

May 15, 1942.

S-E-C-R-E-T

From: The Commanding Officer, U.S.S. LEXINGTON.
To : The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Via : (1) Commander Task Force ELEVEN.
(2) Commander Task Force SEVENTEEN.

Subject: Report of Action - The Battle of the Coral Sea,
7 and 8 May 1942.

Enclosure: (A) Approximate Track Chart of LEXINGTON 7 - 8
May, 1942.
(B) Set of Photographs showing damage to
LEXINGTON and various stages of the attack.
(C) Sketch of torpedo hits made by VT-2 on
RYUKAKU, May 7th.
(D) Sketch of torpedo hits made by VT-2 on
SHOKAKU, May 8th.
(E) Sketch of tracks of Torpedo Squadron TWO
on 7 May.
(F) Sketch of Track of Torpedo Squadron TWO
on 8 May.
(G) Pictures of Enemy CV Attacked by LEX Gr.
on 7 May.

1. On the 7th of May 1942, the LEXINGTON was operating in the Coral Sea as part of Task Force SEVENTEEN, with Rear Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch on board as Commander Air. The Air Task Group consisted of the LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN and accompanying destroyers. Various actions took place during that day and the next, May 8th. The following report is submitted:

NARRATIVE OF EVENTS, MAY 7th.

2. At early dawn May 7th the YORKTOWN launched 10 scout bombers to search a hundred and twenty degree arc to a distance of 250 miles, median 025° true, for enemy forces. At 0835 contact report was received from YORKTOWN of two enemy carriers, two cruisers and two destroyers in a position in the vicinity of the Misima Island, the distance being about 170 miles from the ship. So far as reported, the rest of the search was negative. The scout in the eastern arc reported low visibility in that area and turned back at 150 miles, the rest of his arc not being searched.

3. The LEXINGTON attack group was launched for attack about 0925. It consisted of 10 VF, 28 VSB, and 12 YTB. Eight SBD's were retained at the ship for anti-torpedo plane patrol. After the group was well on its way, YORKTOWN reported

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The scout making the contact had corrected his report when he returned to the ship to 2 CA and 2 CL. This implied to me that there was no carrier present. However, the group was allowed to continue.

4. About 11:30 the group made contact with a carrier of the RYUKAKU type and started their attack. VS-2 consisting of 10 SBDs loaded with 1-500 and 2-100 lb. bombs, attacked first and obtained 2 500 lb. bomb hits as follows:

- 1 on stern about 50 feet from ramp.
- 1 about 2/3 aft on flight deck, center.

These later were confirmed by independent observers, including Commander of Fighting Squadron Two.

5. VB-2 attacked at 1145 and obtained 5-1000 lb. bomb hits as follows:

- 1 about 2/3 aft on stbd. side flight deck.
- 1 aft on flight deck amidships.
- 1 aft on port side flight deck.
- 1 amidships about 1/2 way aft.
- 1 near stbd. side aft.

Sixteen pilots participated in that attack and it is not practicable to determine which ones definitely made direct hits. However, the number of hits was confirmed not only by the participating pilots and the Squadron Commander, but also by the Commander of Fighting Two and others who were in excellent position to observe. The ship was a mass of flames from bomb hits and covered by splashes from the later torpedo hits.

6. VT-2 attacked at 1145 and obtained 9 torpedo hits by planes as follows:

- 2-T-1, pilot, Lieut. Comdr. J.H. Brett, Jr., USN.
- 2-T-2, pilot, Lt. (jg) L.F. Steffenhagen, USNR.
- 2-T-4, pilot, Lieut. R.F. Farrington, USN.
- 2-T-7, pilot, Lieut. E.W. Hurst, USN.
- 2-T-8, pilot, Ensign C. Hamilton, USN.
- 2-T-9, pilot, Gunner H.E. Talkington, USN.
- 2-T-10, pilot, Lt. (jg) L.W. Thornhill, USN.
- 2-T-11, pilot, Rad. Elect. J.E. Mattis, USN
- 2-T-12, pilot, C.A.P. M.H. Georgius, USN.

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7. Photographs were obtained during the latter phases of the attack, showing only the bow of the carrier with the rest of it completely enveloped in smoke, splashes, and flames. It is difficult to conceive any other result than complete destruction of this carrier and the personnel loss must have been close to 100%. From the bow silhouette in the photographs plus the cut away flight deck, the pilots descriptions, and radio intelligence it is believed that this carrier was the RYUKAKU. These photographs were saved when the LEXINGTON was abandoned.

8. One of our planes was lost in this attack. Lieutenant ALLEN, executive officer of VS-2, was definitely seen to go into the water as the result of enemy fighter action. Another SBD, Lieut. (jg) QUIGLEY, of VS-2, was damaged by AA fire, reporting his control wires shot away and his plane became unmanageable. He was directed by his Squadron Commander to bail out or land on Rossel Island in the Louisiades Archipelago. This was friendly territory and it is hoped he made a safe landing. Air Headquarters at Townsville was notified with the idea of his rescue, results so far unknown.

9. The rest of the group returned and landed about 1345. A second attack on enemy ships in the De Boyne Island area was ready at 1450 but was not ordered by the Task Force Commander due to the possibility of other enemy carriers being in our vicinity and not yet located. Evidence existed that we were being shadowed by enemy planes and enemy radio was intercepted giving our approximate position and exact course and speed. The weather in our area was squally, with about 90% overcast, frequent rain squalls, in which ceiling and visibility were zero. Wind varied from 15 to 22 knots from southeast.

10. About 1745, very close to sunset, radar contacts gave a group of enemy planes to the westward. Fighter Control directed fighters in the air to intercept and additional fighters were launched. These planes intercepted a formation of nine enemy zero fighters and engaged them in combat. Results were as follows: Four zero Jap fighters shot down, two other zero fighters damaged as evidenced by smoke and gasoline leakage. Yorktown fighters claimed three which would account for the entire formation of nine, if there was no over-lapping.

Our losses: One VF, Lieut. (jg) P.G. Baker, pilot, failed to return. It is believed that he collided with a zero fighter, included in the above enemy losses.

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11. While landing the combat patrol, well after sunset and almost completely dark, strange planes appeared flying around our formation. They were challenged and I received one report that they answered correctly and it was presumed at first they were YORKTOWN planes approaching to land. One observer reported they were two-engine torpedo planes. YORKTOWN reported they were enemy planes. Some ships opened fire on them. YDRKTOWN and LEXINGTON planes were still circling to land. However, these strange planes made no hostile move, were burning running lights and eventually moved off thirty miles to the eastward, where radar showed them circling and apparently landing on an enemy carrier. They were definitely enemy planes and apparently mistook us for their own force. The indicated presence of enemy carriers only thirty miles east was reported to the Task Force Commander. It was estimated that these carriers were the SHOKAKU and the ZUIKAKU of Cardiv FIVE, which until that time had been unaccounted for.

12. It is believed that this day's action resulted in the complete destruction of the enemy carrier RYUKAKU with practically all personnel and ultimate loss of all her planes. In addition, during the day, the following enemy plane losses were inflicted:

6 zero type VF at 1745.
4 "97" type VF at scene of enemy carrier.
1 VT near scene of enemy carrier.

Total 11 planes. This does not include planes shot down by YORKTOWN group.

Our losses during the day were: 2 SBD, 1 VF. The pilot and radioman of 1 SBD may be safe on Rossel Island.

SECOND DAY'S NARRATIVE

13. The Task Force Commander's decision was to proceed during the night to southwestward and search for and attack the enemy carriers at dawn. The LEXINGTON was directed to search 360°, 200 miles in the northern semicircle and 150 miles in the southern semicircle.

14. Contact was made by LEXINGTON scout 2-S-2, Lieut. (jg) Joseph Smith, about 0820, with a formation of two CV, 4 CA, and 3 DD 170 miles to the northeastward. Attack group consisting of 24 SBDs, 10 VF, and 12 VTB was launched

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between 0900 and 0920, and proceeded immediately. At 0832 radio intercepted enemy transmission giving our position, course and speed and we knew definitely we had been located. I predicted enemy attack would come in about 1100. All preparations to receive it were made. Ship was at General Quarters; condition Zed was set; returning scouts were launched as anti-torpedo plane patrol; additional fighters not already in the air were launched at 1030 and 1100; and all stations were warned to be ready.

15. The weather in our vicinity was clear, unlimited visibility and ceiling, few clouds, no rain squalls, wind about 15 knots, from southeast. Radar reported at 1100 many enemy aircraft approaching from northward, distance about 75 miles. First enemy planes were sighted from the ship at 1113. They were torpedo planes. They were at about 6-7000 feet altitude and split and came in from both bows. Ship's speed had been built up to 25 kts. at 1100 when the attack was expected and was immediately increased to 30 kts. when the hostile aircraft were sighted.

16. Our combat patrol, under the Fighter Director, was patrolling at 10,000 feet. Exact altitude of the approaching enemy was not determined, but was known to be over 10,000 feet. The fighters made contact 20-30 miles out but the enemy bombers were at 17,000 feet and the performance of our fighters was not sufficient to gain enough altitude to attack them before they reached the "push-over" point. The bombers intercepted were accompanied by 18 protective fighters, which our fighters subsequently engaged in combat and show down or damaged six. They were Me-109, 00, 96, and 0 types.

17. The Anti-torpedo Plane Patrol was on station at 2000 feet, but about 6000 yards out. This patrol always has a tendency to get too far out, probably due both to concern over AA fire from surface ships and an eagerness to intercept torpedo planes well out. From this position the enemy torpedo planes at high speed came in over them. Even so, the SED's on the port side intercepted; shot down 4 VT with torpedoes, 4 without torpedoes, 1 VB and 2 accompanying VF. One SED was shot down by enemy VF.

18. Anti-aircraft fire from this force was opened generally about 1113. Torpedo planes made the first attack, the first approaching from port and others circling to come in from starboard bow. Most of these planes came in at about a 40 or 45° dive from 6-7000 feet, making high speed and dropping

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their torpedoes in the dive attitude from altitude of 300-500 feet, although some were seen to level off just above the water and make a normal drop. The range at the dropping point varied from 500 to 1200 yards. I turned to port with full rudder to bring the first torpedoes ahead. From then on torpedoes were coming from both starboard and port and I maneuvered with full rudder both ways as I considered best to avoid torpedoes. Some from starboard crossed ahead; two others ran parallel to the ship, one on each side; some from port ran ahead; two ran under without hitting. At 1120, first torpedo hit ship and exploded just forward of port forward gun gallery; at 1121, one hit a little further aft about opposite the bridge. In the meantime, dive bombers were making their attack from about a 70° dive angle. They were pushing over from high altitude, 17,000 feet, and were not visible until they were in the final stages of their dive. One bomb estimated at 1000 lbs. hit the after end of the port forward gun gallery in the ready ammunition locker just outside the Admiral's cabin. Two other near misses hit close aboard aft on the port side and at first were mistaken for torpedo hits. Another bomb estimated 500 lbs. hit the gig boat pocket on the port side, and one 100 lb. hit the stacks and exploded inside. There were one or more near misses aft on the starboard side, fragments killing and injuring a number of men in the stack machine guns, sky aft, and the after signal station. I personally saw a flaming bomb, approaching the ship from port, and burning with a reddish colored flame. I am unable to say whether or not it hit.

19. Apparently there were seven explosions against the LEXINGTON, two of which are thought to have been torpedoes, 1 1000-lb. bomb hit, 2 1000-lb. bomb very near misses on the port side, and 2 smaller bombs. Fires were started in the main deck near the Admiral's country, beneath the incinerator, near the gig boat pocket and one in the forward starboard marine compartment near the forward elevator. The ship was listing about 6° to port. Damage control reported they were shifting oil to correct the list and fire parties were fighting the fires. Main Control reported all units in commission. Number 2, 4, and 6 fire rooms were partially flooded, but water was being controlled by the pumps. Steering gear was intact and the ship was making 25 kts. under good control. Both elevators at this time were reported out of commission, jammed in the up position, due to machinery casualties in the wells, probably from shock.

20. At about 1300, Damage Control reported the ship on an even keel, that three fires were out and the other one in the Admiral's country under control. The ship was periodically

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turned into wind to land and reserve aircraft. The attack group returned and was landed, the torpedo planes about 1400.

21. The attack group reported two 1000-lb bomb hits on enemy carrier of the SHOKAKU class made by Commander W.B. Ault, U.S.N., Group Commander, and three other SBD's operating with him. 5 torpedo hits were made by VT-2 as follows:

2-T-3, pilot, Ensign N.A. Sterrie, USNR.
2-T-5, pilot, Ensign T.B. Bash, USNR.
2-T-6, pilot, Ensign H.R. Mazza, USNR.
2-T-7, pilot, Lieut. E.W. Hurst, USN.
2-T-12, pilot, C.A.P. B.C. Shearon, USN.

They further reported when last seen she was on fire, settling and turning in a circle. It is believed that this ship was sunk. Radio intercepts later tended to confirm this belief. She was rapidly losing headway.

