

A16-3

Headquarters of the
Commandant Third Naval District
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New York, N. Y.

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 053

January 8, 1943.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

From: Captain Andrew R. Mack, U. S. Navy,
Commanding Officer, U.S.S. ERIE.
To: The Secretary of the Navy.
Via: Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier.
Subject: Torpedoing and Beaching of U.S.S. ERIE;
Conduct and Performance of Officers and Crew.
References: (a) U.S. Navy Regulations, Art. 712.
(b) U.S.S. ERIE Confidential Report PG50/A16-3/
L11-1, Serial 051 of December 9, 1942.
Enclosure: (A) Extracts from the report of Lieut. Comdr.
D. L. Roscoe, U.S.N., Acting Executive
Officer (Full report included in Ref. (b)).

1. In accordance with Reference (a), report is submitted herewith of the conduct and performance of officers and men of the U.S.S. ERIE on November 12, 1942 at the time of the torpedoing, and during the subsequent fire and beaching of the vessel.

2. When the vessel was torpedoed, and during the following period of about one hour while the after part of the vessel was enveloped in a terrific fuel oil and gasoline fire, which caused the exploding of the 6" charges and projectiles in the after ready ammunition room, the officers and crew of the vessel, without an exception, showed by their conduct and performance, the highest degree of loyalty and personal fearlessness. The Commanding Officer noted, in the case of each individual observed, and by subsequent reports of others, the spirit of determination of each to prevent, as far as possible, further damage to the vessel, regardless of personal risk and possible further loss of life. Fortunately, there were no personnel losses or injuries after the initial torpedo and gasoline explosions.

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3. The material damage and the blast from the explosions included the area of the quarterdeck, wardroom, and officers' living quarters. The officers of the ship's organization most directly concerned with damage control and fire fighting were either lost or were overboard as a result of the torpedoing. This included the executive officer, the damage control officer, the engineer officer, and the deck division officers. But without exception, the leading petty officers immediately assumed the initiative of action without hesitation or question. Due to interrupted communications, the commanding officer did not know for a considerable period which of the officers had been lost. It was evident, however, that each department was functioning to full capacity with the equipment and facilities at hand.

4. The ship's chief carpenter's mate, assisted by the chief machinist's mate of the damage control party, demonstrated the greatest degree of initiative, ability and coolness, not only during the fire, but in subsequent salvage operations.

5. When it became apparent that the fire and the exploding ammunition in number 4 ready ammunition room were an immediate danger to the ammunition in number 3 ready room, the gunnery officer was relieved and sent aft to take such action as possible in connection with the protection of this ammunition. Although only about twenty-five feet from the exploding 6" ammunition, and immediately above a burning compartment, this officer, with a party largely composed of volunteers, removed the 6" powder charges from number 3 ready ammunition room and threw them overboard. The powder cans containing these charges were so hot that they could not be passed directly from hand to hand, but had to be shoved about and through the scuttle without direct bodily contact.

6. The following is quoted from a letter by Captain G. M. Rayne, R.N., senior British naval officer at Curacao, N.W.I.:

"I had hoped that loss of life had been avoided by the fine handling of the ship, and particularly of the magnificent work of the engine room staff in sticking to their job under what must have been terrible conditions."

The Commanding Officer is in full agreement with this commendation of the engineer's force of the ERIE. They took immediate action, even during the period when the engineering

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spaces were in partial darkness due to loss of certain lighting circuits, to start pumps, to stop leaks and to regain ship's power. They answered all bells from the bridge with the port engine which was still functioning. It was known by these men, as well as by most of the ship's company, that a heavy fire was burning in the vicinity of the after 6" and 1 1/2 AA magazine groups. Whether or not these magazines were flooded or were in immediate danger of exploding could not be determined. The magazines were adjacent to the engineering spaces. As the ship continued to list heavily and settle by the stern, there was doubt as to whether the beach could be reached before capsizing. These men did not question the decision that they remain at their stations in the below deck engineering spaces. When the word came to them, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, to abandon ship, they not only left the plant properly secured, but closed hatches and scuttles as they left the engineering compartments. Men of the engineer's division with assigned battle stations in the parts of the ship which had been destroyed, went to the engineering spaces to lend their assistance, without orders or other instructions.

