

In reply  
address Commandant, U. S.  
Naval Operating Base,  
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

11 579

0644  
A16-3

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDANT  
UNITED STATES NAVAL OPERATING BASE  
GUANTANAMO BAY, CUBA

Refer to  
File No. NB37/A16-3  
0046  
Serial No. -----

10-p

November 17, 1942

**SECRET**

From: The Commandant.  
To : The Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier.

SUBJECT: Loss of USS ERIE - 12 November 1942.

Enclosure: (A) Sketch of tracks of USS ERIE and USS SPRY.

1. The following detailed events and actions of the escort vessels with TAG-20 at the time and after the ERIE was torpedoed, obtained from the Commanding Officers of the vessels concerned, follows:

REPORT OF PC-583

At 1130 the PC-583, 589, SC-533, VAN KINSBERGEN and a motor torpedo boat left Willemstad for patrol duties off the harbor. The subsidiary convoy got under way at 1130 Queen and stood out of the harbor on base course 180°, heading toward the rendezvous point. During this period the escort vessels carried on the normal search plan. The main convoy from Trinidad was sighted at about 1500. At 1635 the subsidiary convoy was joined to the main convoy and steaming on the base course. At 1703 the ERIE, on station starboard bow of convoy well out, was hit by torpedo, thereafter turning to course about 120° into the wind. The vessel appeared to be burning. The VAN KINSBERGEN, whose station was about six miles ahead of the convoy, the BIDDLE, the SC-533 and the SPRY searched the area around the ERIE. The SC-533 dropped destructive barrage ahead of ERIE which was on course, east at this time. One PT vessel also dropped charges and this PT vessel was seen to be fired upon by a merchantman in the starboard column which was estimated to be No. 72. At this time there were three planes overhead. The convoy did not change course, but proceeded on her base course. At about 1715 the Aruba convoy was on the horizon and at 1810 was in position in the main convoy. At 1815 a merchantman in the first column, believed to be No. 12, fired about six rounds to port. At 1817 a PC vessel reported a submarine on the surface on the port quarter of the convoy. The BIDDLE was seen to head over in that direction. The convoy was making eight knots.

REPORT OF PC-624

This vessel reports seeing a fierce fire giving out heavy black smoke burning on the ERIE and that vessel changing course to an easterly one. No signals or messages were sent out. The

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ERIE steamed across the van of the convoy, then paralleling it on the reverse course and the VAN KINSBERGEN, SPRY, PC-573 changed course in the direction of the ERIE while the BIDDLE ran through the convoy taking the leading position. Several planes were seen circling overhead and a PT boat was circling the ERIE. Shortly thereafter the Aruba convoy, escorted by a PC and an SC, joined TAG-20. At 1712 a merchant vessel in the leading column was seen to open fire, although its target could not be observed. At 1810 the merchant ship in No. 1 column was seen to open fire to port, firing six or eight shells, although its target could not be observed. The PC-545 reported sighting a submarine near her then position and that vessel opened gunfire on this object. The PC-624 circled to port to join in the hunt together with the VAN KINSBERGEN and the QUEEN WILHELMINA. "We were unable to obtain a sound contact." "At 1830 the VAN KINSBERGEN directed us to join her in search astern, a distance of about six miles away." "The SPRY was seen to head toward Curacao with ERIE which was still blazing." "At 1915 we reported to the Escort Commander (BIDDLE) that sweeps astern were being made and requested orders which were received at 1927 to rejoin convoy which orders were completed at 0015." At no time did this vessel have a sound contact, sight periscope, submarine or any indication that a submarine was present before or after the ERIE was torpedoed. "We were unable to see the targets being fired on by the merchant vessels."

REPORT OF PC-545

At 1702 this vessel observed an explosion abaft the deckhouse of the ERIE, which was believed to be a torpedo striking her fuel oil tank, because of the flames and dense smoke being given out. The ERIE was seen to turn toward Willemstad. At 1822 a periscope and about four feet of a submarine's conning tower were seen approximately one mile between this vessel and the convoy. It was believed that this submarine was likewise seen by several of the vessels in the convoy for at least two of them were firing at the same time. We sighted the conning tower which was visible to us for about ten seconds, indicating that the submarine was on a southerly course. "This vessel went to general quarters, headed for a position to attack the submarine while vessels in the convoy continued firing after the submarine had submerged and during our sound search toward the last known