22. In the meantime, Damage Control was gradually getting all damage checked and cleared up. At 1247 a heavy explosion shook the ship. It appeared to come from amidships well down in the bowels of the ship. Communication with Central Station was immediately lost, all telephones except the JV line went out including the ship's service phones, and a bad fire broke out from the main deck down to the vicinity of Central Station just forward of the main elevator. All pressure was lost in the fire main forward. Rudder indicators on the bridge went out, although steering control was working. By using the JV line to trick wheel to receive reports of the position of the rudder, steering was retained on the bridge. The forward gyro compass system was out, but after gyro compass and repeaters were satisfactory.

23. This heavy explosion at 1247 was what caused the loss of the ship. Until that time everything was well under control. Full propulsive power was available, steering was O.K., the ship was on an even keel, and all fires were either out or under control. The cause of this explosion was uncertain. At first it was thought to be a "sleeper" dud 1000-lb bomb which went off in the bowels of the ship. However, further study indicates that small gasoline leaks from the heavy pounding the ship had received had caused accumulation of gasoline vapors in the lower regions and they were set off by spark of unknown origin. In any event, from this time on the ship was doomed.

24. Hoses from the after section of the fire main were led out and every effort was made to combat the fire. The fire spread aft and additional communications were gradually being

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lost. The fire main pressure dropped to 30-40 lbs. Minor explosions were recurring at frequent intervals, increasing the fire. Whether these were from 5-inch ammunition going off or from further gasoline vapors could not be determined. All lights forward were out and the main deck and below were full of smoke. It was a losing fight to control the fire. The JV line to truck wheel went dead and I steered for a while with the engines. Both gyros and repeaters were out and we used the magnetic compass.

25. At about 1600, the one remaining phone working to Main Control was getting very weak. Main Control had reported the forward bulkhead of Afirm unit was so hot the paint was peeling off in large blisters. I gave them permission to shift to the after spaces. Finally, about 1630, fearing I would lose all communication with them I ordered engineering personnel to secure the plant and get up on deck. The safeties were opened and the ship came to a stop. I ordered life rafts made ready and preparations made to abandon ship. Fire fighting efforts were still being made until the engineering plant was abandoned, when all water pressure was gone. At this time I asked Admiral FITCH for destroyers to come alongside and pass over fire hoses, thinking we might control the fire if we got water. The Admiral directed DD's to come alongside and also directed me to disembark excess personnel to the destroyers alongside. In response to this the USS MORRIS came alongside and passed two hoses over, which were put to work, and excess personnel went down lines to her deck. However, by this time the fire was beyond control. Additional explosions were occurring; it was reported the war heads on the hangar deck had been at a temperature of 140° F; ready bombs storage was in the vicinity of the fire and I considered there was danger of the ship blowing up at any minute. I had previously directed sick and wounded to be disembarked in our whale boats and excess squadron personnel had gone on lines to the destroyer alongside.

26. At 1707 Admiral FITCH directed me to abandon ship. I issued the orders and orderly disembarkation began. Boats from accompanying ships came alongside and assisted. Preference was given to lowering wounded and injured into the boats. Most of the men went hand over hand down lines over the side and into the water on life rafts. Most of the men were off by 1800. Admiral FITCH and myself were the last to leave the bridge. He disembarked forward where practically all had gone and I made a final inspection aft. I found a number of men aft on the starboard side and in the port after gun gallery where there seemed to be some difficulty; men in the water were having trouble getting away from the ship due to drift. I

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made a final inspection and went aft where my executive officer, Commander SELIGMAN, reported to me all men were off the ship. At this time a tremendous explosion about the vicinity of the elevator shook the ship and we had to duck to avoid falling debris. I directed Commander SELIGMAN to disembark. I saw him in the water swimming toward an approaching motor whale boat. Having assured myself there was no other living person on the ship, I went down a line hand over hand and dropped off into the water, to be picked up by a motor whale boat of the USS MINNEAPOLIS. This boat took me to the USS MINNEAPOLIS where I reported to Admiral FITCH.

27. The picture of the burning and doomed ship was a magnificent but sad sight. The ship and crew had performed gloriously and it seemed too bad that she had to perish in her hour of victory. But she went to a glorious end, more fitting than the usual fate of the eventual scrap heap or succumbing to the perils of the sea. She went down in battle, after a glorious victory for our forces in which the LEXINGTON and her air group played so conspicuous a part.

28. The PHELPS was directed by the Task Force Commander to sink the LEXINGTON by torpedoes. Five torpedoes were fired, at least three hit, and she finally went under on an even keel. As she went under a tremendous explosion occurred which rocked ships for miles around. It was the end of the LEXINGTON. These circumstances were reported to me verbally by the Commanding Officer of the PHELPS.

29. The survivors were scattered among nearly all of the accompanying ships. Check-ups by signal disclosed a total of about 2735 survivors. There were no drownings in the water due to abandoning ship so far as known. All losses of personnel were due to air combat in the air group or to the bomb explosions and fire on the ship. The preliminary total of personnel losses subject to final check is 26 officers and 190 men out of a total complement of 2951. This in itself is considered to be a remarkable achievement.

CONCLUSIONS

30-1. Air offense is definitely superior to the defense.

30-2. Combat patrols must patrol at 20,000 feet to insure interception prior to attack of high-flying enemy dive bombers.

30-3. Anti-torpedo Plane Patrols must keep in close to the torpedo release point, at about 3000 feet altitude, to insure interception of either high or low approach torpedo planes. This

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employment of SBD's is a make-shift at best; the best defense would be to have sufficient fighters for both a high and low patrol. This condition will seldom be realized. In this particular attack, the Anti-torpedo Plane Patrol of SBD's was partially effective. They shot down nine torpedo planes, four with torpedoes aboard, four without, and one undetermined. They also shot down two fighters. One SBD was shot down by enemy fighters. The Anti-torpedo Plane Patrol on the port side of the formation made all the intercepts. It was in position 3000 yds. outside of screen at 2000 feet. If it had been at the designated altitude of 3000 feet, it's position would have been more effective. It is considered that the Anti-torpedo Plane Patrol of SBD's is amply justified as better than nothing.

30-4. Our personnel are superior in quality and skill to the Japanese.

30-5. The ship was completely ready for the attack in every respect. A total of 11 fighters were in the air for defense against bombers, and 14 SBD's for defense against torpedo planes, in addition to planes in the air for defense from the YORKTOWN. All guns were manned and ready. Material condition Zed to meet the attack was completely set. Twenty-five to thirty knots speed was being made. All personnel were alert.

30-6. This battle definitely represented the simple problem of carrier against carrier. Both air groups were attacking the other's carrier at about the same time. I predicted ahead of time that it was possible for both attacks to be successful and for both opposing carriers to be destroyed. That is what happened. But few of our attacking planes were destroyed in the attack itself, whereas many of the Japanese planes were destroyed by our fighters and AA fire in their attack on us. The LEXINGTON remained afloat for over seven hours and rescued about 92% of her personnel, whereas the enemy carrier is believed to have sunk within the hour and to have lost a heavy percentage of its personnel.

30-7. In this battle, the enemy had the advantage of weather. The LEXINGTON was in a clear area, whereas the Japanese were in a rain squall area. Nevertheless, the major part of the LEXINGTON air attack group was able to find its objective.

30-8. Our own AA fire was, as usual, only partially

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effective. The general tendency was still to use insufficient lead and to fire under the target.

30-9. The loss of the ship was caused by an internal gasoline vapor explosion near Central Station below the armored deck in the vicinity of the forward torpedo hit. This explosion resulted from minor gasoline leaks gradually accumulating highly explosive vapor in the area. It was undetected, due to the complete sealing of the ship in Condition Zed. The adjacent gasoline control room had been flooded and sealed with CO₂ as a preventive measure. For means of preventing see recommendation 31-8 below.

30-10. The material performance was in general excellent. No gun stoppages or material failures were reported by the planes. The damage control features of the design of the LEXINGTON speak for themselves; she remained afloat for over seven hours after sustaining two torpedo hits, three bomb hits, and two near misses and had to be finally sunk by additional torpedo hits.

30-11. The performance of all personnel was magnificent. I cannot say too much in praise of the conduct of the personnel, of the officers and men of the LEXINGTON and her squadrons. The finest traditions of the Naval service were upheld in every respect. Many cases of individual heroism occurred, and they are too numerous to mention in this report. In accordance with Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet Instructions, separate letter is being submitted with recommendations for suitable awards in these cases. However, I wish to emphasize that every last officer and man performed his duty with the greatest credit to himself, his family and his country. The country can well be proud of their performance.

30-12. Our present methods of training and tactics are sound, as proven by this engagement. Our attacks were successful and except for the gasoline vapor explosion the ship would have been saved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

31-1. That a new carrier, the first available, be re-named the LEXINGTON to carry on the traditions of that great ship.

31-2. That the officers and men survivors of the LEXINGTON and her air group be retained together as a unit, to man the new LEXINGTON. This will be of the utmost value for morale, not only of these men but for the country as a whole, and will best utilize

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this group of well-trained, seasoned, and tested officers and men.

31-3. That all carriers be immediately filled to their allowance of 27 fighters.

31-4. That combat patrols patrol at 20,000 feet when enemy dive bombing attack is expected.

31-5. That Anti-torpedo Plane patrols be stationed at not more than 3000 yds. from the carrier at 3000 feet altitude for protection against both high and low level torpedo planes. Fighters should be used for this if available.

31-6. That fighters and torpedo planes of greater performance be provided to carriers as soon as possible.

31-7. That every effort be made to strengthen the air defense of carriers without sacrificing their offensive strength.

31-8. That damage control instructions to all ships contain the following:

Whenever structural damage occurs in the general vicinity of gasoline tanks, possibility of accumulation in confined spaces of dangerous concentrations of gasoline vapors exists. The following immediate steps must be taken to prevent destructive explosions:

1. Pump all gasoline tanks in the vicinity overboard or to tanks in an undamaged area and keep them flushed with salt water.
2. Take all steps practicable to prevent sparks anywhere near the damaged area.
3. Ventilate the damaged area thoroughly by all practicable means, including bilge pumps, even though it involves partially breaking material condition Zed in that area.

31-9. That additional fire fighting apparatus be installed on carriers, preferably separated units of diesel powered fire pumps and hoses, so that entire reliance is not placed on the fire mains.

31-10. That more rescue breathing or oxygen smoke helmets be provided. Several hundred should be the minimum and all men trained in their use.

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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

32. Enemy Damage May 7th:

By LEXINGTON Air Group:

- 1 carrier (RYUKAKU) sunk. In addition probably all her planes were lost and practically all personnel.
- 4 zero enemy fighters (type zero) shot down at 1745.
- 2 probable enemy zero destroyed at 1745.
- 1 type 97 VF at scene of carrier attack (VB-2).
- 1 type 97 VF at scene of carrier attack (VB-2).
- 1 3-place seaplane probable, near scene of carrier attack (VF-2).
- 2 VF type 97 by VF-2 at scene of attack on enemy carrier.

Total:

- 1 CV, (presumably 80 planes); 11 planes additional in combat (part of 80). These losses do not include planes shot down by YORKTOWN planes.

Our Losses, May 7th:

- 1 SED shot down by enemy fighters at scene of attack.
- 1 SED damaged at scene of attack, force-landed on Rossel Island. Pilot and gunner may be safe.
- 1 VF shot down by zero fighters at 1745.

Total:

- 3 planes, crew of one of which may be safe.

33. Enemy Losses, May 8th:

- 1 carrier (SHOKAKU) probably sunk with all planes and heavy loss of personnel.
- 4 VT shot down in vicinity of LEXINGTON (by AA).
- 1 VT shot down in vicinity of LEXINGTON (VB-2).

By VF-2: Certain:

- 2 VS at enemy carrier.
- 1 VF, type 00, at enemy carrier.
- 1 VF, Me-109, over LEXINGTON.
- 1 VF, 00, over LEXINGTON.
- 1 VF, 0, over Lexington.

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Probable:

- 2 VF, type 00, at enemy carrier.
- 1 VF, Me-109, over LEXINGTON.
- 1 VF, 96, over LEXINGTON.
- 1 VT, over LEXINGTON.

By VS-2:

- 4 VT with torpedoes near LEXINGTON.
- 4 VT without torpedoes near LEXINGTON.
- 1 VT or VB without bombs or torpedoes near LEXINGTON.
- 2 VF near LEXINGTON.

- 2 VF, type 97, shot down by VT-2 on return from attack.

Total:

- 1 CV, (presumably 80 planes) probably sunk; 29 planes additional in combat (part of 80). These losses do not include planes shot down by YORKTOWN planes (or AA fire in vicinity of YORKTOWN).

Our Losses, May 8th:

- 1 carrier (LEXINGTON) sunk, but with 92% personnel and 18 planes saved (planes landed on YORKTOWN).
- 7 VF shot down at scene of attack on enemy.
- 1 VT lost, out of gas returning; personnel may be safe.
- 3 SBD lost, out of gas returning; personnel may be safe.
- 1 SBD lost, shot down as Anti-torpedo Plane Patrol at LEXINGTON.