7. The Executive Officer who had received serious injuries and burns, climbed to the stern of the ship through the opening in the deck and side made by the torpedo. With the help of a man on depth charge watch, so seriously burned as to be placed later on the danger list, the ready depth charges were set on "safety" before the intense heat made it necessary that this isolated part of the ship be abandoned.

8. After the ship had been abandoned, and almost as soon as the commanding officer had landed, a report was received of a muster of the crew by divisions and a list of absentees. This muster by division petty officers without muster lists available, coupled with a report from the local hospitals a few hours later, gave the accurate casualty list reported to the Navy Department. Army officers and others at the landing beach remarked upon the orderliness and discipline of the men.

9. The following is a statement of the performance of individual officers and men of the U.S.S. ERIE:

- (1) Lieutenant Commander Daniel J. Sweeney U.S.N.
Day, Troy W. 295 45 52 GM2c U.S.N.

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Lieutenant Commander Sweeney, with severe bruises and burns, and Day, GM2c, so seriously burned as to be later placed on the danger list, while isolated on the stern of the vessel by the ruptured deck and flames of the oil and gasoline fire, and before being forced to jump overboard by the intense heat, set the "ready" depth charges on the "safety" setting in the hope of preventing further damage to the vessel and further loss of life.

- (2) a. Lieutenant Karl Erik Johansson, U.S. Navy
- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Hilton, Joseph Karns | 311 27 19 | Pt1c | U.S.N. |
| Dickerson, William J. | 274 44 07 | SFlc | U.S.N. |
| McNeal, William David | 272 19 93 | AMM1c | U.S.N. |
| Butler, Benjamin F. | 201 78 27 | AOM2c | U.S.N. |
| Foster, Edward Harold | 223 86 70 | AMM3c | U.S.N. |
| Rybicki, Florian E. | 223 91 31 | S1c | U.S.N. |
- See paragraph 5 above

With an intense fire burning in the compartment below, and the 6" powder charges and projectiles exploding in Number 4 ready ammunition room about twenty five feet further aft, the group listed above removed the powder charges from Number 3 6" ready ammunition room and threw them overboard. The powder cans were so hot that they could not be handled with bare hands. In performing this and other tasks, the officer and these man showed the highest degree of loyalty and fearlessness, disregarding the personal danger involved.

b Dickerson and Hilton, in addition to the performance mentioned above, as members of the damage control party, took charge of separate groups, closed off the after part of the ship to prevent spread of fire to the second deck, and participated in the fire fighting in the most dangerous area.

- (3)
- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------|--------|
| Danos, Lewis J. | 243 47 53 | CRM(AA) | U.S.N. |
| In charge of pump room and generators | | | |
| Durva, Frank S. | 380 71 22 | CRM(AA) | U.S.N. |
| In charge of engineroom. | | | |
| Tribble, Henry Rosser | 265 56 45 | CWT(AA) | U.S.N. |
| In charge of fireroom. | | | |
| Moore, Hansell B. | 279 55 51 | MM1c | U.S.N. |
| Hyde, Louis Francis | 291 55 58 | MM1c | U.S.N. |
| Yuhas, Michael (none) | 250 47 53 | MM1c | U.S.N. |
| Yuhas, Stephen (none) | 250 47 54 | EM1c | U.S.N. |
| Kobryn, Peter (none) | 207 22 80 | MM1c | U.S.N. |

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Adsit, William Richard	381 20 46	MM1c	U.S.N.
Platt, Curtis (none)	336 78 88	MM1c	U.S.N.
Byars, Kenneth William	359 85 60	MM1c	U.S.N.
Smales, William Clifford	250 47 59	MM1c	U.S.N.
Nix, John Westely	272 25 59	MM2c	U.S.N.
Smith, Sherwood Daniel	381 31 55	F1c	U.S.N.
Anderson, Lyall Marion	321 25 82	WT1c	U.S.N.
Sisson, George William	274 43 41	WT2c	U.S.N.
Parks, Charles Woodrow	266 02 18	WT2c	U.S.N.
Stump, Richard Lewellyn	266 30 03	F1c	U.S.N.
Lumber, James (none)	224 27 36	F2c	U.S.N.
Malarsie, Leonard Joseph	- - - -	F3c	U.S.N.

