

At Sea
May 13, 1942

From ; Dicken , R.J., C.S.M., U.S.N.

To ; The C.O. U.S.S. Neosho

Subject: Personal observations of Sims #409 disaster.

On May 7 at 0930 I was in the Chief's quarters and heard #1 a man in #1 handling room explain that a bomb had hit right alongside. General Quarters sounded immediately and duty gun opened fire. Upon reaching bridge the other guns had commenced firing on horizontal bombers. Recognition signals were attempted but no reply.

There were a large number of our shells which failed to burst at the beginning of the attack but after several rounds, number unknown, the fuse settings seemed to be operating satisfactory as bursts were observed near the enemy planes.

At beginning of attack Sims went to full speed and patrolled on either bow of tanker. Our gun fire seemed very effective in keeping the planes high and on the move.

Observed one bomb score near miss, port side, amidships. No damage reported. One casualty, slight shoulder wound, on #2 gun. Man treated during lull and returned to gun.

High level attack lasted ten to fifteen minutes.

For next two hours several Radar contacts made, distance fifteen to twenty miles, but no planes appeared.

#1 gun appeared to be blistered.

About 1155 planes approached, identification attempted and upon no response the order to commence fire was given. Enemy planes began dive bombing attack on tanker. A steady rate of fire was maintained from all 5" guns.

About 1215 Sims received direct hit on or near after set torpedo tubes. Bomb apparently pierced deck and exploded in after engine room. Deck buckled forward of after deck house. Radar fell across gig. Received two more hits, one on after deck house, port side forward, which appeared to have caused only local damage. Another hit on #4 gun caused local damage. #1 and #2 guns were continuing to fire by local control.

Personnel was ordered off bridge and reported to Assistant Chief Engineer Ens. Tachna who ordered us to take off our shoes and put motor whale boat in water.

Numerous fireroom personnel seemed uninjured by first hit in engine room. This force assisted in lowering boat. Two men in boat when lowered. Boat began drifting clear of side. I went over the side, swam to boat, took tiller and began picking up personnel in water.

The Captain, still on bridge, ordered me aft to try to get aboard to flood after magazines and extinguish fire on after deck house. This was necessary due to fact that main deck between after deck house and machine shop was awash.

CLASSIFIED
VND 968133
NARA Date 5-9-02

May 13, 1942

Subject: Personal observations of Sims #409 disaster

An attempt was made to get aboard. Ship began settling from aft, whale boat pulled clear and immediately afterwards the boilers blew up followed by another but smaller explosion. The ship broke in two parts, and sank.

All men that were not apparently dead were taken aboard, search made for two life rafts with from ten to twenty (total) men aboard. We then proceeded to tanker and placed ourselves under that command. There were fifteen Sims survivors in boat.

I have questioned Sims survivors for more data but no further information available.

~~Respectfully submitted~~
Respectfully submitted

Robert James Dicken C.S.M.

SECRET

May 18, 1942.

From: The Senior Line Petty Officer, U.S.S. SIMS,
(Robert James Dicken, C.S.M., U.S. Navy).
To : The Secretary of the Navy.
Via : The Commander U.S. Submarines, Eastern Australia.
Subject: Personal observations of SIMS #409 disaster.

1. On May 7, I was serving as Chief Signalman on board the U.S.S. SIMS. We were employed conveying the U.S. Navy Tanker NEOSHO when attacked by Japanese planes, bombed and sunk. After several days we were picked up by the U.S.S. HENLEY and while enroute to Brisbane Australia, I prepared a report which I gave to the Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. NEOSHO who had been taken off by the U.S.S. HENLEY.

That report is as follows:

"At Sea
May 13, 1942.

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To : The C.O. U.S.S. Neosho.

Subject: Personal observations of Sims #409 disaster.

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About 1155 planes approached, identification attempted and upon no response the order to commence fire was given. Enemy planes began dive bombing attack on tanker. A steady rate of fire was maintained from all 5" guns.

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The Captain, still on bridge, ordered me aft to try to get aboard to flood after magazines and extinguish fire on after deck house. This was necessary due to fact that main deck between after deck house and machine shop was awash.

An attempt was made to get aboard. Ship began settling from aft, whale boat pulled cleared and immediately afterwards the boilers blew up followed by another but smaller explosion. The ship broke in two parts, and sank.

All men that were not apparently dead were taken aboard, search made for two life rafts with from ten to twenty (total) men aboard. We then proceeded to tanker and placed ourselves under that command. There were fifteen Sims survivors in boat.

I have questioned Sims survivors for more data but no further information available.

Respectfully submitted

Robert James Dicken C.S.M."

2. I never saw any sign of panic. Everyone was on their stations doing their job and the whole ship worked as a well organized unit until the end. Discipline was excellent.

~~SECRET~~

May 18, 1942.

Subject: Personal observations of SIMS #409 disaster.