Total:

- 12 planes, personnel of 4 of which may be safe.

34. It is believed the above figures speak for themselves and that on the 7th and 8th of May, the LEXINGTON and her air group achieved two great victories in our country's cause and that her performance will go down in the annals of the Navy as an outstanding example of devotion to duty and successful accomplishment of a mission.

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35. This report of these actions is as accurate as I can determine at this time. I have obtained written statements from key personnel and can elaborate on any points if further details are desired, especially on material matters. If my recommendation to keep the officers and crew together is approved, it will facilitate supplemental reports.

36. The question of whether or not the SHOKAKU is sunk may be controversial at this writing. No report of any sighting of the SHOKAKU since the attack has been received. All information in my possession points to the probability of the only carrier proceeding away from the area being the damaged ZUIKAKU, which has been reported from radio intelligence. From the reports of pilots at the scene, stating she was settling, on fire, circling but rapidly loosing all way, unless positive information otherwise exists, I believe the SHOKAKU sank shortly after the attack.

Frederick C. Sherman
FREDERICK C. SHERMAN.

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ENCLOSURE - "A1"

approximate track chart of
Sexton May 7, 1942

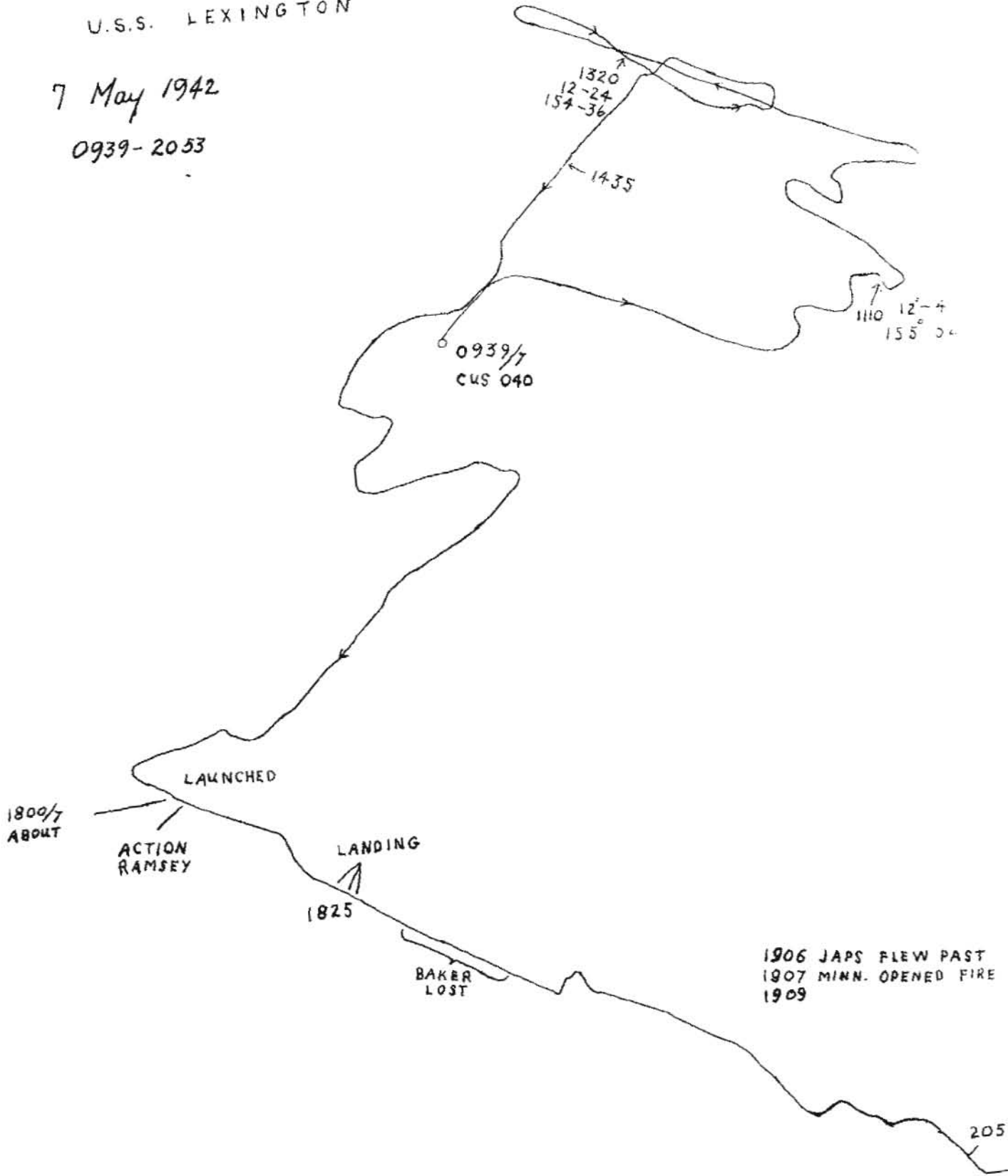
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CO LEX. secret serial (0100) of 5-15-42.

U.S.S. LEXINGTON

7 May 1942

0939-2053



1906 JAPS FLEW PAST
1907 MINN. OPENED FIRE
1909

ENCLOSURE "A"-2

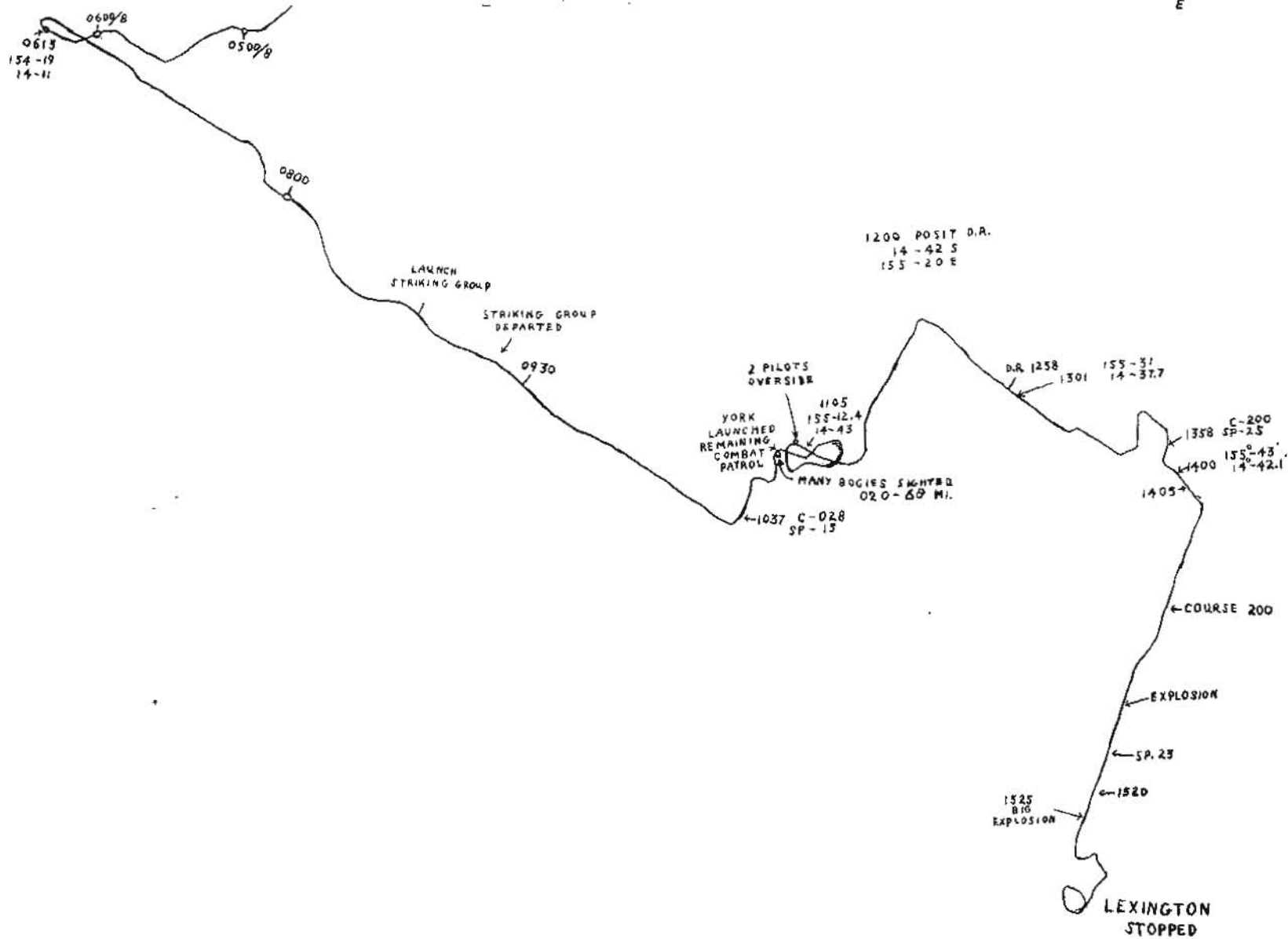
*Approximate track chart of
U.S.S. Lexington 8 May 1942.*

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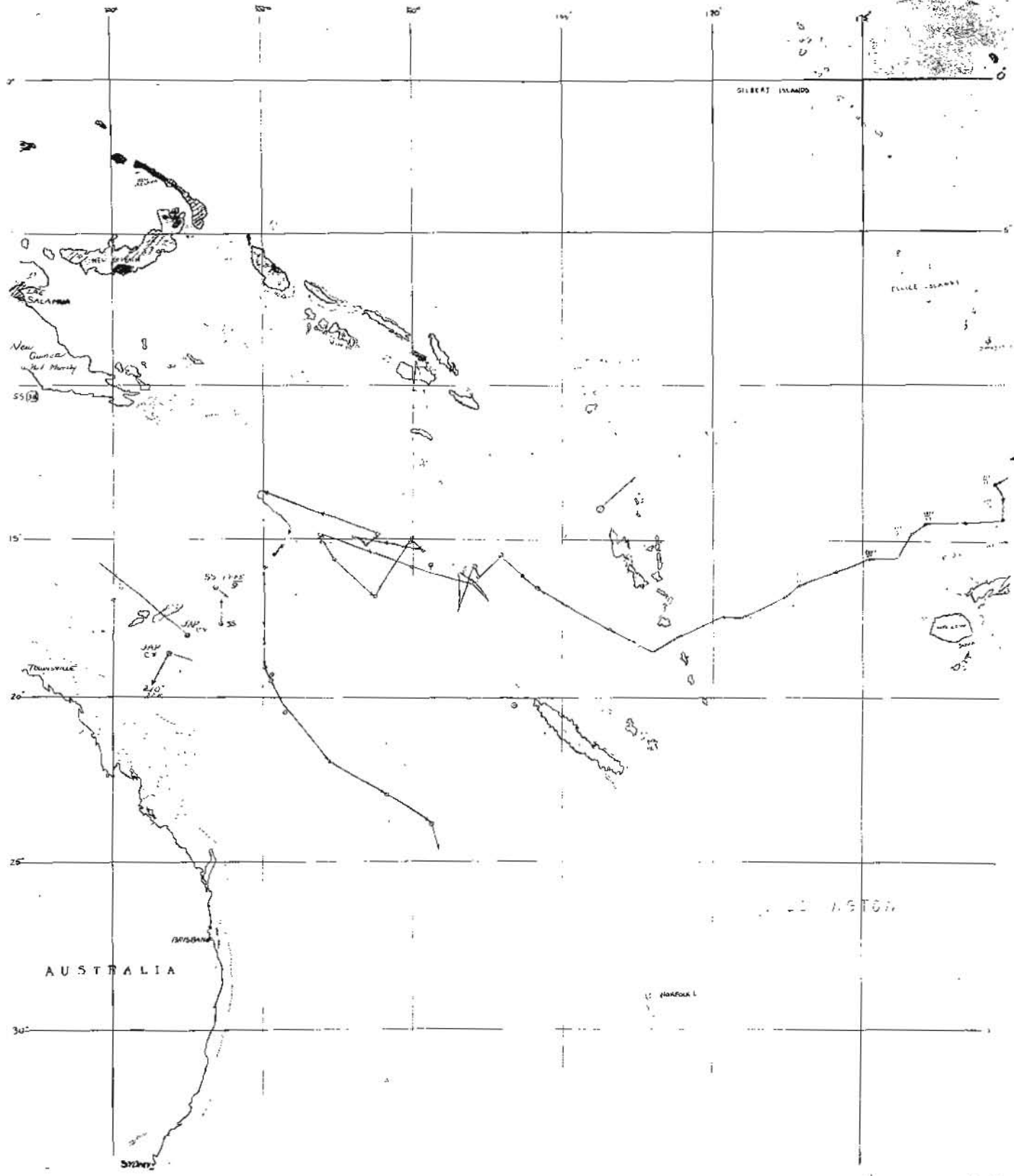
ENCLOSURE "A"-3

Approximate track chart of
Lexington 7-8 May 1942

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
MAY 15 1942

5-15-42

Enclosure (A) to CO LEXINGTON Secret Serial (0100) of 5-15-42.



