

CARIBSEAFRONT

U.S.S. ERIE

942
216-3

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

From: Commanding Officer.
To : The Secretary of the Navy.
Via : Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier.

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

Reference: (a) U.S.N.R. 1920, Article 841(3).

Enclosure: (A) Diagram 1 - Escort and Convoy Formation.
Diagram 2 - The Torpedo Hit.
(B) Diagrams 3 and 4 - Areas of Immediate Damage.
(C) Damage by Subsequent Fire.
(D) Statements of Lieutenant Commanders D.J.
Sweeney, D.L. Roscoe, Jr., T.P. Lowndes,
and Ensign D.H. Madsen.
(E) Letter of Captain G.M. Rayne.
(F) Extracts from Quartermasters' Notebook.

1. Subject report is submitted herewith.

A. General:

1. At 1733 plus 3 1/2 zone time (2103 G.C.T.) on November 12, 1942, the U.S.S. ERIE while acting as a convoy escort was torpedoed by an enemy submarine off Willemstad, Curacao, N.W.I., in Latitude 12-05 North; Longitude 68-55 West. There was one torpedo hit on the starboard quarter abreast Number four six-inch gun mount, at about frame number 126. The torpedo explosion was followed, after an interval of a few seconds, by another explosion of considerable intensity in the same part of the ship. The second explosion is believed to have resulted from the rupturing of aviation gasoline stowage tanks below the protective deck.

2. The ship's hull was ruptured below the waterline for a horizontal distance of about forty-five feet. The break extended from about five feet from the keel to an opening of about twenty-four feet at the main deck line. The main deck was ruptured about the same distance fore and aft and nearly across the ship. The after six-inch gun platform and ready ammunition room were badly ruptured. On the second deck all bulkheads and partition bulkheads were ruptured for a fore and aft distance of about sixty-eight feet. This included the wardroom and wardroom stateroom country which immediately became flooded with fuel oil, diesel oil, and high octane gasoline from about six or seven ruptured tanks.

49504

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

3. Immediately following the explosions an intense fuel oil, and gasoline fire enveloped the after end of the ship. It extended from side to side on the main deck including the Admiral's Cabin and after six-inch ready ammunition room where the six-inch charges soon began to explode. It did not reach the stern of the ship where the twenty-five depth charges were stored. On the second deck the fuel oil and gasoline spread throughout the wardroom and wardroom country and the fire spread to this entire area. (See Enclosure (B) Diagrams 3 and 4).

4. The starboard propellor shaft had been broken, but the port engine functioned properly, and steering control was maintained. The ship commenced listing gradually to starboard, and settling by the stern.

5. All available and usable fire fighting equipment was brought to bear upon the fire. Loss of pressure on the fire system due to a ruptured main was corrected by cutting out the after group.

6. The ship was held for a time on a course across wind in an attempt to minimize the spreading of the flames either forward to the ready ammunition rooms or aft to the area of the depth charge racks. The ship continued to list heavily to starboard and the settling by the stern increased. To prevent sinking the ship was beached at a point on the coast of Curacao about two miles North West of Willemstad. A local tug Parmo, in an attempt to assist in fighting the fire, became stranded to the South Eastward of the ERIE and at a distance beyond reach of her hoses.

7. Three minutes after beaching the fuel from the ruptured tanks had encircled the ship with the exception of a small area on the port bow which was down wind. The wind was East South East. The flames from the oil fire moved rapidly forward and spread the fire to the ship's structure. When the flames reached the ship's bridge the order was given to abandon ship.

8. Upon reaching the beach the Commanding Officer was met by the Commander All Forces Aruba-Curacao who informed him that there was no further suitable fire fighting equipment within the area.

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

B. Surface Escort and Plane Coverage:

1. The escort group of this particular convoy was the strongest that the Commanding Officer of the ERIE as Escort Commander had ever been associated with in the Caribbean Area. Up to the time of the joining of a subsidiary convoy off Willemstad, Curacao, there had been seven vessels with sound gear. Three of these vessels had radar. At this junction the escort was being increased by three more vessels for the night run through the critical area north of Aruba-Curacao. Two of these added escorts were to continue with the convoy to its destination. At the time of the torpedoing there were eight escorts in their assigned sectors about the convoy. Four other escorts were operating in the near vicinity. (See Enclosure (A), Diagram 1.)

