

TF64/A16-3

UNITED STATES ATLANTIC FLEET
TASK FORCE SIXTY-FOUR
U.S.S. DECATUR (DD-341)
Flagship

SECRET

c/o Fleet Post Office
New York, N.Y.
9 May, 1944

From: Commander Task Force SIXTY-FOUR.
To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via: Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.
Subject: Air Attack on Convoy UGS-36, April 1, 1944

Inclosures:

Photostated
and
DISTRIBUTED
SEPARATELY

1. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944, DECATUR with letter -p.7
2. Ltr. SELLSTROM DE-255(FMR)A16-3 (035) of 3 April, 1944 -p.10
3. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944 SELLSTROM -p.13
4. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944 RAMSDEN -p.17
5. Ltr. RAMSDEN DE-382(FMR)/A16-3/FF13 (422) of 7 April, 1944 -M-ser. 69768
6. Ltr. RHODES DE-384/FE-7 (0153) of 4 April, 1944 -p.20
7. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944 RHODES -p.23
8. Ltr. SAVAGE DE-386(FMR)P6-1 (336) of 8 April, 1944 -p.25
9. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944, SAVAGE -p.27
10. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944, WHIPPLE with letter -p.30
11. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944, ALDEN with letter -p.33
12. AA-1 Form, 1 April, 1944, JOHN D. EDWARDS with letter -p.38
13. AA-1 Forms (3), 1 April, 1944, TOMICH -p.41

1. At 0400 (-1) April 1, 1944 the enemy carried out an air attack on convoy UGS-36 with a small force, believed not to have exceeded twenty planes. The convoy at this time was in Latitude 36° - 52' north, Longitude 01° - 43' east, course 082°, speed 8 knots. The ships, ninety in number, consisting of seventy-two merchant vessels and eighteen LST's were disposed in thirteen columns, the LST's all at the rear of the columns.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: E.O. 13526

By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

TF64/A16-3

9 May, 1944

From: Commander Task Force SIXTY-FOUR.
To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via: Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.
Subject: Air Attack on Convoy UGS-36, April 1, 1944.

2. The escort was composed as follows:

Task Force SIXTY-FOUR

DECATUR (Flag)

CORTDIV 23

SELLSTROM (F)
RAMSDEN
MILLS
RHODES
SAVAGE

DESDIV 57

WHIPPLE (F)
ALDEN
JOHN D. EDWARDS

Two ships of CORTDIV 7

TOMICH
SLOAT

(Two ships of Task Force SIXTY-FOUR, JOHN D. FORD and RICHEY were absent temporarily, undergoing repairs.)

Escort Group THIRTY-SEVEN

H.N.M. JOHAN MAURITS (F)
H.N.M. FRISO
H.M.S. BLACK SWAN
H.M.S. AMETHYST
H.M.S. DEPTFORD
H.M.S. CAMPION

Two additional vessels fitted as (JIG) ships also re-enforced the escort.

H.M.S. COLOMBO, Captain H. W. Williams, R.N.
U.S.S. SPEED of Mine Squadron SIX.

Vessels of Task Force SIXTY-FOUR less DESDIV FIFTY-SEVEN and MILLS formed an anti-submarine screen in accordance with Table 7 day stations as for seven vessels. MILLS had reported radar failure earlier and had been withdrawn from the inner screen

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: E.O. 13526

By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

SECRET

9 May, 1944

TF64/A16-3

From: Commander Task Force SIXTY-FOUR
To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via: Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.
Subject: Air Attack on Convoy UGS-36, April 1, 1944.

and stationed on the starboard quarter. DESDIV FIFTY-SEVEN was stationed astern, ALDEN in center, WHIPPLE to starboard, and JOHN D. EDWARDS to port. These ODD have light AA armament (six 20 MM) and were so located that smoke could be laid by them if found advantageous. Escort group THIRTY-SEVEN, less BLACK SWAN and AMETHYST were disposed as an outer anti-submarine screen twelve thousand yards ahead of the guide. The port flank, regarded as the more exposed, was supported as follows: SPEED on port bow between station 11 and the inner screen, BLACK SWAN and AMETHYST, fitted with heavy AA armament radar controlled, on port flank. COLOMBO (JIG and fighter director), port quarter with freedom of movement as found desirable during attack.