See paragraph 6 above

These men, under hazardous conditions, when there appeared to be danger from the explosion of the after magazines and when the vessel was in eminent danger of capsizing, unswervingly stood by their posts in the engineering compartments and kept the ship's power plant functioning, thereby enabling the vessel to be beached, and preventing further loss of life. This high degree of loyalty and personal fearlessness caused most favorable comment by officers of our own and allied navies who witnessed the action.

(4) Roy, George Albert 212 31 40 COM(AA) U.S.N.

When the vessel was torpedoed and fuel oil and gasoline fires broke out, Roy, in the absence of the assigned officers, assumed full charge of the damage control and fire fighting parties. He closed off the after part of the ship and thus prevented the immediate spread of fire on the second deck. He participated in the fire fighting in the most dangerous area. Although in a position of great danger, he performed tasks for the protection of the ship, in which he displayed a high order of intelligence, loyalty and personal fearlessness.

Note: In separate correspondence, Roy is being recommended for advancement to rank of Chief Carpenter, U.S.N.

(5) Schiller, Richard Louis 291 39 25 CMM(AA) U.S.N.

As the senior engineering rating on the damage control party, and with the engineer officer and the damage control officer lost, Schiller, under Roy, the chief carpenter's mate, took immediate charge of all engineering features of damage control

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and fire fighting. With disregard for personal danger, and with initiative and ability of a high order, he performed such duties as were necessary in an attempt to prevent further damage to the vessel.

(6) Holley, Horace Clinton 268 34 33 Ylc U.S.N.

This man was Captain's talker in the conning tower. With interrupted circuits, and other interior communication difficulties, he managed to get orders through to the engine rooms and other stations, and to keep the Commanding Officer informed of activities of all principal damage control and ship control stations.

Note: In separate correspondence, this man is being recommended for advancement to the rating of Chief Yeoman.

(7) Pastor, Robert Thomas 223 48 65 SKlc U.S.N.

Subsequent to the action and fire on the ERIE, in which practically all supply and disbursing office records were lost, Pastor, showing great ability and almost photographic memory, reconstructed the pay accounts of the officers and crew of the vessel with great accuracy. With the ship's paymaster and his relief lost, and without records, as mentioned before, Pastor was able to furnish information of exact amounts of ship's funds, transfers, disbursing transactions, etc., which will undoubtedly be of great value to the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts.

Note: In separate correspondence, this man is being recommended for advancement to the rating of Chief Storekeeper.

(8) Duffield, Harold E. 402 04 27 CQM(PA) U.S.N.

This man at the steering wheel, did an excellent job under difficult maneuvering conditions. With only a narrow shelf upon which a vessel could be landed, he greatly assisted the commanding officer in successfully beaching the ERIE.

10. The following officers and men received serious injuries in action:

(1) Lieutenant (jg) John B. Elliott, U.S.N.R.

This officer received most serious burns and a severe fracture of one leg which necessitated immediate amputation. After the explosions, he was on an isolated part of the ship

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which had to be abandoned on account of intense heat from the oil and gasoline fire. During the subsequent period of hospitalization it was undoubtedly his courage and determination which enabled the medical authorities to save his life. The fortitude of this young officer caused the most favorable comment among the officers and others in attendance, and among those who had occasion to observe him, particularly during the critical period.

- (2) Captain Alan Wilder Levi, U.S.M.C.R.
 - Davis, Joseph P. 266 06 77 GM3c U.S.N.
 - Rebato, Flacido (none) 182 53 72 OC2c U.S.N.
 - Carino, Maximo (none) 497 94 27 OS2c U.S.N.
 - Del Rosario, Francisco (none) 497 82 71 OC1c U.S.N.
 - *Day, Troy W. 295 45 52 GM2c U.S.N.
- *See paragraph 9(1).

