive officer aboard to aid in determining damage. Before this the SC 1044 had requested medical aid and Capt. E.L. Moore, MC, RAMC who was aboard this vessel as a passenger, and J.W. MacVanner PhMlc aboard this vessel were sent aboard the 1044. LCI (L) 216 took off LCI (L) 237 2 British Officers, 88 enlisted British personnel; five LCI 237 men, 2 LST 316 men who were passengers aboard the 237. Among the 90 British personnel were two stretcher cases and many slightly wounded and shocked cases. The hospital corpsman of the No. 3 Commando Unit embarked aboard this vessel as passengers rendered invaluable first aid to these cases. When the SC 1044, having taken aboard all the seriously wounded cases which totaled 9 men, cast off, I ordered LCI 15 to come alongside LCI 237 on port quarter to take LCI 237 in tow, as it was ascertained by that time that the LCI 237 was in no immediate danger of sinking. (See Enclosure (A)).

4. When LCI 15 was moored to LCI 237, and it was determined by Capt. Borthwick who was in charge of British draft aboard LCI 237, that there were no more living British troops aboard, this vessel cast off and stood by LCI 237.

5. LCI (L) 15 then took LCI (L) 237 in tow and proceeded towards Catania, LCI's 216 and 192 following close astern on either flank.

6. 2245 SC 1044 came close by and hailed us saying that they had contacted a hospital ship which was passing farther out to sea and was going alongside to transfer their wounded. One case aboard the SC 1044 had already died. SC 1044 transferred 8 wounded men and one body to the hospital ship and then returned to join the convoy.

7. The commanding officer of this vessel wishes to call attention to the admirable conduct of the entire crew and officers of the LCI (L) 237 during the disaster, especially of the executive officer of the LCI 237 Ensign W.B. Hilburn, USNR., senior officer present, performed gallant duties in rescuing four living British troops from demolished No. 1 troop space and in helping determine that there were no more living men who could be rescued or that were trapped in the wreckage.

8. The commanding officer of this vessel wishes to call attention to the conduct of the No. 3 Commando Unit aboard this vessel, Major Peter Young, commanding, in assisting the survivors transferred to this vessel. Their aid was invaluable in rendering medical assistance for minor injuries and shock; in helping keep confusion to the minimum; and in giving up

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SECRET

A4

Serial: L-121

their own bunks to survivors.

9. It is also to be noted that the commanding officer of the U.S.S. LCI (L) 15 performed a remarkable feat in taking in tow the LCI 237 by the stern during poor visibility and ground swells. Also on the morning of 28 October of initiating the idea of towing the LCI 237 between the LCI's 15 and 192. In the opinion of the commanding officer of this vessel, the commanding officers of the two LCI(L)'s performed a hard job extremely well.

10. The commanding Officer of the U.S.S. SC 1044 deserves commendation for his actions in taking off the seriously wounded men; rendering all possible medical aid; and in later transferring said wounded to the hospital ship "JULIAN" at sea in poor visibility and heavy swell.

11. The commanding officer of this vessel wishes to call attention to the keen judgment shown by his executive officer, Lt.(jg) Ralph W. Wright, USNR., who boarded damaged vessel at his request to aid in determining damage and casualties.

12. At 0615A 28 October, this vessel proceeded at advanced speed to Catania because of the necessity of getting survivors to a hospital as soon as possible, leaving SC 1044 in charge of convoy and the LCI 237 being towed very well by LCI's 15 and 192.

13. Arrived Catania 1600A 28 October and reported facts to N.O.I.C., Catania, sending advance dispatch to Commander in Chief, Mediterranean Fleet, Commander Landing Craft and Bases, information Commander LCI(L) Flotilla One and Commander LCI(L) Flotilla Two.

J.D. Parker, Jr.
J.D. PARKER, JR.
LIEUT. USNR.
S.O.P.A. CONVOY VESSEL

Copies to: COMLANCRABNW
COMGR5LCIFLOT2
COMLCI(L)FLOT2
COMLCI(L)FLOT1
CO USSLCI(L)237
CO USSLCI(L)15
CO USSLCI(L)192
CO USSSC1044
COMNAVNAW

October 28, 1943

Enclosure A

On October 27, 1943, at about 1930, on course 221 T, in an approximate position of 38 54' N, 17 19' E, while officer of the deck, I heard a loud explosion on our port quarter. Visibility was poor. I observed no flash. I immediately had the helmsman log this explosion, sent my lookout to report same to the Captain, and ordered the signalman to look back and determine whether or not the two ships astern were afloat. He reported all well. I checked his observations, and could see both vessels. Earlier on my watch, at about 1610, I had seen 4 large warships, which I believed to be three Italian Cruisers, and on Italian Battleship. I observed two bursts of antiaircraft fire from these vessels, and after careful inspection, logged same as "expenditure of ammunition in drill exercises." Seeing our convoy apparently in tack, and knowing that these larger vessels were previously firing, I reasoned that this loud explosion was heavy fire from one of these warships. After informing the captain, my lookout returned to the bridge. The captain was close behind him. The captain had no sooner taken over the bridge than we received unreadable blinker from LCI 237. It was then and is now suggested that their signalman was unduly excited. Convoy speed, at that time 12 knots, was reduced to "All engines, ahead 1/3." Within seconds, a clearly distinguishable S.O.S. message was received from LCI 237.