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RECEIVED
MAY 15 1942

Enclosure "B" 5/8/42

USS Lexington about 1500 groups
all landed on board and deck spotted



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ENCLOSURE "B" 5/8/42

USS Lexington #2 gun gallery after
bomb hit and fire extinguished

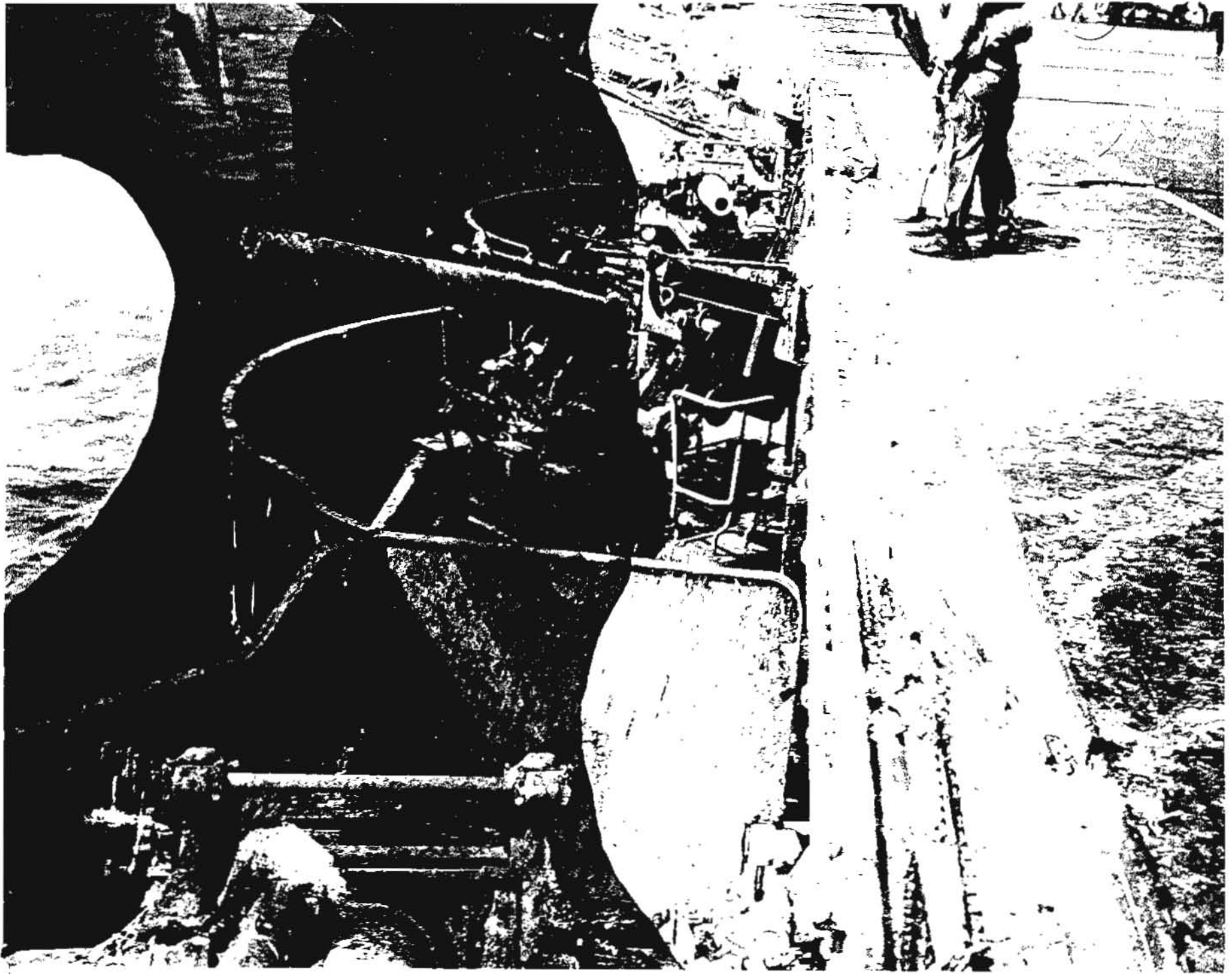
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~~SECRET~~

Enclosure "B" 5/8/42

U. S. S. Lexington looking forward after
big explosion which stopped ship at 1525

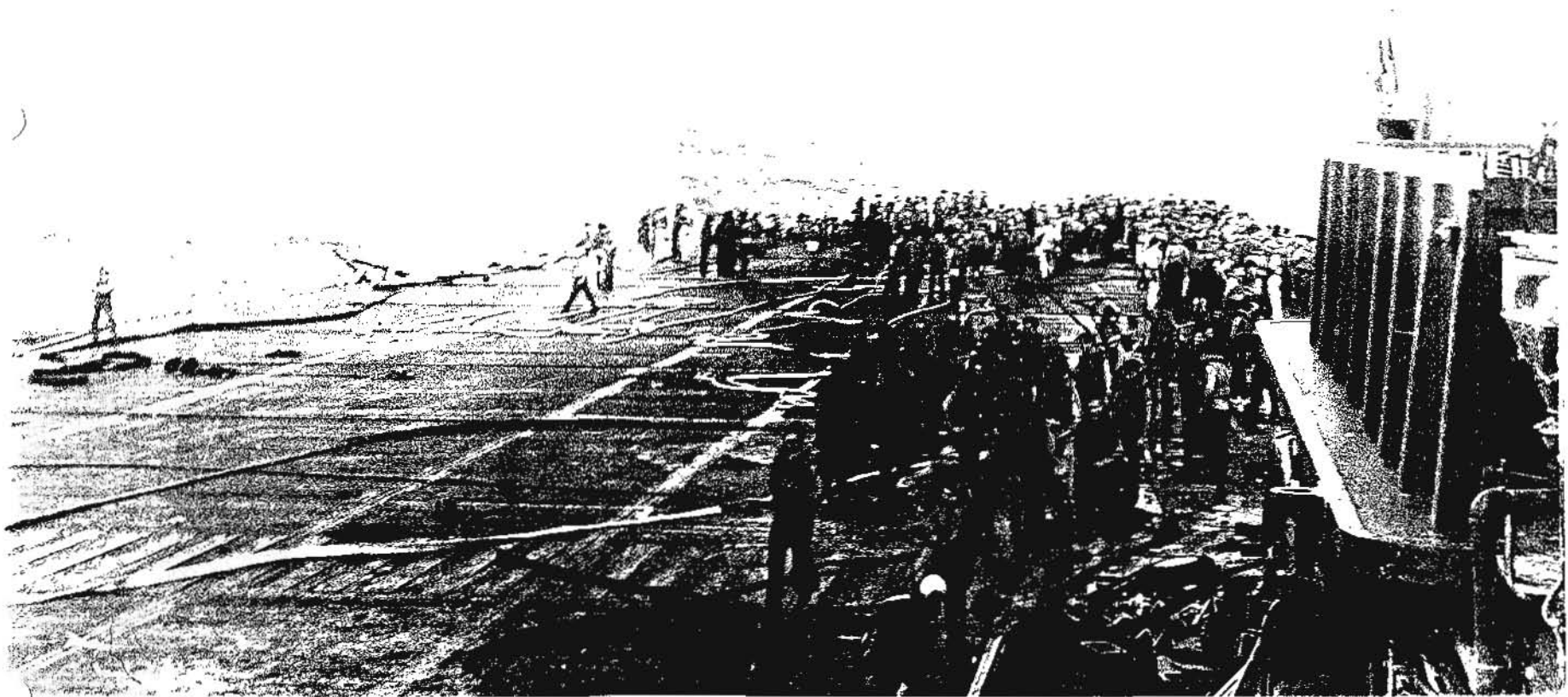
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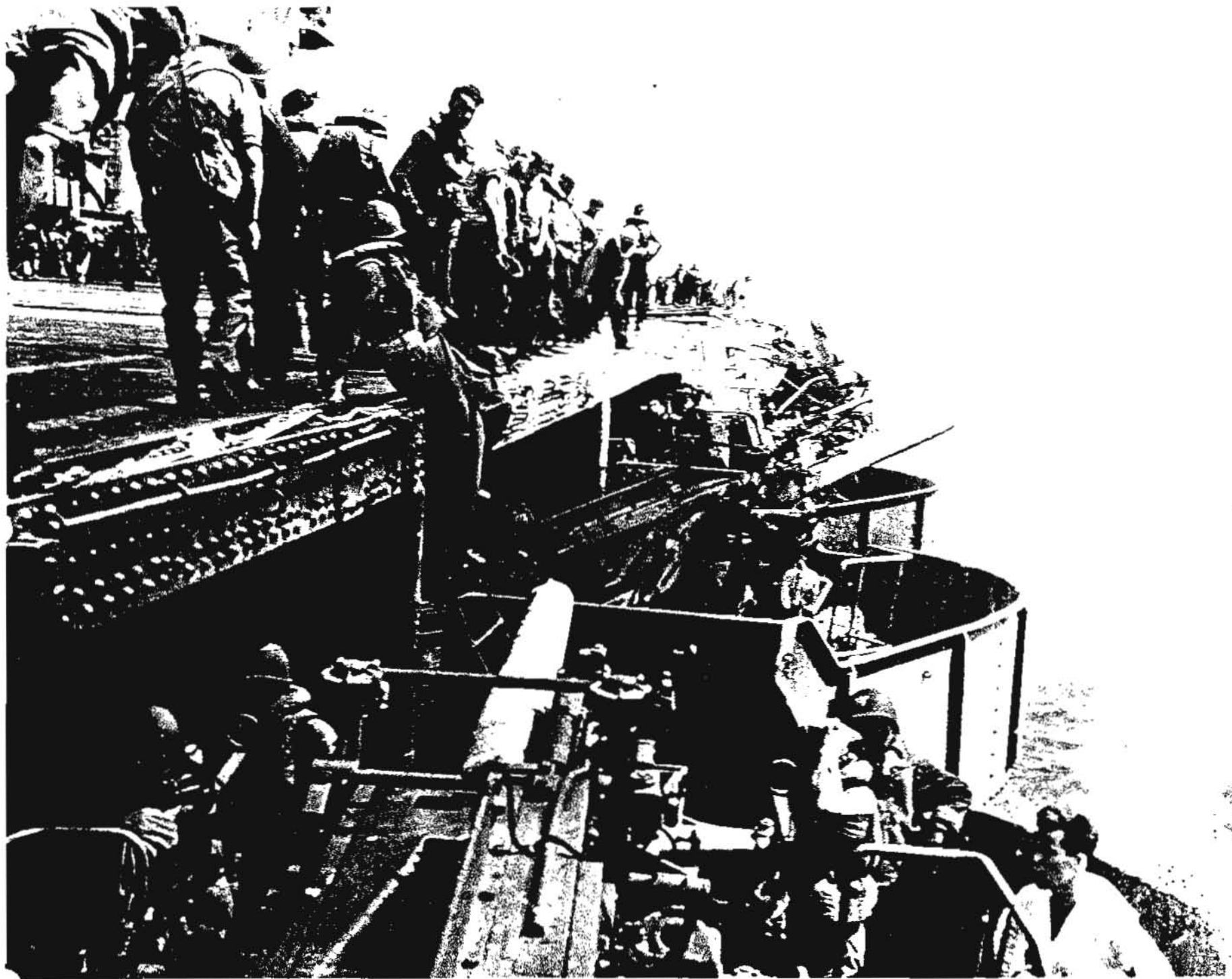


CO LEX. secret serial (0100) of 5-15-42.

SECRET
BUREAU OF THE BUREAU
OF AERONAUTICS

Enclosure "B"

U. S. S. Lexington # 2 gun gallery after
bomb hit. Fire extinguished.
5/8/42



Enclosure "B" 5/8/42

U.S.S. Lexington, fuselage looking aft.
Toyudo hi! Was forward seat pocket.