3. There are a few outstanding things that I can remember in addition to the above report:

The number one gun crew stood by their gun and kept up a steady rate of fire after the paint on their gun was burning and the ship was at such an angle that the decks were awash. The Chief Engineer was wounded severely but carried out several duties under extremely difficult conditions. He tried to fire the forward set of torpedo tubes to assist the Captain in lightening the ship and to remove the danger of the torpedoes exploding aboard. He also extinguished the fire on the torpedo deck house at the time. One outstanding act was done by an enlisted man named E.F. MUNCH, MM2c, just before he jumped over the side to be picked up by my boat, he secured a depth charge to the deck so it would not go over the side or accidentally explode on deck.

4. The last I saw of the Commanding Officer he was standing on the bridge when the ship was blown up by the explosion. He showed an example of courage throughout the entire engagement.

5. To the best of my knowledge and belief all master rolls, log books and valuable papers went down with the SIMS. We did not have any books or papers in my boat at all. My boat was not loaded with a view to permanently abandoning ship. The Captain believed that he could save the ship and was doing everything in his power to do so right up until the ship blew up and sank.

6. During the entire four days of hard work in the boat, part of which time we were alongside the NEOSHO, and part clear of the NEOSHO, the conduct of the men was very good. We did the best we could to provision the boat and prepare it for sea. For the first three days we were repairing the 18 inch hole in the boat.

7. Our small boat was left tied up alongside the NEOSHO when we were taken aboard the HENLEY. When the NEOSHO was fired on and purposely sunk, this boat went down with her.

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No property of any kind remains of the SIMS.

8. To the best of my knowledge and belief the following are the only survivors of the U.S.S. SIMS:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RATE</u>	<u>SERVICE NO</u>
VESSIA, V.J.	F2c	Unknown
LAWES, J. Jr.	Sea2c	Unknown
TEVEBAUGH, J.W.	RM3c	Unknown
GOBER, A.C.	Sea2c	Unknown
CHMIELEWSKI, J.	F1c	Unknown
SCOTT, M.W.	F3c	Unknown
VERTON, J.C.	Sea2c	Unknown
ERNST, G.E.	FC3c	Unknown
SAVAGE, J.	FC3c	Unknown
MUNCH, E.F.	MM2c	Unknown
CANOLE, V.F.	MM2c	Unknown
REILLY, T.F.	WT1c	Unknown
CLARK, (Unknown)	CY	Unknown
PELIES, E.M.	Sea2c	Unknown
DICKEN, R.J.	CSM	Unknown

I am the senior petty officer in this group of survivors. Of this list two men are now dead, they are: Chief Yeoman CLARK, who died the first night we were in the boat and PELIES, E.M., who died in the sick bay on board the HENLEY. To the best of my knowledge and belief there are no other survivors of the SIMS.

Robert James Dicken
Robert James Dicken, CSM.

A16-3/1AR
Serial (00185)

COMMANDER DESTROYER SQUADRON ONE
% Fleet Post Office
San Francisco, California

(90-By)

~~SECRET~~
DECLASSIFIED

May 22, 1942.

From: The Commander Destroyer Squadron ONE,
(Commander Task Unit 17.2.4).
To : The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.
Via : (1) The Commander Cruiser Division SIX,
(Commander Task Group 17.2).
(2) The Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet,
(Commander Task Force SEVENTEEN).
(3) The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.
Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force 7-8 May, 1942
in Coral Sea.
Reference: (a) U.S. Navy Regulations, Art. 712 and 762.
(b) ComTaskFor SEVENTEEN Secret Operation
Order 2-42, Serial (007N) of May 1, 1942.
ENCLOSURE: (A) Track Chart of engagement on May 8, 1942.

1. Task Unit 17.2.4 (Attack Group) was composed originally of the PHELPS, DEWEY, AYLMIN, FARRAGUT and MONAGHAN. However, the FARRAGUT was detached at 0700, 7 May, to join the Support Group and the MONAGHAN was detached 0100, 8 May, to hunt for survivors of the NEOSH0.

2. In compliance with reference (a), the following report of events occurring during 7-8 May, 1942, is submitted: On the morning of 7 May, Task Force SEVENTEEN was proceeding on course 290° True at 22 knots in Cruising Disposition Victor.

7 MAY, 1942

0700 AUSTRALIA, CHICAGO, MOBART, PERKINS and FARRAGUT left formation to proceed to vicinity of Jomard Passage.
0715 Formed Cruising Disposition Victor. Sky overcast with frequent rain squalls. Sea moderate.
0718 Changed course and axis to 025° True.
0730 Following message sent to PHELPS, DEWEY by Comdesron ONE: "FOR AIR ATTACK MOVE TO CIRCLE 3 BETWEEN CRUISERS".
0800 Posit. 13-09 S., 152-27 E.

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May 22, 1942.

Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force 7-8 May, 1942
in Coral Sea.