The Captain, as senior officer afloat, immediately halted the convoy, ordering Sub Chaser 1044 and LCI 192 to return and assist the damaged vessel. LCI 15 was then immediately ordered to return and stand by. By this time, our own vessel was proceeding, at flank speed, to the scene of the emergency. We stood off insisting that LCI 237 permit us to come alongside and transfer personnel. Sub Chaser 1044 moored to the port quarter of LCI 237 to evacuate the seriously wounded. About 17 British Soldiers - 10 seriously wounded - were put aboard the Sub Chaser. Our vessel moored on the starboard quarter of LCI 237. 2 British Officers and 89 British Troops - 5 crew members of LCI 237 - and two LST 316 men, who were being transported to Bizerte by LCI 237 - all survivors - were taken aboard this vessel.

Upon orders from my Commanding Officer, I went aboard the LCI 237 to inspect the damage, determine the number of casualties, and gather general information. As I boarded the LCI 237, Sub Chaser 1044 cast off, later turning over her casualties to a hospital ship which, fortunately, was passing the area. The LCI 237 was severely damaged. Her bow was completely blown off. Her number one (#1) troop compartment was almost completely blown off, but enough deck area remained to allow me to observe numerous bodies strewn there on. Number two (#2) troop compartment was taking on water, but I was informed that the ships' "handbilly" could adequately take care of it. Troop compartments number three (#3) and four (#4) were watertight. It was decided that the damaged vessel could be taken in tow. I returned to my vessel to report my findings to my commanding officer.

Ralph W. Wright

Ralph W. Wright
Lt. (jg), USNR.
Executive Officer

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BY: *NARA* Date: *11-15-08*

c/o Fleet Post Office
New York, N. Y.

S-E-C-R-E-T

29 October 1943

From: The Commanding Officer.
To : ComLanCrabNaw.
Via : Commander Escort Sweeper Group.

Subject: Mining of LCI-237 on 27 October 1943.

1. On 27 October 1943, this vessel sailed as escort for LCI-15, LCI-192, LCI-216, and LCI-237. Convoy left boom gate at Taranto at 1100 and proceeded on route D, as per orders, at speed 11-12 knots. Proceeded out swept channel in column as follows: SG-1044; LCI's 216, 192, 237. At 1630 changed course to 174T. At L39 28' N. Lo 17 23' E. Radar bearing showed distance from pt. Alice 10.5 miles distant bearing 248T.

2. At 1850 changed course to 221T, 217 PSO, at L39 Lo 17 26' E. At 1932 I was in the conn and was taking a Radar bearing and heard a loud noise. Other members of crew heard same and one of the lookouts on bridge saw astern a cloud of black smoke near stern most L.C.I.'s. Position at that time L38 54' N. Lo 17 24' E.

3. Received blinker message from LCI-237 she was sinking, turned back and stood in close aboard LCI-237 whose bow had blown off. She was well afloat. Weather was threatening, swells moderate, other LCI's standing by.

4. 2018 came alongside LCI 237 and took on casualties (9), also a Dr. W. MOORE, R.A.M.C. who was on the LCI-216 and the pharmacist mate l/c, John McVANNER, who is to be commended for his treatment of casualties.

5. After ascertaining LCI-237 would stay afloat, convoy got underway with LCI in tow by LCI-15. We were fortunate enough to see in distance, broad on port bow, apparently a Hospital Ship. Were able to contact her and stood out 135 T and transferred casualties to British Hospital Ship "JULIAN".

6. One man, WALSH, W. 1533066 GNR. R.A. died on board this vessel. Was taken off, with other casualties, by the "JULIAN".

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BY *NAVA* Date *11-15-02*

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Serial No. 001
Date: 29 October 1943

7. We endeavored to contact shore stations by radio and though able to transmit, evidently receiver was not working as could get no replies. Cutting tools were needed to get into forward hold of the 237 and wanted if possible to ascertain if anyone was living.

8. Requested Hospital Ship to deliver story as quickly as possible to NOIC Taranto (Next day, the 28th, at 1650, Italian plane with men and tools landed in Straits of Messina but towing was so successful decided to continue to Catania).

9. LCI was towed stern to but at daylight the LCI's 15 and 192 lashed the 237 between them and convoy continued to Catania, arriving at 2145. Also at daylight LCI 216 proceeded on ahead with minor casualties and to report that we were proceeding to port and to be in readiness.

10. It is believed all positive action was taken and this command wishes to commend the C.O's of the LCI's 15 and 192 for their excellent work in towing the 237. Convoy made about 7-8 knots from daylight on.