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OF AERONAUTICS

SECRET



ENCLOSURE "B"

USS Lexington flight deck splintered by
bomb hit at after part of forward port
gun gallery, just forward of the forward
elevator 5/8/42

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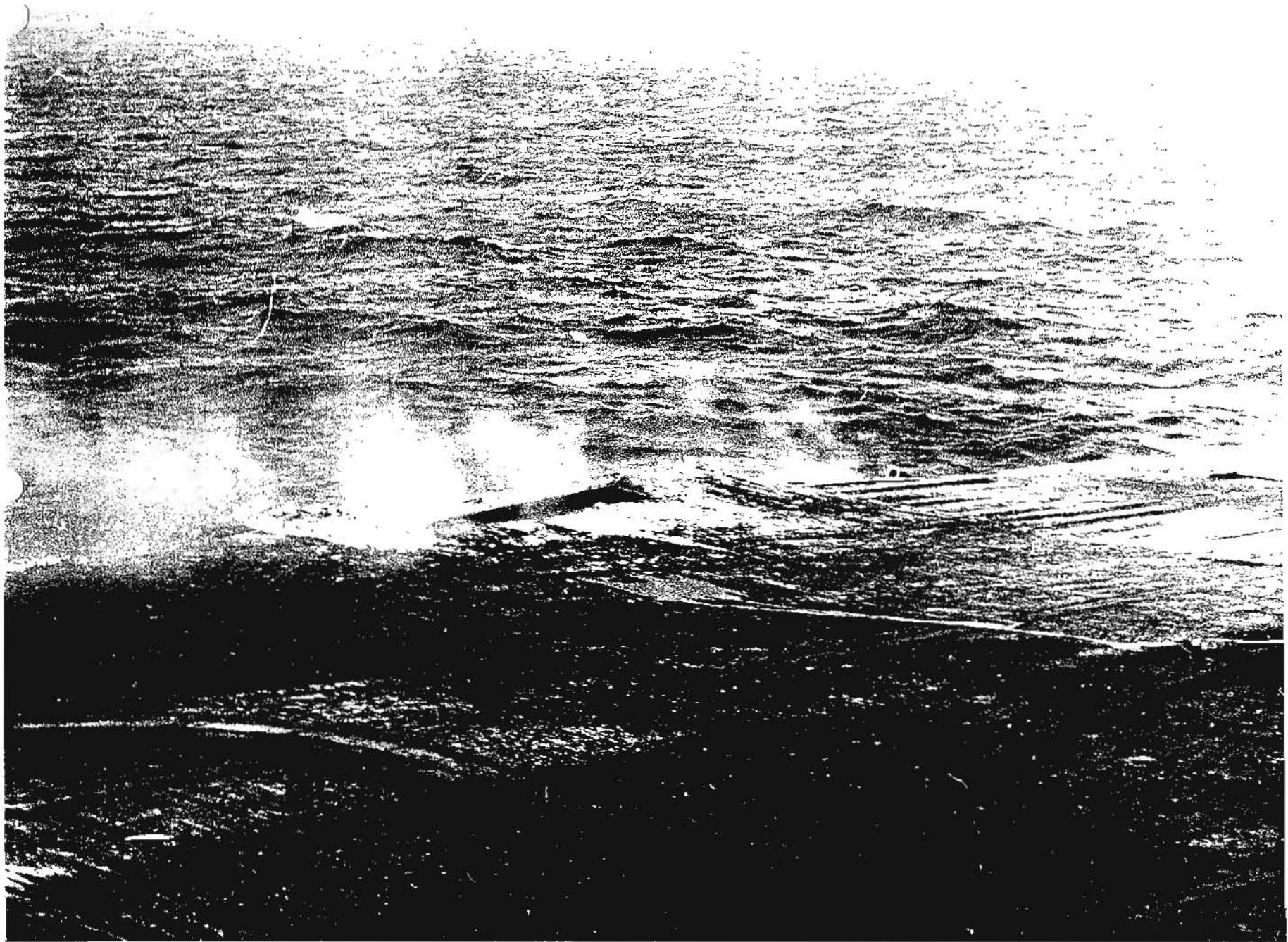
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SECRET

8 MAY 1942

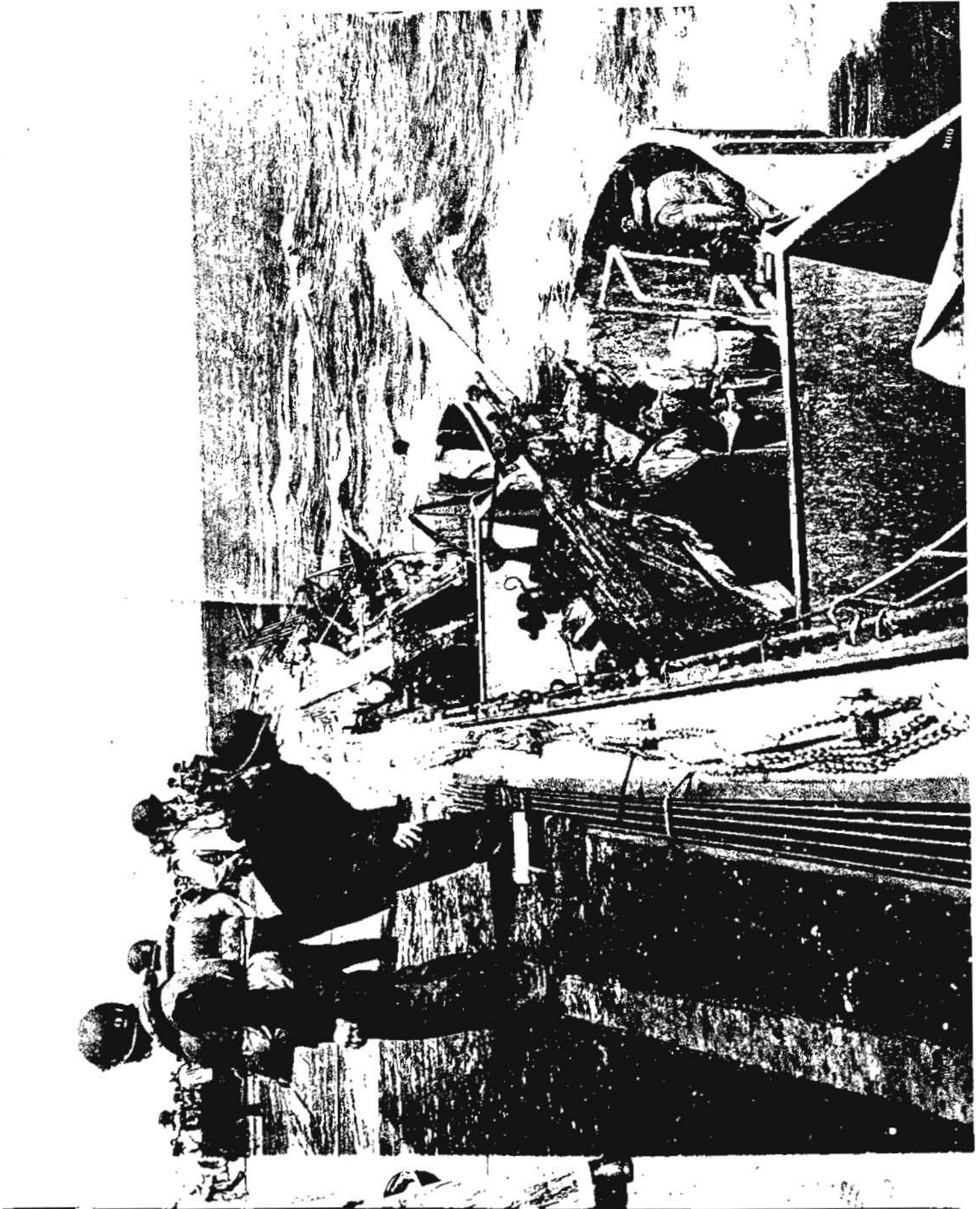


ENCLOSURE "B" 5/8/42

USS Lexington #2 gun gallery looking aft.
Fires extinguished following bomb hit.

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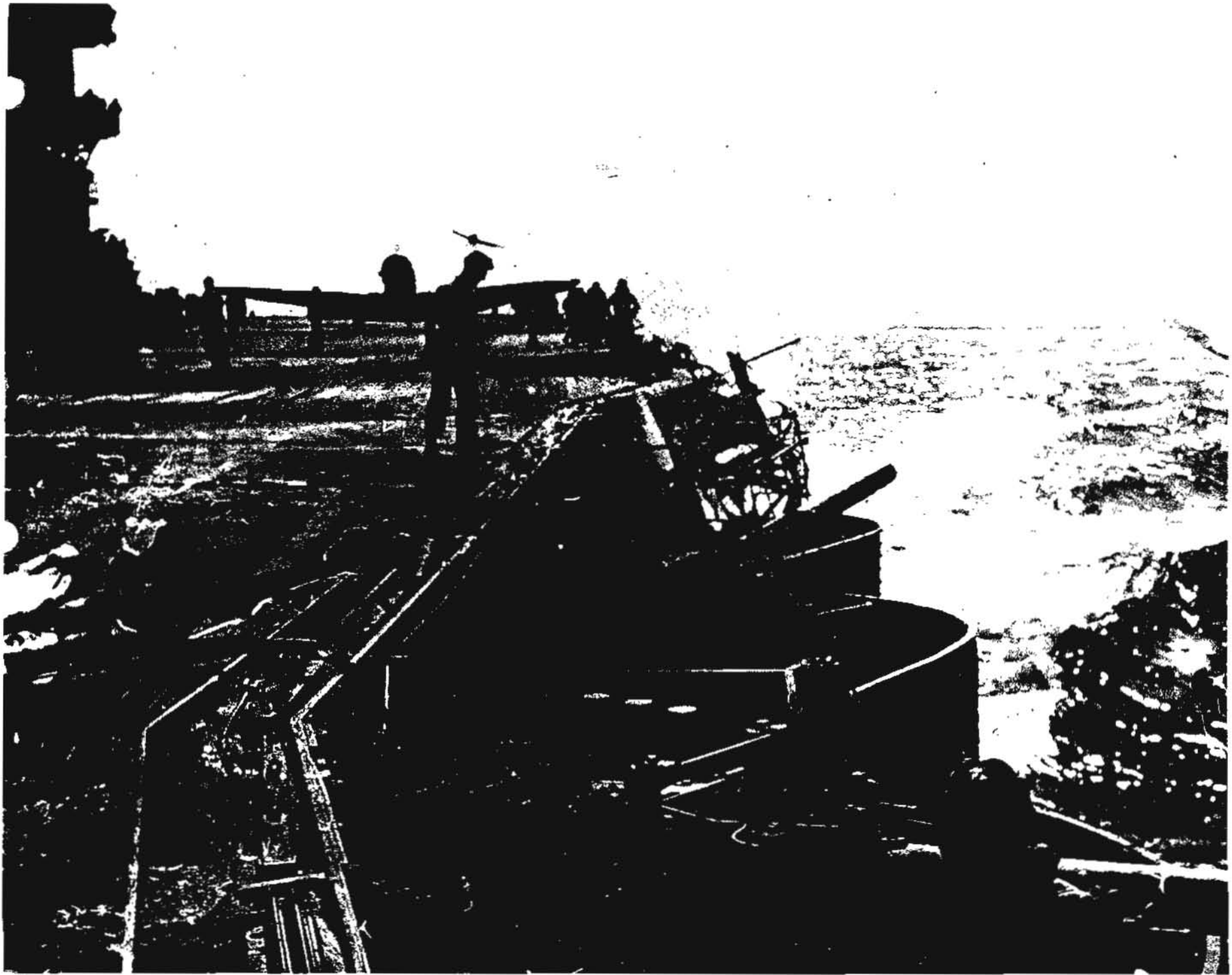
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SECRET

Enclosure "B"

U.S.S. Lexington landing attack group after
raid. 1400 - 1430. Showing #2 gun gallery lockery
aft.

5/8/42



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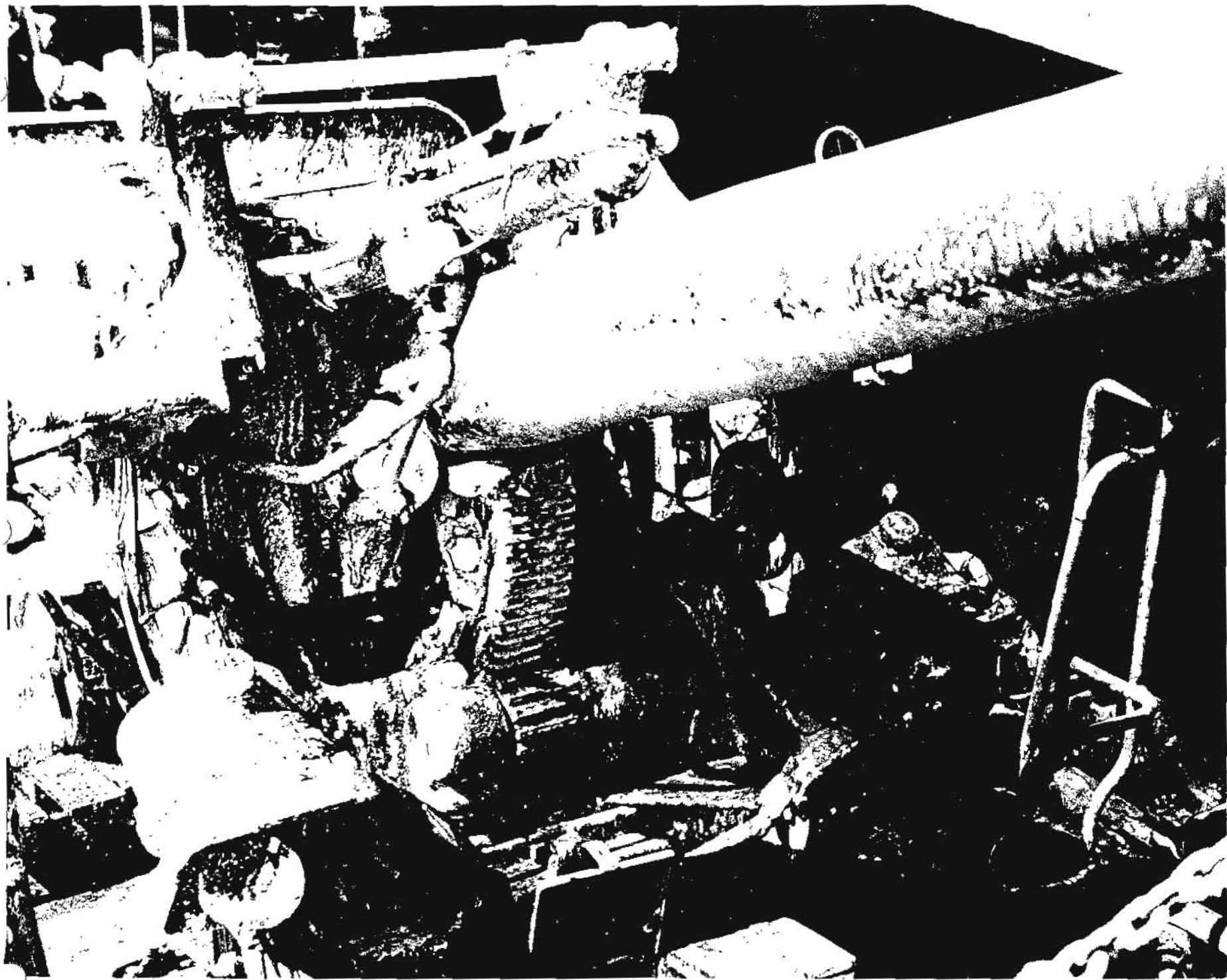
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[Faint handwritten text]

Enclosure "B"

U.S.S. Lexington #2 gun gallery after gun mount,
gun covered with foamite used to extinguish
fire after falling bomb hit.