7 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

- 0925 Signal received: "ENEMY CONTACT 2CV 4CA LAT. 10-06 S
152-00 E ENEMY COURSE 140 SPEED 20".
- 0950 YORKTOWN asked LEXINGTON over TBS: "DO YOU INTEND
LAUNCHING TORPEDO AND FIGHTERS IN ATTACK GROUP"?
Answer: "I INTEND LAUNCHING TORPEDO PLANES AND FIGHTERS
IN ATTACK GROUP".
- 0955 LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN commenced launching planes for
attack on previously reported force.
- 1020 LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN completed launching. Approxi-
mately 100 planes in attack group.
- 1107 Received report that NEOSHO and SIMS had been under
heavy bombing attack.
- 1128 Sighted smoke and flames bearing 012 True, distance
10 miles. Our position 12-35 S., 155-51 E. (Lieutenant
(junior grade) Richard CROMMILLEN, U.S.Navy, from
YORKTOWN taken on board next day, reported this smoke
was from four-motored enemy bomber shot down by himself
and wing mate).
- 1200 Posit. 12-34 S., 154-56 E.
- 1240 YORKTOWN received following message on plane frequency:
"SCRATCH ONE FLAT TOP SIGNED BOB".
- 1310 YORKTOWN and LEXINGTON aircraft returned from attack
on enemy force and were recovered. One enemy aircraft
carrier reported sunk.
- 1408 Changed course and axis to 225 True, speed 14 knots.
- 1749 Unidentified aircraft reported bearing 130 True,
distance 26 miles.
- 1835 Unidentified aircraft reported bearing 170 True,
distance 13 miles, and 275 True, distance 19 miles.
- 1840 Message received over TBS from YORKTOWN: "BE ON
ALERT FOR ENEMY TORPEDO PLANE ATTACK".

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A16-3/WAR
Serial (00185)

S-E-C-R-E-T

(90-By)
May 22, 1942.

Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force 7-8 May, 1942
in Coral Sea.

7 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

- 1850 LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN commenced recovering combat patrol, using landing lights.
- 1857 DEWEY reported over TBS that 6 apparently Japanese planes were circling formation. Carriers turned out lights. Visibility was very low at this time.
- 1904 3 unidentified aircraft with rounded wing tips and lights on flew over PHELPS. The outline of these planes were determined when they were silhouetted momentarily against an open patch in the sky. Commander Destroyer Squadron ONE, over TBS, asked Commander Task Force SEVENTEEN (YORKTOWN) if any planes other than square wing tipped fighters were in the air. LEXINGTON TBS was not functioning at this time and a few minutes elapsed before YORKTOWN answered over TBS that only square wing tipped fighters were in the air. At about this time, tracers from machine gun fire were sighted on port bow of YORKTOWN at about 1,000 feet. It was quite dark at this time.
- 1907 YORKTOWN and one of the cruisers opened heavy A.A. fire on enemy planes previously sighted.
- 1910 PHELPS opened fire with forward 1"1 on enemy plane. No hits observed. All planes in air had turned off lights at this time.
- 1920 All planes in air disappeared from view.
- 2000 Posit. 13-10 S., 154-13 E., course 115 True.

8 MAY, 1942

Proceeding on course 115 True, speed 20 knots.

- 0100 MONACHIAN ordered to proceed to last reported position of NEOKHO and SIMS and rescue survivors. Changed course to 270 True, speed 14 knots.
- 0800 Posit. 14-26 S., 154-45 E.

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A16-3/WAR
Serial (00185)

S-E-C-R-E-T

(90-By)
May 22, 1942.

Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force 7-8 May, 1942
in Coral Sea.

8 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

- 0825 Contact report received from SBD of enemy force consisting of 2CV 4CA 3DD.
- 0838 Enemy reported as bearing 006 True, distance 120 miles.
- 0847 Enemy reported as bearing 028 True, distance 175 miles.
- 0848 Task Force Commander ordered entire striking group launched for attack on enemy.
- 0900 YORKTOWN and LEXINGTON commenced launching planes for attack on enemy.
- 0925 YORKTOWN and LEXINGTON completed launching planes to attack enemy force previously reported. LEXINGTON launched approximately 12VF, 17SBD, 12TBD. YORKTOWN launched approximately 6VF, 24SBD, and 9TBD.
- 1012 Over TRS received warning: "GROUP OF JAP BOMBERS HEADED THIS WAY BEARING 270 TRUE".
- 1014 1 patrol plane sighted bearing 050 True.
- 1015 Zero type fighters bearing 025, reported by our combat patrol. Unidentified aircraft observed shot down bearing 025, distance 15,000 yards.
- 1037 Unidentified aircraft reported bearing from 310 to 040, distance 27 to 30 miles.
- 1052 Changed course to 025, axis 305.
- 1056 Many unidentified aircraft reported bearing 020 True, distance 68 miles.
- 1104 Large group of enemy TBD reported bearing 020 True, distance 35 miles.
- 1110 Enemy planes reported coming straight in, distance 22 miles.
- 1111 Enemy planes now 15 miles.

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A16-3/MAR
Serial (00185)

S-E-C-R-E-T

(90-By)
May 22, 1942.

Subject: Engagement with Japanese force 7-8 May, 1942
in Coral Sea.