This officer and these men, although severely injured, most of them with serious burns, showed a spirit of great courage and fortitude. During the period before reaching the hospital some of them had been in the water and were unrecognizable because of a coating of fuel oil. During the hospitalization period they showed such determination as to be of great aid to those in charge of their treatment, and to hasten their recovery.

11. The following officers and men were killed in action:

- Lieutenant George Owen Kunkle, U.S.N.R.
- Lieutenant Ernest Carl Peterson (Aviator), U.S.N.
- Lieutenant (jg) Frank Greenwood, U.S.N.R.
- Lieutenant Gilbert Franklin Gorsuch (DC), U.S.N.
- Lieutenant Commander Albert Lincoln Lloyd (SC), U.S.N.R.
- Lieutenant Ned James Wentz (SC), U.S.N.

Enriquez, Cavino (none) 497 71 59 MA1c U.S.N.
(Died November 13, 1942 as a result of injuries.)

12. Below is a list of officers not otherwise mentioned by name in this report:

- Lieutenant Commander David L. Roseco, Jr., U.S.N.
- Lieutenant Commander Thomas P. Lowndes, U.S.N.
- Ensign Donald H. Madsen, U.S.N.R.
- Lieutenant Commander Ralph M. McComas (MC), U.S.N.
- Captain Jack A. Witherspoon, U.S.M.C.R.

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The conduct and performance of these officers was splendid in every respect, and was entirely in keeping with the traditions of the service.

13. It is recommended that such awards, commendations, or recognition be given to those officers and men mentioned above as is considered merited. Attention is particularly invited to paragraphs 9(1), (2)a,b, (3), (4), and 10.

14. The best expression that the Commanding Officer can give of his opinion of the conduct and performance of the officers and men is that if he were privileged to go into action with the enemy tomorrow, he would like to have with him those officers and men who served on the ERIE on November 12, 1942.

A. R. MACK

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ENCLOSURE A

EXTRACTS FROM THE REPORT OF
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER D. L. ROSCOE, U.S.N.,
ACTING EXECUTIVE OFFICER
(Full report included in Ref. (b))

"4. Action Following Torpedo Hit:

The torpedo explosion was immediately followed by fire in the effected area and it was obvious that a diesel fuel-tank had been ruptured and the flaming oil was spreading throughout the immediate vicinity of the hit. The fire almost immediately spread to the port side so that access to the fantail was blocked. It could be seen that the two men on watch at the depth charges had been blown overboard or had jumped overboard along with any others in that vicinity. The QCL sound equipment and chemical range recorder were damaged and put out of commission from the shock. Power on the main generators went out but steering control was soon regained on auxiliary power. It was apparent that the ship was unable to attempt any counter offensive against the submarine except by gunfire. Battle stations were manned but from then on all efforts on the part of the ERIE were toward fighting the fire and trying to save the ship. The U.S.S. SPRY and the GULF DAWN could be seen conducting depth charge attack and firing their guns at something in the water. The Van Kinsbergen seemed to be rushing back towards this scene of action.

The Captain sent me below to ascertain the situation as to the general condition of the ship and to see what was being done. I went below and aft to find that the damage control party had closed the ship off at the door just forward of the office spaces. They reported gas and smoke in that compartment coming from a raging fire in the wardroom. The torpedo blast had penetrated this far forward as was shown by the burning of several officers' mess attendants who had been in the passageway forward of the wardroom. An unsuccessful attempt was made to close the forward wardroom W.T. door. It was reported to me that everything forward of this area was set in material condition Affirm except when opened to gain access to different spaces.

I then went to the main deck and found that the fire had increased. There was no pressure on the fire main. I then ordered all available CO₂ fire extinguishers brought to the scene of the fire. These were used to try to put out the deck fire in order to get closer to the main oil fire when and if we regained water pressure. The fire on the starboard side of No. 3 gun deck was temporarily extinguished in this manner mainly through the efforts of Amato, L.I., CPM(PA), U.S. Navy who took charge there. I then went to the bridge and reported the situation to the Captain. It was obvious that the fire was completely out of control.