3, Vessels of Task Force SIXTY-FOUR had standing orders in the event of air attack to close the convoy to within 1000 yards and to be ready to open fire with all AA armament. Previous experience by the British in the Mediterranean showed the majority of air attacks occurring either at dawn or dusk and provision had been made for DECATUR and vessels of DESDIV FIFTY-SEVEN to screen the convoy with white smoke during these periods. The value of this defensive measure is considered highly doubtful and for convoy and escort to make smoke, once an attack has started, will only hinder the effective use of own gunfire. At 0400 (-1), when the attack started, the moon had been set for an hour and a half, the night was dark, prominent objects visible at 4000 yards. A gentle breeze from west-north-west caused a slight sea and swell from the same direction.. Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, had advised by dispatch 311836 that the convoy had been sighted by enemy reconnaissance. TOMICH at 2213 thirty-first had obtained a firm sound contact definitely classified as submarine and had attacked, assisted by BLACK SWAN. In view of expected air attack they were instructed to break off attempts to regain contact two hours after lost contact, and at the time of air attack were rejoining.

⑤

-3-

3

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: E.O. 13526

By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

SECRET

9 May, 1944

TF64/A16-3

From: Commander Task Force SIXTY-FOUR
To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via: Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.
Subject: Air Attack on Convoy UGS-36, April 1, 1944.

and stationed on the starboard quarter. DESDIV FIFTY-SEVEN was stationed astern, ALDEN in center, WHIPPLE to starboard, and JOHN D. EDWARDS to port. These ODD have light AA armament (six 20 MM) and were so located that smoke could be laid by them if found advantageous. Escort group THIRTY-SEVEN, less BLACK SWAN and AMETHYST were disposed as an outer anti-submarine screen twelve thousand yards ahead of the guide. The port flank, regarded as the more exposed, was supported as follows: SPEED on port bow between station 11 and the inner screen, BLACK SWAN and AMETHYST, fitted with heavy AA armament radar controlled, on port flank. COLOMBO (JIG and fighter director), port quarter with freedom of movement as found desirable during attack.

3, Vessels of Task Force SIXTY-FOUR had standing orders in the event of air attack to close the convoy to within 1000 yards and to be ready to open fire with all AA armament. Previous experience by the British in the Mediterranean showed the majority of air attacks occurring either at dawn or dusk and provision had been made for DECATUR and vessels of DESDIV FIFTY-SEVEN to screen the convoy with white smoke during these periods. The value of this defensive measure is considered highly doubtful and for convoy and escort to make smoke, once an attack has started, will only hinder the effective use of own gunfire. At 0400 (-1), when the attack started, the moon had been set for an hour and a half, the night was dark, prominent objects visible at 4000 yards. A gentle breeze from west-north-west caused a slight sea and swell from the same direction.. Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, had advised by dispatch 311836 that the convoy had been sighted by enemy reconnaissance. TOMICH at 2213 thirty-first had obtained a firm sound contact definitely classified as submarine and had attacked, assisted by BLACK SWAN. In view of expected air attack they were instructed to break off attempts to regain contact two hours after lost contact, and at the time of air attack were rejoining.

⑤

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: E.O. 13526

By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

SECRET

9 May, 1944

TF64/A16-3

From:

Commander Task Force SIXTY-FOUR.

To:

Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.

Via:

Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.

Subject:

Air Attack on Convoy UGS-36, April 1, 1944.