8 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

- 1112 LEXINGTON reported her combat patrol had sighted enemy planes and were going after them. Changed course to 125 True, speed 25 knots.
- 1114 Sighted flashing light bearing 025 True, distance 10,000 yards and a wave of enemy planes coming in fast. Observed dog fights taking place and many splashes in the water underneath.
- 1115 Task Force Commander reported enemy bombers coming in protected by enemy fighters. Attack commenced. Fighters or dive bombers composed first wave and were followed very closely by torpedo planes coming in at a long glide angle of about 30 degrees and dropping torpedoes from a height of at least 200 feet. Torpedo planes appeared to stay in formation until they were within about 6,000 yards of the port bow of LEXINGTON when they broke up to deliver their attacks. Fire was opened promptly.
- 1116 Two planes observed shot down by DEWEY. One plane seemed to break up in the air and burning portions fell around DEWEY. Two Japanese planes observed shot down by MINNEAPOLIS. One plane bursting into flame and making a perfect spiral of smoke as it crashed off the port bow. The attack came in over the DEWEY and MINNEAPOLIS.
- 1117 LEXINGTON observed to be hit by bomb and burning forward. Three planes observed shot down by LEXINGTON, one of which appeared to crash on deck.
1118. One enemy plane crashed in water off PHELPS port beam and burned fiercely.
- 1120 Observed what was believed to be a near bomb miss on LEXINGTON port bow with water shooting high in the air but it was apparently a torpedo hit as determined later. At about the same instant a Jap plane in a mass of flame tried to crash on the LEXINGTON bow but missed by inches. Port bow of LEXINGTON in flames. Another plane attacking was observed shot down by LEXINGTON.

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Serial (00185)

~~SECRET~~

(90-By)
May 22, 1942.

Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force 7-8 May, 1942
in Coral Sea.

8 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

- 1126 Torpedo planes coming in low from starboard on LEXINGTON. LEXINGTON had changed course about 120 at this time. One Japanese torpedo plane shot down on horizon by our planes. Four of these planes were shot down almost simultaneously by the LEXINGTON and the combined 5" crossfire of a CA and one-stack destroyer of the Sims Class. This attack, unlike the initial wave, came in low from a distance of about 10,000 yards and was similar to our own torpedo plane attacks. It was not heavily supported by fighters. It appeared to be unsuccessful.
- 1129 What appeared to be a torpedo wake passed approximately under PHELPS who was steaming on LEXINGTON starboard bow at this time.
- 1130 Bomb fell just off port beam of PHELPS. Dive bombers or fighters observed to come in very low and have a long glide angle. Attacks ceased. LEXINGTON hoisted signal: "THIS SHIP HAS BEEN TORPELOED".
- 1133 A United States SBD plane, apparently crippled, passed ahead of PHELPS and tried to land on LEXINGTON deck, which it did while she was maneuvering but fell off and sank immediately. This plane was fired on by our own ships but was apparently not hit.
- 1135 Steaming with LEXINGTON. Most of flame is gone from port bow but there is still smoke. Black smoke is pouring out of stacks.
- 1144 PHELPS rescued YORKTOWN VF pilot who landed in water ahead of PHELPS. His name was Lieutenant (junior grade) Richard CROSMILLEN, U.S. Navy. His engine had been damaged by a Japanese plane.
- 1200 Posit. 14-41 S., 155-36 E.
- 1210 YORKTOWN reported her RADAR out of commission.
- 1356 LEXINGTON reported fires are not out.
- 1400 Recovered air striking group. One enemy CV reported badly damaged, another damaged.

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A16-3/WAR
Serial (00185)

(90-By)
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Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force 7-8 May, 1942
in Coral Sea.

8 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

1448 LEXINGTON signalled: "THIS SHIP HAS HAD A SERIOUS EXPLOSION". (Subsequent events, including the sinking of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON and rescue of survivors, are covered in Commander Destroyer Squadron ONE serial (0179), copy enclosed).

3. The following material recommendations are made as a result of experience gained during engagement:

(1) Replace present type cease firing horns now installed at 20 M.M. and 1.1 guns with the loudest type klaxon or bell obtainable. The present installation is entirely inadequate for the purpose intended when men have been deafened by the terrific noise of battle. Efficient cease firing signal is absolutely necessary to prevent firing at own planes.

(2) The performance of the 20 M.M. batteries was excellent.

4. Personnel casualties in this unit were 6 men wounded by a strafing attack on the U.S.S. DEWEY. Material casualties consisted of only superficial damage to rigging and superstructure.

5. Ammunition expended against the enemy:

FIELDS: 16 rounds of 5"/38
500 rounds of 1.1
1400 rounds of 20 M.M.

DEWEY: 69 rounds of 5"/38
2790 rounds of 20 M.M.

AYLWIN: 100 rounds of 5"/38
2000 rounds of 20 M.M.

6. As far as could be observed, the conduct and performance of the officers and crews of ships of this unit was exemplary and in accordance with the highest traditions of the Navy.

Copy to:
COMDESPACFLT.

A. R. EARLY.

Quinn O'Connell

L11-1/12

DESTROYERS, PACIFIC FLEET

Serial 0724

CONFIDENTIAL

From: Commander Destroyers, Pacific Fleet.
 To : The Secretary of the Navy.
 Via : (1) Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.
 (2) Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet.

Subject: Sinking of the U.S.S. SIMS (DD409) by
 Japanese Bombers in the Coral Sea on
 May 7, 1942.