2. Full air coverage, day and night, had been assigned to the convoy from departure to a point 150 miles beyond the Aruba-Curacao area. All of these planes were equipped with radar. Three submarine contacts, by the air escorts, had been reported in the vicinity of the convoy since departing Trinidad. The day before arrival Curacao a fourth report, that of a large submarine, was plotted, and indicated that the submarine was in a position within about 9 miles of the scheduled convoy route for the night. The Escort Commander had diverted the convoy to a route South of Island Los Roques and Bonaire Islands and rejoined the original route South of Curacao. A proposal had been made to the Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier to again divert the convoy, after joining of the subsidiaries off Willemstad, to a course South of Aruba. The area of the convoy routes North of Curacao and Aruba was, during this particular period, and as a result of recent submarine reports, considered by the Escort Commander to be one of the most dangerous areas.

3. All escorts were informed as to the particular submarine activity in the area during this period.

C. Sound Search and Sound Conditions:

1. Escorts were assigned arcs of sound search of about 120° each. The order assigning arcs of search by relative bearings is not available. With the number of escorts present there was a considerable overlapping of sound search by adjacent escorts when patrolling near the boundaries of their sectors.

20

U.S.S. ERIE

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1944

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

2. With former convoys it had been the doctrine to echo range during daylight and on moonlight nights, and listen during darkness. With this convoy, echo ranging had been ordered for all escorts throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. The sound range-of-the-day at the time of the torpedoing is not known with accuracy. Sound conditions off Curacao are reported to be poor at times. The sound range had been reported by the operator the evening before as about 2700 yards. At sometime in the morning South of Curacao a range of 1800 yards was obtained. Little reliance is placed on these figures as a range at which the presence of a submarine could be detected. Sound range-of-the-day taken from a vessel in the convoy or an escort of known bearing may lead to false conclusions. Under varying sound conditions ranges were sometimes not obtainable on the convoy vessels or other escorts while on assigned station.

3. Just where the submarine passed through the sound screen cannot be determined. There had been no breaks in the screen or wide distances between escort vessels as sometimes occurs when joining up subsidiary convoys.

D. The Torpedoing:

1. The ship was patrolling station at about 14.7 knots speed in the sector about 4000 to 5000 yards ahead of the convoy. A break was noted in the surface of the water about 1000 to 1500 yards on the starboard beam. The Officer-of-the-Deck's estimate was 2000 yards. It appeared as though it might have been made by two fish moving approximately parallel to the ship, though the spray thrown up and the action in the water appeared more violent. It was commented that it might be the porpoising of two torpedoes, and if so there was a submarine inside the screen. The Commanding Officer gave the order to "come right" to investigate and started from the wing of the bridge to give orders regarding the shifting of the sound search to the direction of the possible submarine. Almost immediately the Navigator, Lieutenant Commander Roscoe, now further aft on the same wing of the bridge reported that there appeared to be a torpedo on the quarter (starboard) and advised coming left. At a glance it was evident that a second pair of torpedoes was approaching from the starboard quarter. The order for "hard left rudder" was given followed by the order "full speed." The Officer

U.S.S. ERIE

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

of the Deck sounded the siren for collision. The starboard rudder had probably not taken effect at the time the order for full left rudder was given. Reports of the torpedoes came in from lookouts, signalmen, and gun crews.

2. It is estimated that the torpedo which hit the ERIE was about 500 to 700 yards away when first sighted. The Navigator's estimate was 1000 yards. It was porpoising when sighted and then running very shallow. It appeared to be about four to six feet below the surface as it approached, and at the time it hit the ship. The head was yellow or copper colored, and the flask and afterbody was heavily coated with grease.

3. From the time it was first sighted, the torpedo seemed to be curving very slowly to the left, the turning radius being much greater than our torpedoes when fired with curved fire. Just before reaching the ship the torpedo course appeared to straighten out, and it hit the starboard quarter at an angle of about 135 degrees relative. The other torpedo of the second pair passed ahead of the ship. (See Enclosure (A), Diagram 2.)

E. Maneuvers After the Torpedo Hit:

1. For a few seconds the ship lost steering control due to loss of electric power. This was soon regained by the automatic functioning of the auxiliary diesel generator. Steering by auxiliary power was an alteration performed at a recent overhaul at the Mechanical Division, Balboa, Canal Zone. The automatic relays in the steering engine room had been more recently received and installed by a tender a few days before the torpedoing. Main electric power was soon reestablished by cutting in a generator the switch of which had tripped out by the jar of the explosion. The starboard engine was inoperative due to the shaft being broken, but the port engine was still in use. The second boiler was reported cut in on the line after eleven minutes. The ship was put on a course about 040 degrees.

U.S.S. ERIE

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

2. After initially heeling to port by the force of the impact, the ship gradually listed to starboard. The starboard list appeared to be continually increasing and the stern gradually settling.

3. The boats were launched except the motor boat in the skids which could not be released because of the list. The wounded were sent off to the shore in one boat. The other boats followed the ship. The plane could not be hoisted out because of the list and burning of the after guy of the plane boom. The Commanding Officer ordered that it be not jettisoned.