5/8/42



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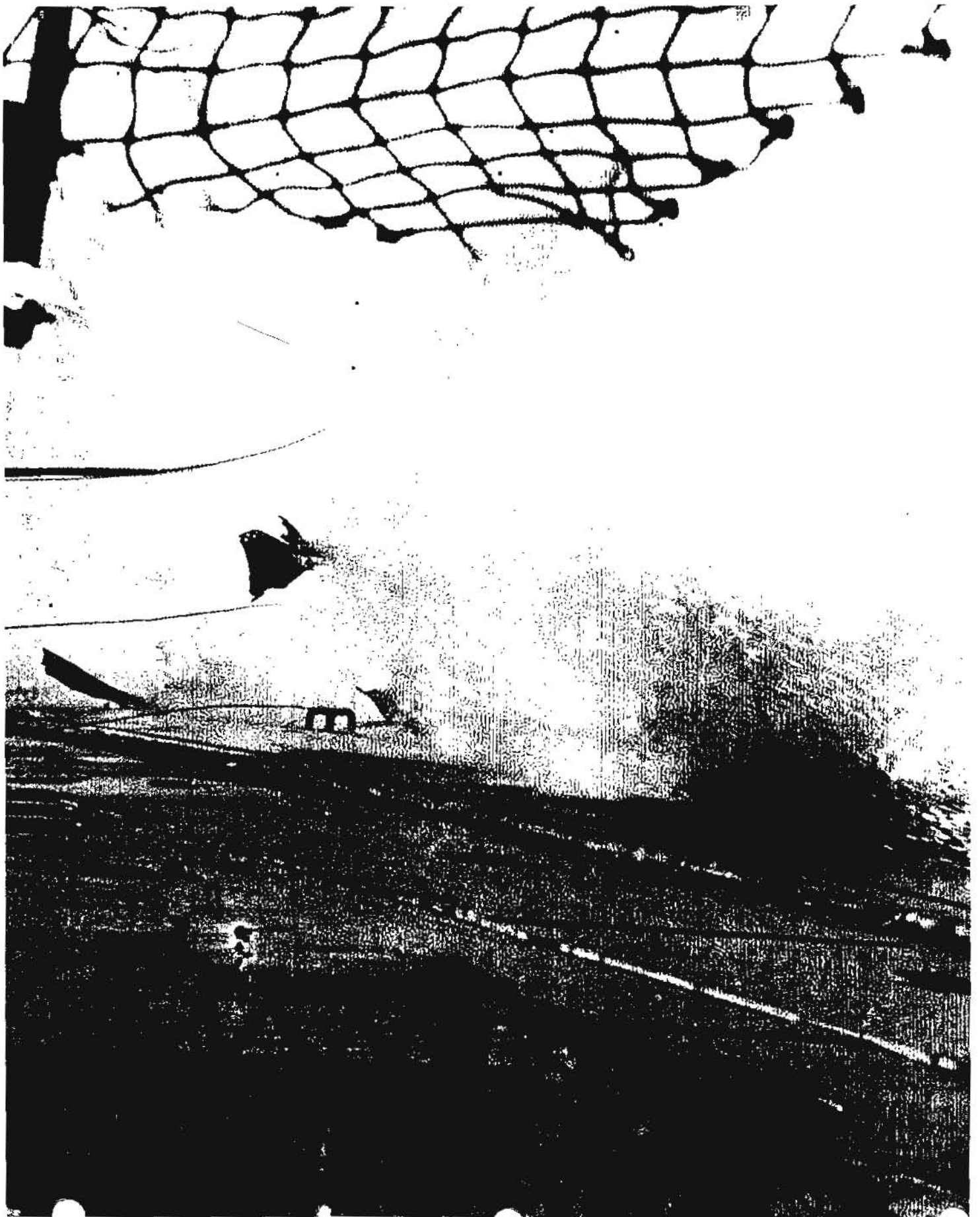
THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU
OF AERONAUTICS

[Faint, illegible text]

Enclosure "B"

*U. S. S. Lexington, port side looking aft. Torpedo
hit near forward boat pacher.*

5/8/42



VT-2 torpedo ^{hits} ~~tracks~~, May 7, 1942

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Enc. (C) to CO LEXINGTON secret serial (0100) of 5-15-42.

U.S. NAVY

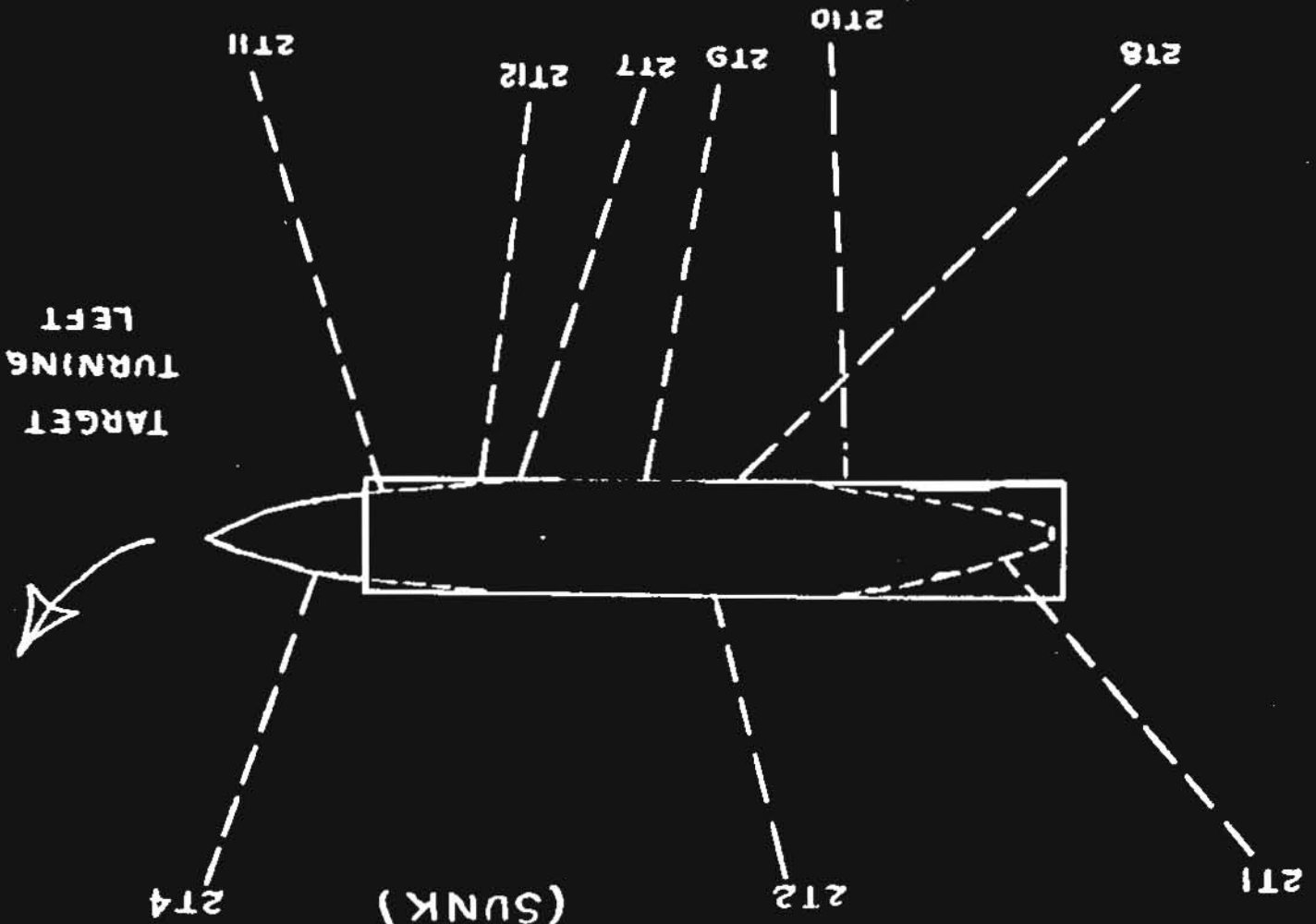
ENCLOSURE "C"

TORPEDO TRACKS

MAY 7, 1942

TARGET - RYUKAKU (?)

(SUNK)



UNOBSERVED TRACKS
 AVERAGE RANGE OF
 DROPS 700 YDS
 NOT SHOWN

VT-2 Torpedo ^{hit} ~~trucks~~, May 8, 1942

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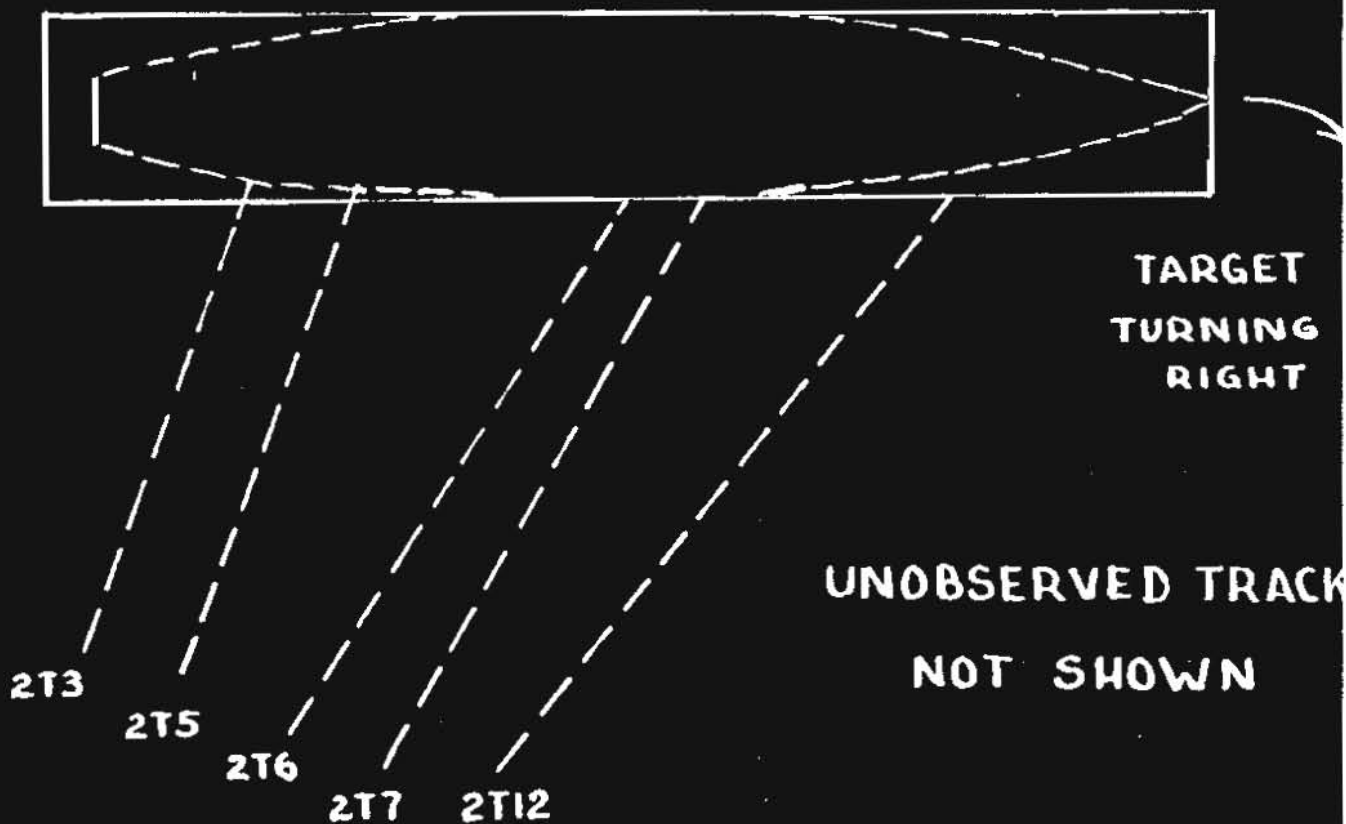
Enc. (D) to CO LEXINGTON secret serial (0100) of 5-15-42.