Enclosure: (A) U.S.S. SIMS - Description of Bombing
 Attack and Narrative of Events
 Following Attack by Japanese Bombers
 on May 7, 1942.

1. Survivors of the U.S.S. SIMS were informally interviewed by members of my Staff in an effort to obtain as much information as possible on the tactics of the enemy, the performance of material, and other circumstances which may be of value to destroyers in future operations. The following men were interviewed:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>RATE</u>	<u>GENERAL QUARTERS STATION</u>
Dicken, R. J.	OSM	Bridge
Savage, J.	FC3c	Director
Munch, E. F.	EM2c	Steering Engine Room
Heilly, T. F.	WT1c	No. 1 Fireroom
Candle, V. F.	EM2c	No. 2 Fireroom
Vessia, V. J.	F2c	No. 2 Fireroom
Ernst, G. E.	FC3c	Plotting Room
Gober, A. C.	Sea2c	No. 2 Gun

Information obtained from these survivors is reported in Enclosure (A).

2. Information obtained from the above survivors indicates that throughout the action, and during the events following, all hands performed their duties in a manner which is in keeping with the traditions of the Service. Though many instances of heroism may never be revealed, Commander Destroyers, Pacific Fleet, believes that further questioning of these survivors will reveal that special commendation for

14

Comdespac
111-1/A12

Serial 0724

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Sinking of the U.S.S. SIMS (DD409) by
Japanese Bombers in the Coral Sea on
May 7, 1942.

service above and beyond the call of duty is due the
following:

Lieut-Comdr. W. M. Hyman, USN -- Commanding Officer
Lieut. M. Silverstein, USN -- Engineer Officer
OSM R. J. Dickson, USN
E. F. Munch, MM2c
V. J. Vessia, P2c

It is recommended that suitable awards be made to these men.

W. L. ALMSWORTH.

Copy to:
Comdesron TWO
OO HAWAIIAN detail (Comdr. A. H. TROM, USN)

CONFIDENTIAL

U.S.S. SIMS - Description of Bombing Attack and Narrative of Events Following Attack by Japanese Bombers on May 7, 1942.

During the forenoon of May 7, 1942, while acting as anti-submarine escort for, and patrolling station ahead of the U.S.S. NEOSHO (AG-23), the U.S.S. SIMS was attacked and sunk by Japanese bombers in the Coral Sea. The weather was clear, with alto-cumulus clouds at about 15,000 feet altitude; the sea was smooth, with a slight swell; wind was about three knots.

The ship had steam on all boilers and one 5-inch gun, as well as all four 20 mm. anti-aircraft guns, was manned. The SC radar was manned, and was searching; no FD radar had been installed.

At about 0910 a bomb landed in the water at some distance to port, abreast the forward guns. One man at Number Two Mount was injured by a fragment, but no material damage was incurred. Geber states, however, that the hearing of all hands at Numbers One and Two Mounts was impaired by the explosion and that normal hearing did not return for about one hour. After the bomb had landed, a lone twin motored reconnaissance plane was sighted at about 15,000 yards range, flying high and crossing above the ship. General quarters was sounded immediately; the 20 mm. guns began firing; and the five inch gun which was manned began firing in director control. The first three projectiles failed to burst, while the following shots appeared to be well off in deflection. Savage says that the plane apparently changed course every time he noted a flash of the gun. This plane then flew out of gun range and continued to shadow the SIMS and NEOSHO. An enemy contact report was sent out by the SIMS after this attack.

The SIMS had numerous radar contacts following this first attack and about 0930 sixteen high level bombers in two groups attacked the SIMS and NEOSHO. They dropped bombs which missed wide, causing no damage to either ship. SIMS survivors stated that the bombers were apparently disturbed by the fire from the 5-inch guns, all of which were firing in director control. No information was obtained as to whether any of the planes were shot down. A total of 325 rounds of 5-inch ammunition was expended in these first two phases of the attack.

The horizontal bombers disappeared from sight but the SIMS continued to pick up planes on her SC radar. None were sighted, however, until twenty-four dive bombers appeared at about 1130. As soon as these planes appeared, the SIMS went

CONFIDENTIAL

to flank speed and turned left to take position on the port quarter of the tanker; fire was opened by the 5-inch battery in director control when the planes came within range. The attacks were directed primarily at the tanker and came in from various bearings astern in three waves. The planes approached at about 15,000 feet and dove close to the ship in shallow dives of about 30°. Bombs were released quite close aboard, because survivors state that some bombers were destroyed by the blast of their own bombs. The SINS made a direct hit on one bomber with a 5-inch shell and the plane was seen to explode in the air. The 20 mm. guns fired continuously at the dive bombers as they passed overhead and tracers were seen to pass through the planes, but the projectiles failed to burst and destroy the aircraft. One of the forward 20 mm. guns jammed early in the action and was not cleared during the remainder of the engagement.