4. It was realized that the fire area was very close to the after magazine group, but no information was then obtainable as to whether or not the after magazines had been flooded. Voluntary flooding was not possible because of the extent of the damaged area.

5. It appeared that if the ship could be beached to prevent sinking, and the fire overcome, either with or without outside help, the damage would be kept at a minimum.

6. The charts of the Curacao area showed deep water up to the Island and the probability that the bottom was steep to at the shore line. A hurried consultation with the Navigator, and a glance at the chart showed little choice in location for beaching. A course was selected which took the ship to about the nearest point on the shoreline, but which was well clear of the harbor of Willemstad, and sufficiently distant from a small settlement or cluster of houses in the opposite direction.

7. As the ship approached the beach one small vessel with local knowledge gave information that proper beaching on that side of the island was impossible. Another suggested that the ship follow him, and indicated a bay several miles to the northwestward.

8. The engine (port) had been stopped as the ship approached the shore, but was given another ahead bell as the Navigator and others on the bridge believed the ship would founder before grounding. The list had increased to about fifteen degrees and the starboard quarter was under water forward to the wardroom skylight at about frame 104.

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

9. At this moment a patch of light colored water indicated a shelf ahead and about a twenty degree change of course to port was necessary. The ship beached very gently with port engine backing full speed. The only indication of beaching was a correction of list and trim of the vessel.

10. The location of the beaching of the vessel was most fortunate. It is apparently about the only shelf along the southwest coastline of Curacao where a ship of three hundred foot length can be successfully beached.

F. Area Damaged by the Explosions:

1. The damaged area of the hull was about centered at the point of impact of the torpedo, at frame 126, and about five feet below the water line. (See Enclosure (B), Diagrams 3 and 4.) It extended from five feet from the keel, starboard, to the main deck, and across the main deck as shown in the diagrams. Number 4 six-inch gun sagged with the explosion, and further sagging occurred later with the weakening and distortion of the supporting structure by fire. The ready service ammunition room was badly buckled, the starboard door blown off, and the port door blown open, but there was no rupture in the STS plating. The weld at the seam, between this plate and the side plating opened up in the area of the Admiral's Stateroom. The blast shield under number 3 six-inch gun was blown upward. Part of it was carried away entirely.

2. On the second deck, compartments D-202-1L, 203-L and 205-1L were practically demolished. This was the wardroom, and officers' stateroom country. Most of the partition bulkheads in this area were blown out. Bulkheads and doors 2-107 and 2-99 were warped and buckled. The compartments hatched in green pencil on Diagrams 3 and 4 were ruptured and flooded. This accounts for the great amount of fuel oil, diesel oil, and gasoline that flooded the ship in the area of the hit. Where the (?) is shown it is not known by actual sighting whether or not the compartment was flooded. Inspection was prevented due to flooded compartments above. The port shaft alley was dry upon beaching, but was flooded when inspected a few days later. It is believed that the after magazines were flooded. This could not be determined in the case of

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

magazines D-402-M, 405-M and 406-M. The fire main in the vicinity of the wardroom was broken and punctured in several places.

3. The shock of explosion transmitted to the bridge broke the chemical recorder, knocked down the chart desk and other gear, and caused the sound gear to become inoperative.

G. The Fire Area and Fire Fighting: (Enclosure (B), Diagrams 3&4)

1. Upon explosion of the torpedo and gasoline tanks, oil and gasoline spread on the second deck from frame 107 to 141, a fore and aft distance of about sixty-eight feet. Fire immediately spread to this entire area. Attempt was made to close the door in bulkhead 99, but it could not be closed properly due to distortion of bulkhead and door. No attempt could be made to close the door in bulkhead 107 because of the flames pouring through. In consequence fire soon spread to compartment D-201-4L, and later to C-204-L due to intense heat on bulkhead 99 and improper closing of the door. These compartments were wardroom stateroom and office country. The escape hatch to this area from C-2, the auxiliary machinery spaces, had been closed immediately to prevent spread of fire to these spaces.

2. Flames from the oil and gasoline fires poured through the entire rupture in the main deck structure. The fire entered the badly ruptured number four ready ammunition room, and into the Admiral's Stateroom through a seam ripped by the explosion. This fire caused heat which soon exploded six-inch charges and projectiles. They exploded singly throughout most of the fire fighting operations. Fire hoses had been led out from plugs forward of the Captain's Stateroom and abreast the galley.

3. All available CO₂ extinguishers were brought aft and used in connection with the fire at the rupture in the main deck, but proved entirely inadequate and practically useless for a fire of this magnitude. Pressure was temporarily lost on the fire main at the time of the initial explosion, due to the ruptures in the fire main in the damaged area. The electrical pumps had become inoperative because of the tripping of the circuit breakers in the main power system.