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position of the enemy." "During this time, shells landed about 500 yards off each bow and one was heard as it passed overhead." "Our sound attacks were not good although a number of echoes were heard and investigated, none of which had the characteristics of a submarine and, from the ranges of the echoes, it was decided that they were caused by vessels in the convoy." "At 1834 had a fair sound contact and commenced an attack." "Contact was weak and the only information obtained was that it was moving rapidly to the left during the last stages of the attack." "Dropped a barrage of five charges set to one hundred feet at 1836." "At about 1837 QUEEN WILHELMINA dropped a barrage about five hundred yards off our starboard bow." "We could not regain contact but continued to search the area until ordered to rejoin at 2035." "It is our opinion that the submarine escaped by turning into and under the convoy, making our sound search ineffective."

REPORT OF USS SPRY

This vessel reported the torpedoing of the ERIE in Latitude 12° 03' N. Longitude 68° 58' W. at 1701 Queen, 12 November. The SPRY was patrolling starboard bow of convoy, TAG-20, with ERIE ahead; convoy course 300. Five ships had just joined from Curacao and four more were coming in from Aruba. ERIE was noted to be on a northerly course when hit. SPRY went ahead full speed to close convoy and position of ERIE. At 1706 made reasonably good sound contact. At 1709 fired eight charge pattern at mean depth 150 feet with no trace of damage. At 1712 ERIE requested SPRY to stand by and BIDDLE was directed to take charge of convoy. While standing by ERIE and attempting to use fire hose, many echoes were picked up on Asdic believed to be wakes of PT boat which had come out of Willemstad. At 1822 gunfire was observed from ships in the convoy and PC-545 reported the submarine conning tower sighted which he attacked with depth charges on a fair contact. At 1545, while maneuvering around the ERIE, a signalman reported he sighted a periscope and feather of submarine and one charge was dropped just forward of the reported track. While several swirls from PT boat in the water around the ship were seen and sound contact had been made on many wakes, no classified contacts were actually made. At 1822 observed gunfire from ships in the convoy firing at something on the port side and at a seemingly short range. The Commanding Officer of the SPRY believes that the submarine was between the



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ERIE and the convoy when the ERIE was attacked.

REPORT OF PC-573

This vessel proceeded towards Sector 1 to relieve SPRY which stood over to assist ERIE. Between 1710 and 1725 observed ships on starboard bow of convoy firing deck guns to starboard. At 1725 sighted five men in the water, position marked by a flag. Searched area and Sector 3, no contact. The Dutch cruiser lowered a boat to pick up the survivors at 1755. Observed ships in the convoy to fire their deck guns on port bow of the convoy, but could not see their target. At 2010 this vessel fired four rounds of star shell, nothing was sighted. Resumed patrol in Sector 5.