Four planes broke off from one wave of NEOSHO attackers and directed their attack at the SINS, diving on her in succession from astern. All of these planes were single motored, had fixed landing gear, and had a silhouette similar to that of Japanese dive bombers. The first released a bomb which landed in the water about amidships to port; the second released a bomb which landed on Number Two Torpedo Mount and exploded in the forward engine room; the third released a bomb which apparently hit the after upper deck house and went down through diagonally forward, exploding in the after engine room; the fourth plane is believed to have made a direct hit on Number Four Gun, but this cannot be definitely established. Numbers Three and Four Mounts and the after 20 mm. guns were put out of commission by the bomb hits, but the forward mounts in local control and one 20 mm. gun continued firing at the planes until all of them were out of gun range. The total number of rounds fired by the SINS cannot be ascertained, but one survivor states that over 200 rounds were fired from Number Two Mount alone. During this last attack, the paint on the barrel of Number One Mount blistered and caught fire; the crew, however, continued to fire with the complete length of the barrel in flames. Several planes were brought down by gun fire during this attack. NEOSHO survivors told SINS survivors that the planes which attacked the SINS were never seen to emerge from the blast of their bomb explosions. It is believed that the bombs dropped were about 500 pound size.

Though there are only thirteen known survivors of the SINS, these men are from widely separated battle stations and it is possible to reconstruct a fairly accurate account of

the damage.

As previously stated, the first bomb released at the WIMS during the dive bombing attack was a near miss to port. There appears to have been no material or personnel casualties as the result of this hit. The fireroom survivors say that missiles were heard hitting the shell of the ship but none penetrated.

Because the three direct hits on the WIMS came in fairly close succession, it was not possible for the survivors to recall accurately the events connected with each hit. Therefore, the damage can probably be best described by recounting the stories of each individual survivor interviewed.

The immediate effect of the first hit was a complete loss of power. The ship stopped dead in the water and all lights went out. The auxiliary diesel generator started and picked up the electrical load on those units whose power supply cables had not been damaged. When this bomb exploded, flames shot about 150 feet in the air, the forward section of the ship vibrated violently, knocking people down, a lookout stationed on top of the director shield was blown overboard, and Savage, who was stationed at the director, was knocked down by the blast. The radar antennae fell from the mast and landed in the port motor whalabout; all signal heliograph dropped from the yard but the mast stays did not part. Broken reports that the pilot house "was a shambles"; the chart desk in the chart house was torn loose from its fastenings and the guide sitting across leading from the ladder passage to the deck below were jammed shut, leaving the vertical ladder at the after end the only access to and from the bridge. The general alarm sounded with a continuous buzz, which is the customary signal for gas attack. This gave several men the impression that they were being subjected to such an attack. This sounding of the alarm, however, was remedied quickly by pulling the switch on the circuit.

No real material damage was noted in the plotting room. The first bomb explosion caused several instrument glasses to break, but all equipment appeared to continue functioning until all power was lost after the second bomb hit, at which time the diesel generator stopped. First then attempted to get onto the main deck by going up through the main deck hatch and out through the galley passageway but he found all quick acting doors in this area jammed shut. He went back down and forward along the first platform deck through C.P.O. quarters and finally succeeded in getting out onto the foremastle deck through the scuttles in the habcove leading to the C.P.O. mess room.

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Reilly states that the first bomb caused no damage other than the breaking of gage glasses in the forward fireroom. All lights went out immediately and by the time Reilly was able to light a battle lantern to look at the steam pressure on the boilers it had already dropped to 200 pounds per square inch and was falling rapidly. On feeling a second shock, which was probably the second bomb hit, he secured the boilers, closed the master oil valve and all of the crew left the fireroom. No steam or feed lines in the fireroom carried away as the result of these two explosions.

In the after fireroom no extensive damage resulted from the first hit. The after bulkhead of the fireroom appeared to hold and no water entered the space. The fireroom gratings were knocked out of place, lights went out, and the steam pressure dropped to zero. Apparently, Canele and Vessia left the fireroom after the first bomb hit, because the latter states that on coming up onto deck he met the Chief Engineer who ordered him to go back down to insure that the boilers had been secured. (One other survivor states that immediately following the first hit he saw the Chief Engineer, Lieut. N. Silverstein, USN, who was in charge of the Repair Party stationed in the machine shop, lying on deck unconscious. He apparently recovered quickly and directed damage control work in a commendable manner, as will be brought out later in this report). Vessia went down again into the fireroom and secured the boiler. While he was doing this work, the second explosion occurred. The blast from this bomb split the deck open overhead and forced the after fireroom bulkhead forward almost to the boiler casing. The fuel oil heater, which was mounted on the bulkhead, dropped down into the bilges. There was no immediate flooding, nor was any steam or feed water released, because Vessia states that he was directly under the lines and would most certainly have been burned had this been the case. Other survivors state that the lathe in the machine shop was knocked loose and was hanging suspended down through the hole in the main deck, and that a small fire, which was easily extinguished, was burning in the machine shop. It is believed that all hands were killed at their battle stations in the engine rooms.