ENCLOSURE "D"

TORPEDO TRACKS

MAY 8, 1942

TARGET-SHOKAKU (?)



AVERAGE RANGE OF
DROPS 800 YDS.

U.S.S. LEXINGTON.

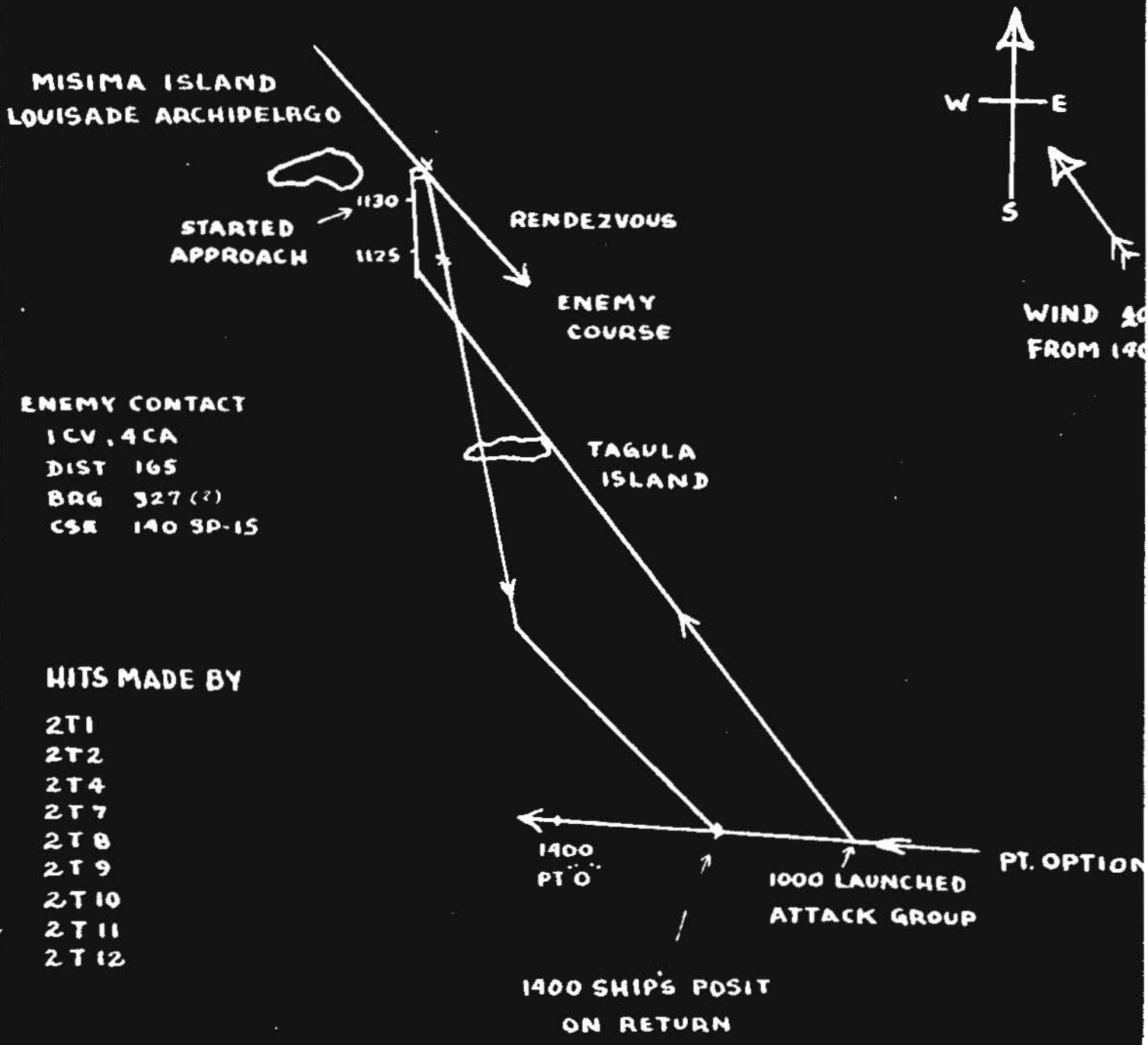
VT-2 TRACK MAY 7, 1942

OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH
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OF AERONAUTICS

Enc. (E) to CO LEXINGTON secret serial (0100) of 5-15-42.

ENCLOSURE "E"

THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA
TRACK CHART
7 MAY 1942 (PHASE I)



U.S. LEXINGTON

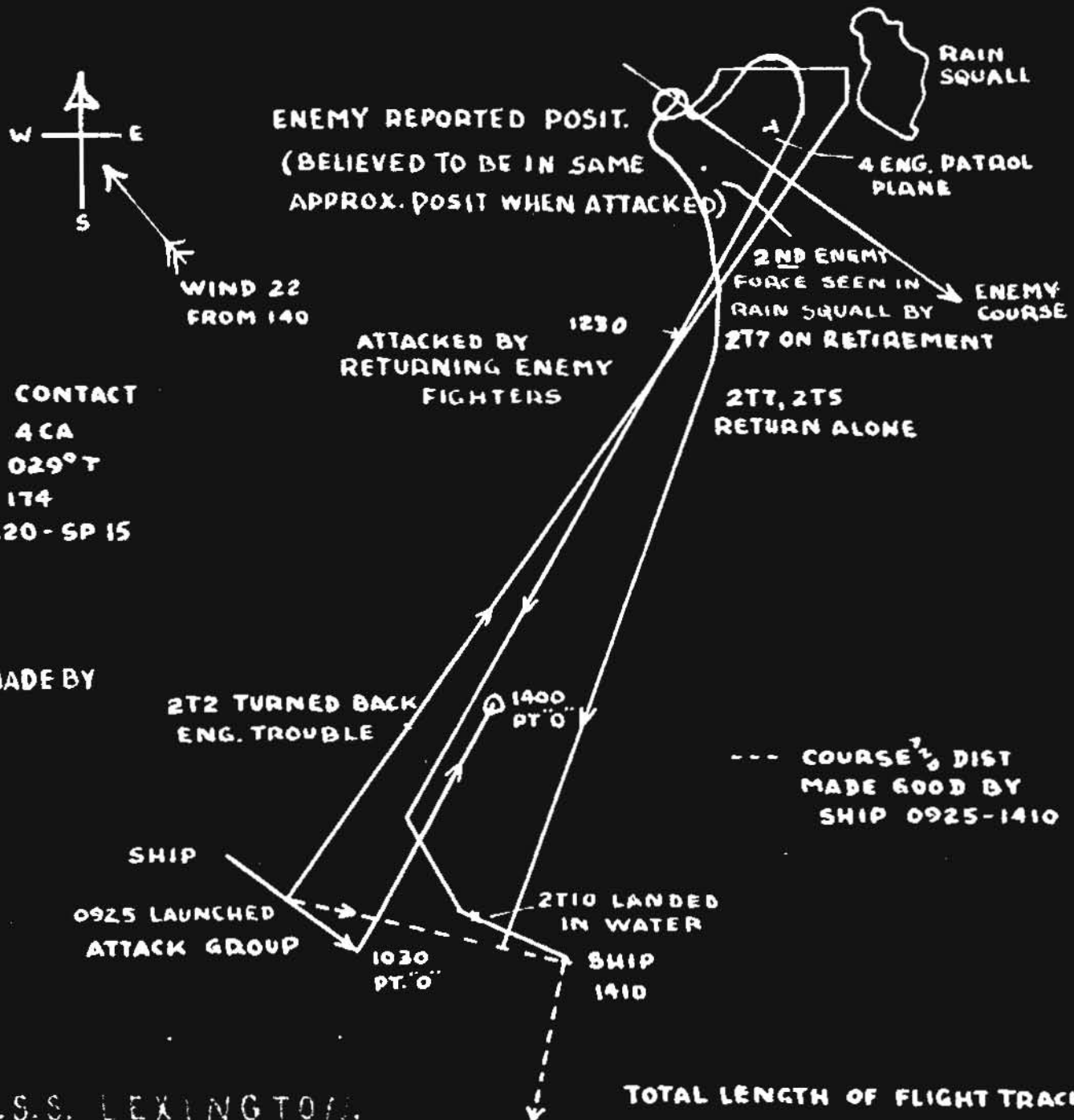
VT-2 French May 8, 1942

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THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU
OF AERONAUTICS

THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA
TRACK CHART
8 MAY 1942 (PHASE 2)



U.S.S. LEXINGTON

TOTAL LENGTH OF FLIGHT TRACK
WITH TORP - 235
RETURN - 230
TIME - 4 HR. 45 MIN 465
AVE. SPEED - 100 KTS (G.S.)

SCALE - 1 INCH = 30 MI.

SECRET

14 MAY 1942

From: Executive Officer, U.S.S. LEXINGTON.
To : Commanding Officer.

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 -
report of.

Reference: (a) Article 948, U.S. Navy Regulations, 1920.

Enclosure: (A) Recommendation for Awards.

1. It is improbable that I can add any facts with which the Commanding Officer is not already conversant relative to the subject action up to the completion of the Japanese aerial attack. Accordingly this report will be confined to events which came under my observation, or those of which I was cognizant subsequent to the attack and regarding which the Commanding Officer may require further information.

2. Shortly after 1120 a bomb, of at least five hundred - or perhaps one thousand - pounds detonated just abaft number six gun on the forward port five inch battery. This hit rendered the battery ineffective, killing the entire crew of gun number six, and killing or wounding thirteen men on guns number two and four. Several were also killed and wounded inboard in the passageway on the main deck. At the same time I believe that part of the preset five inch ammunition in the "Ready" locker in the Cabin detonated which added to the destruction. Fire started on the gun platforms and swept through the Admiral's Cabin and surrounding area.

3. I left the bridge shortly after the explosion and proceeded to the vicinity of that fire. The repair party functioned efficiently and the fire was rapidly brought under control.

4. ALDYKO was used with good effect from the flight deck and fires in the battery were extinguished quickly. The men engaged in fire fighting completely disregarded the extreme danger to which they were exposed from exploding five inch ammunition.

5. The same was true of the rescue parties who cared for those injured most efficiently.

SECRET

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

6. Commander W.W. Gilmore, (SC), U.S. Navy, and Commander W.C. Trojakowski, (DC), U.S. Navy, were probably killed in the passageway by the blast of the first bomb, or possibly by exploding five inch ammunition.

7. It was evident some personnel in the coding room on the starboard side suffered severely from the effects of this blast, but the number of casualties is not known.

8. I had been advised that there was another fire in the forward starboard Marine compartment, and one near the incinerator, in the same vicinity, and I proceeded there as soon as possible. The fire in the Marine compartment had been localized and was not dangerous and no sign of fire was then observed near the incinerator.

9. A bomb had struck near the Gig boat pocket on the port side with severe effects on personnel. The fire was, however, quickly and effectively handled.

10. As soon as the fires appeared to be in hand I conferred with the First Lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander Healy, in Central Station. He advised me regarding the damage sustained and the general situation as follows:

- (a) Fires and bomb hits already mentioned, all under control.
- (b) One or perhaps two torpedo hits on the port side, at about frame eighty-six, which had caused considerable damage in number four fireroom and some small flooding in numbers two and six. Situation under control.
- (c) Possibly an additional bomb or torpedo hit forward on the port side, but no signs of interior damage had been discovered. All other torpedoes had apparently been dodged by skillful handling of the ship.
- (d) Unengaged repair party personnel were making a careful inspection and checking on water tight integrity.
- (e) No signs were evident of any damage to the gasoline system. This system was controlled by the Air Department and preventive measures were taken as indicated below.

SECRET

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

11. The Damage Control organization was functioning smoothly and effectively and there was no apparent cause for concern although inspection of all critical points was in progress. I reported this situation briefly and again proceeded below decks with the idea in mind of reassuring myself as regards the removal of those wounded. The latter were rapidly being evacuated to dressing stations and to the Sick Bay. The work of rescue personnel cannot be too highly commended.