It was decided that, until we regained pressure, we would prepare the boats for lowering. This entails a good deal of hauling on lines, etc. and was smartly accomplished under the direction of the boatswain's mates, all of whom performed splendidly. Also it was decided to try to launch the plane even though the aviator, Lieutenant Peterson, was apparently missing. This subsequently had to be abandoned because the after guys for hauling out the boom could not be manned because of the fire in that area. The ammunition was removed from the plane.

The Captain then ordered a bucket brigade organized. I went below and ordered all hands who were at their stations on the forward gun (those whose stations were below in the magazine were by now on topside) to obtain buckets and a line was formed from the galley, where fresh water was drawn, to the scene of the fire on the port side near the Captain's cabin. This didn't have much effect on the fire but it was good for the effect it had on the crew. The physical exertion helped dispell a feeling of helplessness and anger at not being able to strike back, which everyone seemed to feel. Its effect in general was calming. After a few minutes pressure was regained. The torpedo had ruptured the firemain aft and the damage control party eventually closed the stop in the Engineer's compartment. Then all hoses had to be led from risers forward of amidships. Four hoses were led to the scene of the fire but their effect on the fire was negligible. As before, attempts were made to extinguish the immediate fires in the Captain's and Admiral's cabins and ward-room to clear the way towards the main fire. All efforts to bring the fire under control were unsuccessful. During this period the chief gunner's mate, Herrera, P., CGM(PA), U.S. Navy, reported to me that he thought that the after magazines had been flooded, which I relayed to the Captain. I think he also reported this in person. I then heard the Captain order the forward magazine sprinkling system turned on to counter flood and correct the list. The chief carpenter's mate, Roy, G.A., CGM(AA), U.S. Navy, later reported to me that he and Herrera had done this. He then said that Herrera had gone down the 1st. ammunition elevator to the magazine to check the sprinkling valves and had then reported them as opened. The fact that counter flooding was not actually accomplished was probably due to the fact that there was insufficient water pressure because of the number of fire hoses in use and insufficient time to have flooded with the sprinkling system.

Back on the bridge I saw that we had steering control and were then steadied down on a northwesterly course. The starboard engine was out and we seemed to be making about eight knots good with the port engine. The U.S.S. SPRY then attempted to come alongside close enough to bring her fire streams into action but they were too weak to reach us. By this time the ammunition in No. 4 gun room was exploding at intervals so they drew off. The injured on board who had been treated, were by now placed in the

starboard, No. 1, motor launch and it was decided to stop and lower all boats in case we had to abandon ship. This was accomplished very smartly and we got underway again. The ship was now well down by the stern and listing heavily to starboard. The main deck on the starboard quarter was awash.

The gunnery officer had left the bridge and with the help of some men was removing ammunition from No. 3 gun shelter and throwing it overboard. The Captain ordered me to determine from chart and by eye where to beach the ship. We were by then nearly due south of a small beach about a quarter of a mile east of Piscadero Pt. and about two and a half miles west of the entrance of Willemstad harbor. Fortunately this was about the nearest point to land as well as being one of the few places along this coast where beaching could be accomplished, as the bottom falls away very steeply and there are a series of reefs jutting perpendicularly out. These cannot be seen from very far out. When we were about 500 yards off shore, we came left slightly and then ran in between reefs on to the beach at slow speed. The ship beached about 100 yards off shore, very gently, with the after end still afloat. Upon beaching the ship righted itself to an even keel.