Only one man stationed in the after section of the ship during the attack was rescued. This man, E. F. Munch, MM2c, was stationed in the steering engine room. He states that two other men at this station with him survived the explosions but were probably lost in the water later. When the first bomb hit the ship, Munch states that all power was lost and all communication except with the I.C. Room was severed. Power was restored when the diesel generator started and was maintained for about two minutes. In the berthing compartment immediately forward of the steering engine room all

bunks dropped onto the deck and some water entered. Flooding did not appear to progress, however. After the second hit, Munch and the other men stationed in the steering engine room went up to the main deck. What became of the other two men is not known, but Dicken states that Munch remained on the fantail as the ship was sinking and secured a loose depth charge which was rolling about. Munch was later picked up out of the water by Dicken after the SDEs had sunk.

An accurate description of the damage to the after end of the ship cannot be pieced together. It appears that the first bomb hit the after torpedo mount and exploded in the engine room below. The torpedo mount was blown overboard and some of the warheads, which must have been sheared off, were seen on deck. The forward torpedo mount was canted upward and the speons were driven into the stack. The second bomb hit apparently wrecked the after upper deck house, setting it on fire, and probably exploded in the after engine room. Six of the eight life rafts aboard the ship were in the vicinity of these explosions and they were blown to bits. Number Four Gun had apparently received a direct hit, because every one in the gun crew had been killed and the gun was wrecked. A gaging hole was blown in the main deck above the engine rooms. Dicken states that the deck was ruptured from starboard to port. He further states that, from the bridge, the damage did not appear as extensive as it really was, and that the Commanding Officer had every intention of saving the ship and directed his every effort to do so until the last.

After the attack was over the Commanding officer ordered everyone off the bridge except himself and the Chief Quartermaster. He ordered all hands to assist the repair party in charge of the Chief Engineer in jettisoning topside weights. All loose material was thrown overboard; Lieutenant Silverstein, with several machinist's mates, attempted to free the forward torpedo mount to permit firing the torpedoes. The port boat was lowered over the side and it sank immediately. The two remaining life rafts, located at about frame 76, were launched and the starboard motor whaleboat was lowered. Although this boat had been holed by a large splinter, it was kept afloat by stuffing life jackets in the hole and by continuous bailing; the motor operated satisfactorily. Gohar, Canole, Chalewski, Scott, Reilly, and Vessia manned this boat. The Commanding Officer then ordered Dicken to take charge of the boat and to go aft in it to put out the fire in the after upper deck house and to flood the after magazines. Dicken had to swim out to the boat from the ship

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and he noted that there was no oil on the water at this time. On taking charge of the boat Dicken proceeded around the bow to the lee side of the ship aft. As the motor whaleboat approached, the ship seemed to break amidships and start to sink slowly. The stern went under first and appeared to draw the bow aft, pulling it down stern first. All hands began abandoning ship in life jackets, swimming for the rafts. Just as the water level reached the top of the stack and began running down into it, a terrific explosion occurred. What remained of the ship was lifted ten to fifteen feet out of the water, and the surface of the water around the ship was covered with oil. This great explosion was followed by another smaller one, which survivors definitely identified as a depth charge explosion. The remaining forward section then settled slowly, sinking in about five minutes. One man who couldn't swim was seen hanging onto the anchor until the stem disappeared into the water. Survivors estimate that the ship sank in about fifteen to twenty minutes after receiving the first direct hit. Under conditions of stress such as existed at the time, minutes would seem like hours and it is quite possible that the ship sank much more rapidly than these men estimate.

The survivors are of the opinion that the terrific explosion was a boiler explosion. This seems hardly plausible, though, because both fireroom survivors state that the steam pressure had dropped to zero. A depth charge or war head explosion appears to be more likely. No survivor knows definitely whether or not the depth charges were set on "SAFE", but Dicken states that the usual practice on the SIBS was to keep them set on "SAFE" until a submarine contact was made.

Following this explosion, Dicken, in the whaleboat, proceeded to pick up all men in the water whom he could find, and who appeared to be still alive. He succeeded in saving a total of fifteen men, including himself, and then began looking for the life rafts in order to take them in tow. His search was fruitless, so he headed toward the U.S.S. NEGONO, which was dead in the water, listed about 25° and burning. He approached to within 250 yards and awaited instructions. After about thirty minutes he was called alongside and several of the NEGONO wounded were put in the boat. During the night of May 7th Dicken and the survivors of the SIBS, along with the several NEGONO men, stayed in the boat, keeping in the vicinity of the NEGONO. On May 8th they again went alongside and transferred the wounded back aboard, where mattresses had been laid out on deck. The SIBS crew attempted to patch the

WALTON

hole in their boat and succeeded in stopping it somewhat, but continuous bailing was still necessary. They tried to repair the engine, which had stopped, but could not start it again. On the evening of May 8th the captain of the WALTON gave all hands the choice of remaining aboard through the night or taking to the boats. Pickett and his men (one had died during the night), along with men from the WALTON, spent the night of May 8th in the boat. The sea was quite rough that night and the WALTON whaleboat drifted about three miles away from the WALTON. Pickett realized that one best course was to stay near the WALTON, but without a motor he had no way of getting back. He ingeniously rigged a sail, using alcohol and boat stuffs, and sailed back to the tanker on May 9th. Meanwhile, the men who had stayed aboard the WALTON had succeeded in launching a 20-foot motor launch and had rigged hoisting gear by which they were able to lift the WALTON whaleboat clear of the water to permit patching of the hole. The punctured emergency tanks were replaced with 5-gallon cans, a sail rigged, and the boat was stocked with provisions and water. However, since it appeared that the WALTON bulk could remain afloat, all hands remained aboard until they were rescued by the U.S.S. WALTON (52371) on May 11th.