12. After reassuring myself as to the fires I determined to visit the dressing stations and the Sick Bay to obtain an idea the number and condition of casualties. I had just entered the hatch leading to the Sick Bay forward when a terrific blast occurred (apparently aft and below me). The force of this blast was sufficient to blow me through the scuttle. I am told that this happened at 1247 although I had been completely unaware of the passing of time. As I was not injured I proceeded aft on the second deck to endeavour to locate the source of the explosion. A severe fire was burning in the C.P.O. passageway and at other points in the office area. It was especially severe near the Gunnery Office, but there was no indication of fire below the second deck at this time.

13. The forward fire hoses had no pressure, but hoses were soon led from aft and an effort made to control the fire in the area. Communications were severed except one ship's service phone to the bridge, and Central Station could not be contacted. None of those present realized for some time that the original blast had occurred below the armored deck, but it soon became evident that such was the case and that the fires above were more or less incidental, but none the less most severe and spreading rapidly.

14. The initial explosion was soon followed by another somewhat less severe, but by this time heat, smoke, and gas conditions were so bad as to make it impossible for men not equipped with rescue breathers to enter the area. The small supply of rescue breathers and oxygen bottles available in the ship's allowance was soon exhausted, but the men and officers of the repair parties, augmented by men from the Air Department, and deck divisions, continued to enter the smoke, flame, and gas filled compartments only with gas masks. The latter were

SECRET

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

inadequate. Carbon Monoxide was undoubtedly present and gas masks were totally ineffective. During this period there were successive minor explosions, some apparently from five inch ammunition in the C.P.O. country. Others from the vicinity of the original blast.

15. The lack of water from the forward hoses was an almost insurmountable handicap, but it is believed that the original fire on the second deck might have been controlled if it had not been for new fires started by frequent subsequent explosions. Meanwhile it had been discovered that the initial blast had probably occurred somewhere in the vicinity of Central Station and that the additional detonations in that area had started fires below the armored deck.

16. At this time Lt-Cdr. O'Donnell, the Gunnery Officer, had procured two additional hoses from aft. These hoses were led into the scuttles of the five inch ammunition hoists to starboard, and the last available hose was led into the dumb waiter of the food distribution room in an attempt to flood the C.P.O. country. Good pressure was maintained on these hoses for a short time and it was hoped that sufficient water could be gotten below to flood the area on fire forward of the quarterdeck and check the spread of the blaze. Under existing conditions it was impossible to combat it otherwise.

17. Lt-Cdr. O'Donnell, after inspection, advised me that the Machine Shop area was partially flooded, and there were no fires in that vicinity, which was encouraging.

18. Lt(jg) R.O. Dietzer, the V-1 Division Officer, who was in charge of the gasoline system, had determined shortly after the completion of the attack that the system on the starboard side was functioning satisfactorily. The gas system on the port side had been secured just subsequent to the attack as a precautionary measure. Well before the terrific blast at 1445 he had ordered that the gas control room on the port side be flooded with water and smothered with CO₂. No gasoline was in the system on this side above the armored deck and it was completely secured.

19. At this time it appeared that the situation, while it was extremely grave, might not be hopeless if sufficient water could be obtained. I proceeded to the flight deck for some air as I had been considerably weakened by the effects of smoke.

SECRET

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

20. Shortly after I reached the deck, and was standing on the forward elevator, another explosion occurred. It was apparently from the starboard side just forward of the elevator well. The elevator was jammed up, but sheets of flame could be seen below through cracks at the edges.

21. A hose from aft was obtained and led to the top of the elevator. This water seemed to have some effect on the fire in the well.

22. I asked Carpenter Nowak to insure that all hangar deck sprinklers were turned on, and Lt-Cdr. O'Donnell saw that the "Ready" torpedo war heads on the mezzanine were sprinkled.

23. The hangar deck was very hot by this time and the fire was slowly spreading aft although the hose forward appeared to have assisted in the elevator well as steam was evident. Explosions in the vicinity of the elevator well recurred every few minutes.

24. It soon became necessary to evacuate the hangar deck aft due to heat and smoke and many wounded were brought from the fuselage deck to the top side.

25. Lt. Roach, (LC), U.S. Navy, was in charge of about twenty or twenty five wounded men at this station. Lts. Roach, Hirsch, Air Department, and rescue personnel evacuated all with utter disregard for their own safety.

26. Lt. Roach and his party could see a violent fire in the elevator well and deck plates were cherry red forward prior to removal to the topside. The water supply to the hoses leading to the top of the elevator now failed. Pressure on the hoses forward, leading into the ammunition hoists, had also failed. Explosions continued with increasing frequency in various sections. The main deck forward was completely impassable. The situation became momentarily more desperate.

27. The forward part of the ship was ablaze, both above and below the armored deck with absolutely no means left to fight the fire which was now spreading aft on the hangar deck. It was inevitable that the twenty odd torpedo war heads on the mezzanine of the hangar deck must eventually detonate.

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

28. I therefore instructed Ensign Dowling to cast loose the life rafts and be prepared to distribute them forward and aft.

29. One sound power phone to main control was still functioning, but communication was not good and it appeared that the heat might ground it out at any moment. Accordingly I sent word to the Chief Engineer that it might become necessary to abandon ship. And ordered that the life rafts be placed in the nettings and unoccupied personnel distributed forward and aft on the starboard side as the ship was listing about seven degrees to port.

30. I then proceeded to the bridge and reported the situation to the Commanding Officer, and recommended securing the Engineering plant as I was fearful that all means of escape would soon be cut off. The Commanding Officer immediately ordered that the Engineering Department be secured and personnel evacuated to the flight deck.

31. This was done most efficiently and as far as can be determined all of the personnel who were alive escaped.

32. As the majority of the ship's company was aft on the flight deck, I proceeded to that area and with the assistance of the other officers made the best possible distribution for disembarkation.

33. Meanwhile the U.S.S. MORRIS was evacuating the wounded forward on the starboard side. Other wounded had been placed in the ship's motor whaleboats. The behavior of all hands cannot be too highly commended. It was a magnificent display of coolness and courage in the face of imminent destruction.

34. Mr. Stanley Johnston, representative of the Chicago Tribune, behaved with conspicuous courage throughout the action and during the subsequent trying period. He rescued at least one seriously burned and blinded man from a smoke and flame filled compartment. He was observed everywhere lending aid to the wounded, procuring life jackets, chatting cheerfully with men on deck and otherwise assisting with great efficiency. He was among the last to leave the ship

SECRET

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

after which he spent a considerable time in a boat assisting in the rescue of personnel in the water.

35. Squadron personnel had taken pneumatic life rafts from aircraft, lines were rigged over both sides and all was in readiness to abandon ship when orders should be received. Besides life rafts, all available mattresses were provided to serve as additional flotation for personnel.

36. At approximately 1707 the Captain gave the order to abandon ship. It was a sad end for all of us.

37. Later events proved, however, that the decision was wise and was reached in time to disembark the crew during daylight and prior to the extremely violent explosions which took place later.

38. Again I must comment on the heroism of personnel. It was an inspiration. The first thought of all was for the wounded.

39. Repeated inspections were made by officers and men to assure that none were left behind. Many men and officers were reluctant to leave and had to be ordered to go over the side. Just prior to sunset all but half a dozen men were off the ship. The Commanding Officer had come aft once, but had made several trips forward to see that all hands were clear. I observed about twenty or twenty five men on life rafts or in the water under the port counter. Boats had attempted to pick them up but for some reason were not successful.

40. A Destroyer came up on the port quarter and shot over a twenty-one thread manila line with loops in the end. I leaned over the nets and dropped this line in the vicinity of the rafts and when the men took it I went forward on the port side to look for stragglers.

41. Following this I looked about for the Commanding Officer who had gone well forward and saw him approaching Lt. Hawes and two or three others at the after gun mount on the starboard side. They would not leave the ship until ordered to do so.

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14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

42. Lt-Cdr. Paul H. Ramsey was in a small boat astern and I waved to him from the ramp hoping that he would spot the Captain and myself who were now alone on board. All others who were alive had left the ship.

43. The Commanding Officer directed me to leave as soon as he came aft. As I was doing so there was a tremendous roar, sheets of flame came out of the starboard side above and below the after 1.1 mount. Debris flew high in the air, and in all directions.

44. I slid down the line and dropped about ten feet into the water where Lt-Cdr. Ramsey picked me up.

45. A few minutes later the same boat picked up the Captain and took us to the U.S.S. MINNEAPOLIS.

46. It may not be inappropriate for me to take this occasion to mention the efforts made in our behalf by the entire ship's company of that vessel. The wonderful treatment received at the hands of officers and men will long be remembered by those of us who reached her and remained on board until our arrival at NOUMEA.

47. Approximately twenty seven hundred officers and men abandoned ship in an incredibly short period. It is not believed that any man was lost due to drowning after going overboard.

48. Boat crews from other ships were untiring in their efforts to rescue all.

49. All records having been destroyed, and at this writing the exact number of losses can only be estimated, but it is believed that the total will not be more than twenty five officers and one hundred ninety men.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is my opinion, based on reports of personnel in the vicinity, that the effects of the extremely heavy explosion at 1247 caused the loss of our ship.

SECRET

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

Those present in the Central Station area have described the occurrence in a manner that can lead to but one conclusion on my part.

I believe that the torpedo which struck the port side at about frame 63 ruptured some of the gasoline tanks and the fresh water tanks surrounding them.

The mining effect damaged the inboard bulkhead slightly. Behind this were the I.C. Motor Generator room and the gas control room.

Gasoline spread through the fresh water tanks, thence seeped through small leaks in the inboard bulkhead into the I.C. Motor Generator room and the gas control room. The gasoline vaporized upon reaching the air and the vapor concentration built up very slowly.

I do not know how long the dilution by CO² can be expected to last. The tendency of the gasoline vapor to sink to the lowest level may have prevented its discovery prior to the time the concentration reached the point where a highly explosive mixture was produced.

It is believed, however, that the I.C. Motor Generator room and the gas control room gradually became, to all intents and purposes, a huge bomb which was probably detonated by commutator sparks.

This detonation blew flames and vapor through the gas vent pipes which led into the C.P.O. country and started the fires there. At least one of the pipes was badly ruptured. It also completely demolished the I.C. room and badly damaged Central Station and adjacent compartments. Further, it severed all communications to Central Station, rendered the ship's service phone system almost inoperative and caused complete loss of water forward.

Damage Control personnel were placed under a terrific handicap.

Subsequent explosions, probably caused by additional seepage, and lack of means of combating the fires resulting from these and other detonations on the second and hangar decks doomed the ship.

SECRET

LTS/rl

14 MAY 1942

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 - report of.

I must reiterate that the above conclusion is not based on my personal observation on the spot. It was arrived at after several days discussion and investigation.

2. All known precautions were taken both before and after the attack to prevent the development of such a situation. It is possible if communications and the forward water supply had not been destroyed at the first blast at 1247 that the ship might have been saved.

3. The heroic efforts made by men of the repair parties, and those assisting them who came from other departments, cannot be forgotten. They faced death from many sources and entered areas where the frequency of explosions created fresh hazards each moment.

4. All of the individual cases of heroism and devotion to duty will probably never be revealed. I am, however, submitting herewith an enclosure recommending special awards in cases that have come to my attention to date. Others will undoubtedly come to light and appropriate recommendations will be made in the premises when this occurs.

5. That the best interests of the Nation will be served by retaining the ship's company of the LEXINGTON intact to man the first available new carrier. That the latter should be renamed "LEXINGTON".

6. I am proud and happy to have served under your command and to have had as shipmates officers and men who so gallantly upheld our American and Naval Traditions. Our sadness at the loss of the LEXINGTON, and that of our shipmates who gave their lives for their country is inexpressible. I believe, however, that the victories to which the ship under your command contributed to such a great degree compensates us in some measure for our losses.


M. F. SELIGMAN,
Comdr., U.S. Navy.

CV2/A16-3
Serial (0101)

U.S.S. LEXINGTON

10-hn

May 18, 1942.

S-E-C-R-E-T

FIRST ENDORSEMENT to:
Executive Officer, USS LEXINGTON
Secret ltr. A16-3/CV2 dated
May 14, 1942.

From: The Commanding Officer.
To : The Secretary of the Navy.
Via : (1) Commander Task Force Eleven.
(2) Commander Task Force Seventeen.
(3) The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Subject: Action in the Coral Sea, May 8, 1942 -
report of.

1. Forwarded in accordance with Article 2029,
U.S. Navy Regulations. Enclosure was retained by the
Commanding Officer.

Frederick C. Sherman
FREDERICK C. SHERMAN

A16-3/FB2-1

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
Flagship of COMMANDER CARRIER DIVISION ONE

May 19, 1942.

2nd Endorsement to:
Executive Officer, USS LEXINGTON
Secret ltr. A16-3/CV2 dated
May 14, 1942.

From: The Commander Task Force ELEVEN.
(Commander Carrier Division ONE)
To : The Secretary of the Navy.
Via : (1) Commander Task Force SEVENTEEN.
(2) The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

1. Forwarded.

Aubrey W. Yitch
AUBREY W. YITCH. 4