PLINY JEWELL, JR.
LT.D-V(G), USNR.
Commanding USS SC-1044

Copy to: ComNOB, Palermo.
CO, LCI 216 (SOPA of LCIs)
CO's. LCI-237, 15, 192

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Authority *MMJ 962133*
BY *SA* NARA Date *11-15-08*

TROOP OFFICER'S REPORT ON EVENTS RELATING TO
MINING OF TROOP-CARRYING LCI, USS 237.

TO:- ESO, Catania.
56 Sub Area, Catania.
Copies to:
Captain, LCI 237
" LCI 216.

14 1834

1) On Tuesday 26th October troops from X transit camp, Taranto, 199 transit camp, Taranto, and other army personell were embarked on LCI 237 at Taranto by the ESO.

2) Final roll-call was taken on board LCI 237 at 1830 hours on 26th October, all ranks being confined to ship, with guards mounted. T/95147 MSM Hurry J, 345 CT Coy, RASC, was ships sergeant major. All embarked personell were reported present - 2 officers and 115 ORs - total 117 all ranks.

3) LCI 237 set sail for Catania in Sicily about 1200 hours on Wednesday, 27th October.

4) About 1940 hours on October 27, LCI 237 struck a mine head on. The forward troop compartment was badly damaged, killing and wounding a number of army personell, and taking in water. The second hold was also damaged and some water was taken in.

5) Some army personell on deck were thrown into the sea by the explosion. An American sailor immediately dived overboard and brought them to safety.

6) Following the explosion, and while the ship appeared to be making water, naval personell gave the order "Prepare to abandon ship".

7) There was a complete absence of panic. Troops in the troop space amidships remained in their quarters, and were joined there by some of the personell from No 2 troop space. A party of ORs from No 2 troop space were detailed as a working party to help extricate wounded from the forward troop compartment.

8) When the officer in charge of troops reached the hold he found rescue work was already going ahead. 1106301 Gunner Williams, 90th Field Regt RA, had been first into this badly damaged compartment, awash with water and wreckage, and in total darkness. His example was followed by others and several wounded had already been extricated. 304829 S/Sgt Ash, 11 Workshops and Park Coy, RE, had put himself in command of the rescue party, and conducted himself with great coolness and efficiency.

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BY *NA* NARA Date *11-15-08*

12) When all wounded had been removed from the forward hold, a dressing station was set up in the galley. There S/Sgt Brewere rendered first aid to the less seriously wounded and those suffering from shock.

13) By about 2000 hours a submarine chaser of the U.S. Navy had come alongside. Seriously wounded personell, nine in number - including to unconscious stretcher cases - were transferred to the sub- chaser.

14) LCI 237 was not now taking water, About 2030 hours LCI 216 came alongside in response to wireless requests.

15) Lt David Martin, Black Watch had volunteered and was detailed to remain on board LCI 237 with six men to carry on work in the forward troop compartment, although it was now known no live survivors remained. The remainder of the army personell survivors were transferred to LCI 216. Having ensured that no army personell remained aboard LCI 237 -- apart from those detailed -- and that there were no live men in the forward compartment, they were then joined by the officer in charge of troops.

16) LCI 216 remained alongside the damaged vessel for about an hour. Lt Martin reported to the captain that there were no live survivors in the forward hold, and the dead bodies were pinned down by wreckage. The naval authorities having no need of his services, Lt Martin was ordered by officer in charge of troops to transfer to LCI 216 with his six men. This he did.

17) A total of two officers and 88 OR survivors from LCI 237 were transferred to LCI 216.

18) These survivors were fed and clothed and fitted out with blankets, boots and socks by No 3 Commando, on board LCI 216.

19) Naval personell also gave up their quarters to survivors and drew on their cigarette rations to ensure that each of the survivors had at least twenty cigarettes. Spirits from the naval officers' private stock was administered to survivors desiring same.

20) LCI 216 docked at Catania on Oct 28th about 1600 hours. Survivors were disembarked by the ESO and taken to Catania Transit camp.

21) LCI 237 was towed into Catania harbour about 2000 hours on Oct 28. After working all day Oct 29th, fourteen bodies were removed from the forward hold. Of these six were identified.

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BNA NARA Date 11-15-08

TROOP OFFICER'S REPORT - Cont.

22) It is also believed three Army personell were on board without authority, and killed in the explosion.

23) Of the total embarked of 117 all ranks, 90 survivors were disembarked from LCI 216; 9 wounded were transferred to a hospital ship; 6 dead were identified; leaving 12 embarked personell missing, presumed dead. To this must be added 3 unidentified or partly identified personell missing presumed dead.

24) The officer in charge of troops has asked the captain of LCI 237 to log his tribute to the demeanour of the crew of LCI 237 generally, and that of Ensign Woody B. Hilburn in particular.

25) The officer in charge of troops has also requested the captain of LCI 216 to log his appreciation of treatment accorded survivors on board that rescue vessel.

26) Officer in charge of troops has forwarded through 56 Sub Area commendations for awards in the case of Gunner Williams, S/Sgt Ash and Brewer.

James Borthwick, Capt.
Black Watch, PR2,
att HQ, 51 H Div.

CATANIA,
30th Oct, 1943

o/c troops,
LCI 237.

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BY SP-6 NARA Date 11-15-08