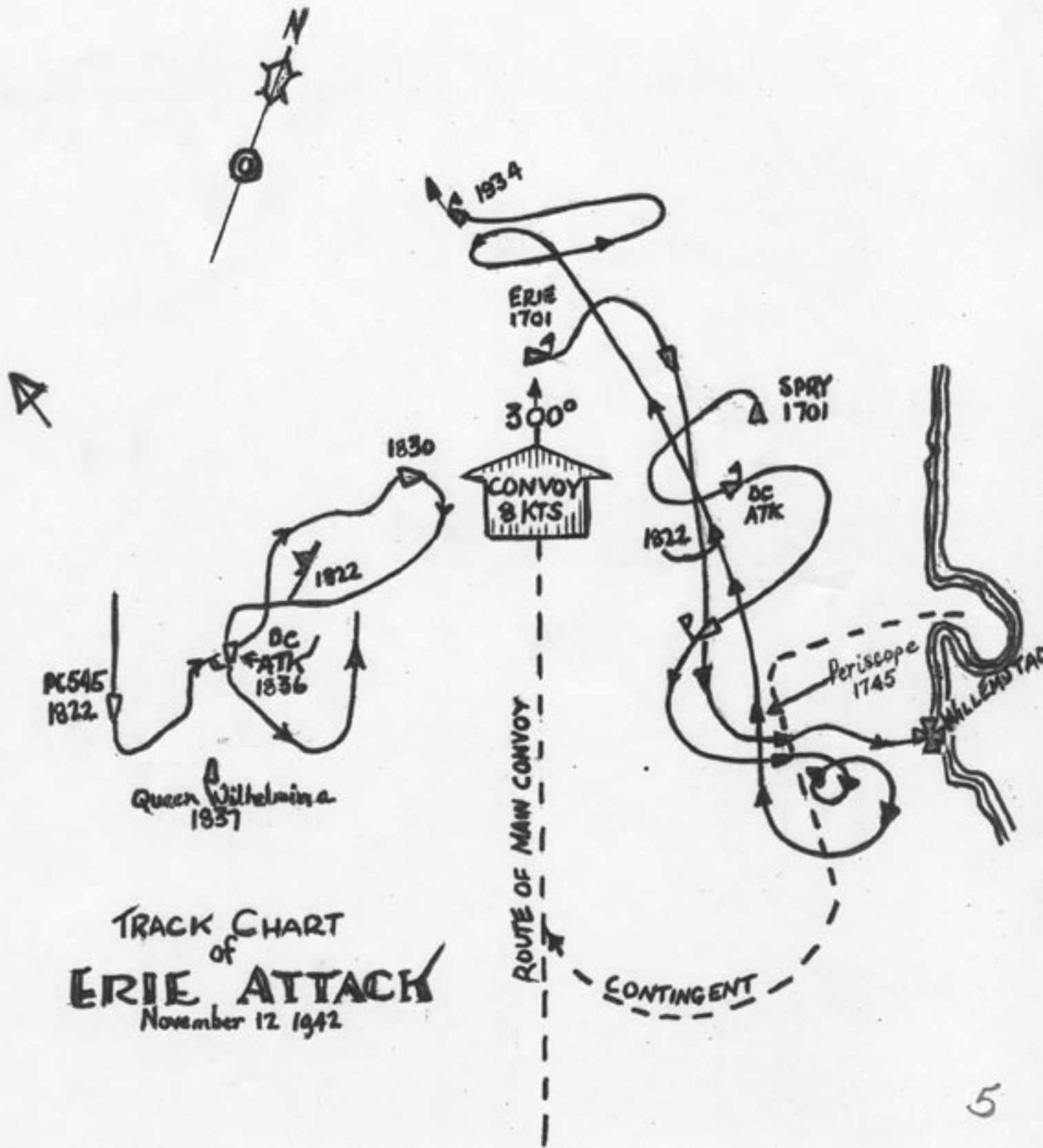
REPORT OF USS BIDDLE

Position was in Sector 2, patrolling port bow of convoy. At 1616 was relieved and proceeded to new station five miles to stern of convoy. At 1703 the stern of the ERIE was seen to be in flames, convoy at the time being off Willemstad. This vessel proceeded towards starboard side of the convoy and at 1709 observed SPRY make depth charge attack astern of the ERIE. At 1712 ships in station 72 and 73 were observed to open fire in a northward direction. The VAN KINSBERGEN was observed to make a depth charge attack in this area and one or two PC boats were searching while the SPRY proceeded to the assistance of the ERIE. Upon orders, BIDDLE proceeded to Sector 1, convoy resuming course 295 with five new ships joining on the port side. At 1820 machine-gun fire was observed, believed to be from PC boats on port quarter of convoy which was followed at 1822 by fire from the stern gun of at least two merchant ships in the same area. At this time PC-545 reported submarine on surface. Ordered that vessel to attack and to remain until further orders. At 1826, on orders from SPRY, the BIDDLE headed down port side of convoy to investigate an explosion which was believed to be from the ERIE.