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Cincpac File No.
AL-3/G.S.
L11-1/BD/(90)

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
FLAGSHIP OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

wb

Serial 02377

1st Endorsement on
Comdespac L11-1/AL2
(0724) dated July 8,
1942.

CONFIDENTIAL

From: Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet.
To: The Secretary of the Navy.
Via: Commander in Chief, United States Fleet.
Subject: Sinking of the U.S.S. SIMS (DD409) by Japanese Bombers in
the Coral Sea on May 7, 1942.

1. Forwarded.
2. The following points stand out in the narrative of the
sinking of the SIMS:

(a) Although a ship may have radar, a high standard of vigilance by lookouts must be maintained; even while searching with SG radar, SIMS' first knowledge of enemy planes in the vicinity was a bomb dropped alongside.

(b) Quick acting doors were jammed shut by the bomb hits so that many or all of them could not be opened.

(c) Large personnel losses were caused by explosions that were probably the ship's own depth charges. Commanding Officers have been repeatedly warned of this danger and must take every precaution to prevent it.

(d) Despite the recent excellent increase in type and number of close range AA weapons, ships still have too few. With only four 20mm guns, SIMS lost one fourth of her close range defense when one of them jammed; this may have meant the difference between her escape and destruction. Destroyers must have at least eight 20mm or equivalent guns.

(e) Apparently only four dive bombers attacked the SIMS, yet three of them made hits. This percentage of hits on a high speed maneuvering ship, especially on a destroyer, is extraordinary and has few if any parallels in this War. Fifty-eight of our carrier dive bombers attacking two Japanese destroyers in the rear after MIDWAY failed to make a single hit. The Japanese pilots' success probably resulted from pressing the attack home to a very low altitude without regard for their own safety.

Cincpac File No.
A16-3/C.S.
L11-1/BD/(90)

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
FLAGSHIP OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

wb

Serial 02377

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Sinking of the U.S.S. SIMS (DD409) by Japanese Bombers in the Coral Sea on May 7, 1942.

(f) The ineffectiveness of high altitude horizontal bombing was again brought out. A total of 17 planes dropped bombs from high altitudes at SIMS and NEOSHO without making any hits; 24 dive bombers attacked and repeatedly hit both ships.

3. In the cases of both the HAMMANN and the SIMS reports have contained statements that the depth charges were set on safe. In each incident after the ship had sunk violent explosions, attributed to either the ship's torpedoes or depth charges, killed many officers and men.

4. Various theories have been advanced as to the cause of these explosions, but most agree that either warheads or depth charges, or both, were involved. Some of the points brought out are:

(a) Safety forks may have been knocked out when enemy bomb or torpedo hit - though in the case of the HAMMANN depth charges on deck were examined by a competent petty officer after the ship was hit. In accordance with standard precautions neither ship had pistols in depth charges other than those on deck.

(b) Boiler explosions may have in some manner detonated warheads or depth charges. In the SIMS, however, pressure in one boiler dropped to zero during the attack before it was secured, and personnel at the other state that the pressure had dropped below 200 pounds and was falling rapidly when they secured the boiler and evacuated the fireroom.

(c) Fire may have set off magazines. This factor does not seem proved in either ship. The HAMMANN went down so rapidly that fires could have had little chance to get started, and there is no indication in the SIMS of severe fire below decks.

(d) Pistols or exploders may have been at fault, due to poor assembly or to exposure.

(e) In both ships internal explosions occurred after the stern had gone down. In the SIMS depth of sinking is exactly indicated by the statement that a terrific explosion occurred just as the water reached the top of the stack and began running down into it.

Cincpac File No.
Alc-3/C.S.
111-1/BB/(90)

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
FLAGSHIP OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

wb

Serial 02377

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Sinking of the U.S.S. SIMS (DD409) by Japanese Bombers in
the Coral Sea on May 7, 1942.

(f) Torpedo air-flasks in the after mount of the SIMS were blown up by bomb hits, and warheads were rolling around on deck but none exploded at this time.

(g) From the evidence of these sinkings, it is believed that only a part of the depth charges or warheads exploded. This points to the probability that only those on deck were involved, and it might narrow the field of experiment to pistols and exploders.

5. It is considered that this matter is of sufficient importance to warrant the Bureau of Ordnance undertaking experiments to determine the reasons for depth charge or torpedo explosions during the sinking of a ship and after she has submerged to a considerable depth. These explosions have caused greater loss of life than the enemy hits that sank the ships.

6. This ship was fought in the highest traditions of the service both in the engagement with the enemy and in the determined and persistent efforts to keep the ship afloat after she had been hit. Suitable awards will be recommended by separate correspondence.

Copy to:

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