The Captain immediately ordered all hands to proceed with the fire fighting. Unfortunately oil from the ruptured tank immediately began to spread around the ship on the starboard side and in a few seconds the flames were licking over this side, aided by the wind, as far forward as the bridge and had set fire to the side and the gig on the plane deck. It appeared that the flaming oil would completely surround the ship and would cut off all means of escape. The fire on board had by now spread so that most of the after superstructure was burning and the ammunition in the after guns ready rooms was exploding continuously. I ordered Byzet, P.J., QMC, to gather together the logs which he did. He was later able to land them in a raft. The order to abandon ship on the port side was given. All hands had previously donned life jackets. The abandon ship order was executed calmly and unhurriedly in spite of the threat of the burning oil. I watched the men going over the side for a few minutes. Many took off their shoes before jumping. Several lines were lowered over the side down which some men slid. This proceeded in an orderly fashion. There was little excitement. There were many incidents of men helping each other, but no one had any real difficulty in reaching shore. Quite a few were painfully cut about the feet and hands from contact with sea urchins and coral on the beach. I threw over a line near the port bow, slid down it, and swam ashore. The Captain, Lieutenant Commander Lowndes and a few men were still on board.

5. Conduct of the Crew:

In general the performance of the crew was splendid. There was no hesitancy on the part of anyone in proceeding to his station or in carrying out subsequent orders. Those men who had

duties to perform under conditions of danger from fire and the explosions of six-inch and 1.1 inch ammunition, did so without hesitation and with disregard to their own personal safety. When the ship was grounded the engineer force remained calmly at their stations until ordered to abandon ship.

I wish to particularly mention the loyalty and devotion to duty displayed by the following men who came under my notice:

- (1) ROY, George Albert, 212 31 40, CCM(AA), U.S.Navy.
- (2) SCHILLER, Richard Louis, 291 39 25, OMM(AA), U.S.Navy.
- (3) DICKERSON, William J. 274 44 07, SP1c, U.S.Navy.

These men were in charge of, or members of the damage control party which closed off the after part of the ship and thus prevented the immediate spread of fire on the second deck. Later they participated in the fire fighting in the most dangerous area, and in general took charge.

The First Lieutenant was injured and forced to jump overboard and was later recovered.

- (4) AMATO, Louis I., 100 89 64, CPM(PA), FR

This man, after releasing life buoys, aided in fighting the fire and also helped in the treatment and embarkation of the injured requiring first aid. He seemed to be all over the ship at the same time and was responsible for much that was accomplished.

- (5) HERRERA, Pete, 371 70 03, OGM(AA), U.S.Navy.

This man helped the damage control party securing below decks and later, after carrying out orders to cut in the magazine sprinkling systems, was seen to go down a powder or ammunition hoist to check on this system.

- (6) HILTON, Joseph Karns, 311 27 19, Ptrlc, U.S.Navy.

This man, as a member of the damage control party, went below and released the CO₂ fire extinguishers to the paint locker before abandoning ship.

- (7) DUFFIELD, Harold E., 402 04 27, CQM(PA), U.S.Navy.

This man took the helm and did an excellent job of steering during the subsequent maneuvering and beaching of the ship.

- (8) HOLLEY, Horace C., 268 34 33, Ylc, U.S.Navy.

This man was a phone talker on the bridge. His calmness and ability to maintain interior communications during the action was of great help in maintaining proper ship control.

(9) The Engineer's Force as a Whole:

The individual names of those other than those in charge is not known by me due to their having been transferred before this information could be obtained:

DUFVA, Frank S., 380 71 22, CMM(AA), U.S. Navy
In charge of engine room
TRIBBLE, Henry R., 265 56 45, CWT(AA), U.S. Navy
In charge of fireroom
DANCS, Lewis J., 243 47 53, OMM(AA), U.S. Navy
In charge of pump room and generators.

All orders to the engine room were carried out efficiently. The second boiler was cut in upon the initiative of the man in charge. Main electrical power was lost when the torpedo hit but power was quickly regained in spite of the fact that the generator room soon filled with smoke which seeped in from the fire aft through the damaged starboard shaft alley. In summation; the whole Engineering Department gave a markedly loyal and superior performance of duty worthy of special mention. The Engineer Officer was lost in the original explosion.

There were undoubtedly other men whose conduct was praiseworthy whom I did not observe, but the situation was not one which called for heroism. It is perhaps sufficient to say that every man did what was expected of him.

(10) Officers

The conduct and performance of duty of all of the officers was excellent and in keeping with the traditions of the service."