4. The attack opened at 0400 (-1) with a string of flares over column eleven near the head of the column, followed at short intervals by additional illumination over the starboard quarter, port bow and outer screen. Low-flying planes could be heard faintly about the sound of the AA guns and machine guns and all escorts except one had brief glimpses of these planes, apparently two-engined torpedo carrying bombers. COLOMBO and COMDESDIV FIFTY-SEVEN reported sighting what was believed to be sticks of bombs from high-level bombers, the former placing the splashes from the port flank toward the center of the convoy, the latter, from the center toward the starboard quarter. The reaction of the convoy to the attack was immediate and surprising. If the enemy had required illumination prior to the attack, none was required 30 seconds later for the whole convoy was solidly outlined, with tracer streaming from every gun.

5. Two planes were shot down, one on the port bow jointly by RAMSDEN and TOMICH, the second was claimed by Pennant 114, LAWRENCE D. TYSON, and crashed between columns eight and nine. One probable was observed to crash in flames on the port quarter, and a possible fourth plane destroyed, showed distress lights on the port beam.

6. There were no personnel casualties reported in the convoy. Two men, Robert C. Beck, Sea.lc. USNR, attached to DECATUR, and James W. Searcy, F.lc. USCGR, attached to SAVAGE, were wounded at their general quarters stations by 20 MM fragments.

7. Penant 93, JARED INGERSOLL, was torpedoed in number one hold, port bow, and was abandoned by her crew as fire broke out. The crew was picked up and the vessel salvaged through the efforts of MILLS and H.M.Tug MINDFUL, separate report of which has been forwarded through Commander American Naval Forces, North African Waters. The enemy failed to make any other hits, although up to twenty heavy underwater explosions were reported.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: E.O. 13526

By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

SECRET

TF64/A16-3

9 May, 1944

From: Commander Task Force SIXTY-FOUR.
To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via: Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.
Subject: Air Attack on Convoy UGS-36, April 1, 1944.

8. With a strong escort and convoy properly instructed, the continuous use of smoke to screen the convoy is regarded as of doubtful value and smoke made after an attack has commenced is regarded more as a hindrance to defense than otherwise. A large proportion of fire from convoy vessels was observed to be directed at the flares. If, through proper instruction, it will be possible to restrain armed guard crews into waiting for legitimate targets normally to be found 180° from the flares, it is believed that damage to the enemy will be proportionately higher. It is certain that a 20 MM or 40 MM gunner whose recent target has been a flare or other illuminant, is temporarily blinded to the point where he would be ineffective should a fair target be presented.

9. It seems doubtful whether it is wise to distribute the defending force unequally, as in this attack, the enemy attempted to illuminate both bows and the two planes shot down were moving from starboard to port. A third plane moving in the same direction made a torpedo run on COLOMBO, which vessel took avoiding action, the torpedo passing astern. There was no evidence of the use of radio controlled bombs. In conversations with officers who have observed similar attacks off the Italian beaches, they recommend reducing speed to ten knots or less and withholding fire until legitimate targets are presented. They believe these tactics to be successful because the wake of a vessel at high speed is relatively easy to pick up from a plane. Vessels stopped or moving slowly are extremely difficult to pick up as the pilot is partially blinded by his own illumination.

10. The conduct of the escort under their first air attack is considered to have been generally satisfactory. In view of the fire power available to the escort and convoy, total damage inflicted on the enemy can only be regarded as unsatisfactory, but this is believed to have been the result of a misconception on the part of control officers as to proper targets. Every effort will be made

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: E.O. 13526

By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

SECRET

TF64/A16-3

9 May, 1944

From: Commander Task Force SIXTY-FOUR.
To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via: Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Fleet.
Subject: Air Attack on Convoy UGS-36, April 1, 1944.

to prevent firing at flares in future attacks. Particular mention is made of the creditable performances of RAMSDEN, Lieut. Comdr. Sherman T. Baketel, USCGR; and TOMICH, Lieut. Charles B. Brown, USNR. These vessels have demonstrated that their training has proceeded to an advanced stage and in the present instance, opportunity in the form of an enemy target presented for but a few seconds under conditions of poor visibility, was promptly seized to accomplish the total destruction of an enemy plane.

H. S. Berdine
H. S. BERDINE

②