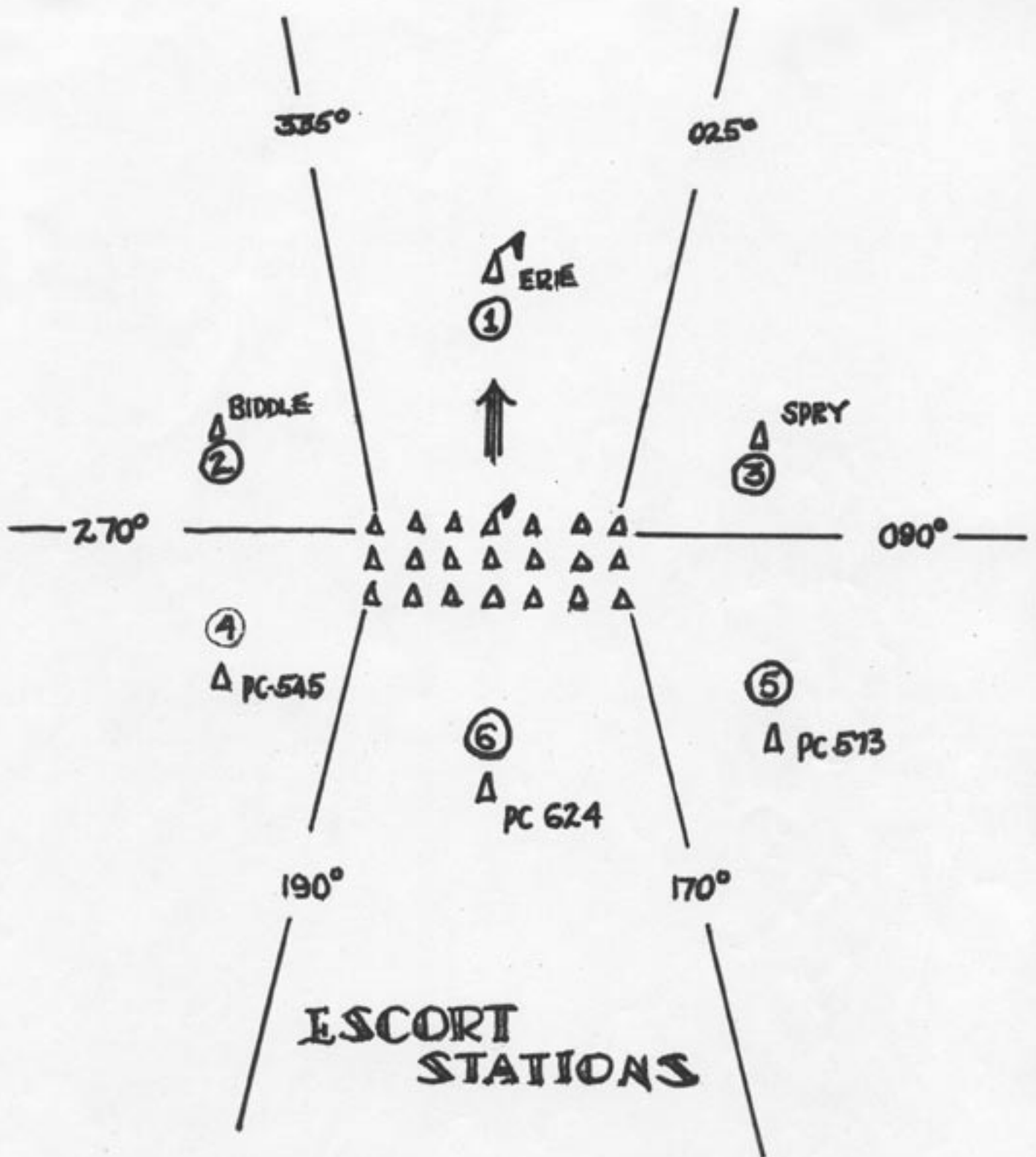


GEO. L. WEYLER.

SECRET



TRACK CHART  
of  
**ERIE ATTACK**  
November 12 1942



SECRET

16921

HEADQUARTERS  
TENTH NAVAL DISTRICT  
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
FLAG OFFICE  
RECEIVED

80666

11 579

1942 NOV 27 8 45

CGSP/A16-3  
Serial 00171-42  
FIRST ENDORSEMENT to  
Comdt. N.O.B. Gtmo.  
ltr. NB37/A16-3 ser.  
0046 dated 11-17-42.

November 22, 1942.

SECRET

From: The Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier.  
To: The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.

Subject: Loss of USS ERIE - 12 November 1942.

1. Forwarded.

S. A. CLEMENT,  
Chief of Staff.

SECOND ENDORSEMENT  
FF1/L11-1

HEADQUARTERS OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF,  
UNITED STATES FLEET.

Serial:001566

DEC 23 1942

From: Commander in Chief, U. S. Fleet.  
To: The Secretary of the Navy.

Forwarded.

OFFICE  
DELIVERY  
NO 10395

G.L. RUSSELL,  
By direction.

1942 NOV 27 8 31

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
FLAG OFFICE  
RECEIVED

SECRET

11 579

RECEIVED S-C FILES  
Nov 28 1942  
DEC 23 1942  
10-10-10- Sec Nav  
10-10-10- L11-1/P650  
70126  
10395

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