U.S.S. ERIE

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

There was a period of 3 or 4 minutes before the cut-out valve in the fire main was closed and before pressure was restored. At no time was there more than from 30 to 35 pounds pressure at the hose nozzles used. Only two hoses were in use from the fire main. Later a garden type hose was hooked up to the fresh water spigot in the galley and led aft and used in the cabin areas. Nothing much could be accomplished at the heart of the fire because of the heat and inadequate pressure on the two fire hoses. An attempt was being made to keep the fire from spreading forward on both sides of the cabin deckhouse.

4. Two of the four fog nozzles recently received on board were brought to the scene of the fire, but were not connected to the hoses. Previous tests had indicated that a greater pressure was necessary for their operation. Instructions had not yet been received on the required pressures and correct use of these nozzles, but it was found later that they were a type requiring a much higher pressure, about 80 pounds, for proper functioning. All blowers were secured except those necessary in the machinery spaces. Smoke was being drawn into the engine room by the blower in use. In an attempt to increase the pressure on the fire main, the ice machine circulating water, and flushing water were secured. One small stream in a trough in the crew's head was missed and discovered later.

5. Hoses were led out forward to the peak tank for counter-flooding to correct list and trim. This was abandoned because of the inadequate pressure, so much needed at the fire. Bucket brigades were formed from unemployed men of gun crews, and water was carried to the scene of fire from fresh water supply in the galley and from over the side.

H. Fire Pump and Fire Main Pressures:

1. When the torpedo hit the two electrical 2 1/2 inch fire and flushing pumps were operating on the fire main. It was noted at the main board that pressure had dropped to zero, and word was sent to the repair party. It was necessary to secure the fire main cut-out valve at frame 99. This cut out the whole after section of the fire main. In the meantime cooling water to the ice machines, and flushing systems were cut out. The pressure immediately rose at the board to 15 pounds.

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

2. The fireroom fire and bilge pump had been started at the time of the explosion. This pump was speeded up to maximum capacity.

3. During the short period that the auxiliary diesel generator was furnishing emergency power two men went down in the dark and smoke to tighten up on the starboard shaft glands which were leaking badly. They put the fire and bilge pump, located in the auxiliary machinery spaces, on the bilges in those spaces. This pump which was soon shifted to the fire main increased the pressure to about 40 pounds at the main board. This was the highest pressure obtained, and was maintained at this level throughout the remainder of the fire fighting period.

4. The fifth, and only other pump in the fire main system of the ship, a three-inch electrical pump, had been overhauled recently at Balboa, but the shaft had been out of line preventing proper functioning. A shaft and sleeve had been built by a tender a few days before, during a visit to Trinidad, but the sleeve was not satisfactory. A sleeve had been completed that day by the ship's force, but had not been installed. Even with the added pressure on the fire main, with this pump in operation, it is doubted if much more could have been accomplished with respect to the oil and gasoline fire.

I. The Ammunition:

1. Twenty rounds of six-inch service ammunition was carried in each ready service ammunition room or gun shelter. In addition 50 rounds of illuminating projectiles were distributed among the ready service rooms of the four six-inch guns. The 1 1/2 AA service ammunition was clipped and stowed in ready service rooms to the capacity of racks provided. 20 mm Ammunition was clipped and stowed in ready service boxes and clipping rooms in racks recently installed. Twenty-nine depth charges were stored in racks at the stern. There were no depth charge throwers installed. Two aircraft bombs and two aircraft depth charges were in ready storage on the plane deck. All other ammunition, except the small arms of different types available for immediate use, was stored in the magazines.

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report on the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

2. The shock of the torpedo explosion forced four depth charges overboard. One of these was a ready charge with depth setting for 100 feet, and was forced through the releasing gear of the starboard rack without the function of that gear. The other charges forced overboard were on the safety setting.

3. The explosion had ruptured the after section of the fire main which had to be cut out at frame 99. This cut off all sprinkler systems to the after magazines and after ready service stowage rooms. It is not known whether or not the after magazines were flooded from ruptured bulkheads. The flooding valve controls were located in the area destroyed by the explosions. As the ship listed heavily and settled aft, the order was given to flood the forward magazine groups. This was attempted more as a counter-flooding measure to correct the trim and keep the ship afloat than for the safety of the magazines. When considered later it was realized that very little flooding could be accomplished in the time available, due to the slow rate of flow into the magazines, even under full fire main pressure with no other demands on the system. The Chief Gunner's Mate operated the electrical flood controls and then went down the 1V1 AA elevator to check the operation of the system. He reported to the bridge that flooding had started, but subsequent inspection showed this report to be in error as the flood valves had not functioned.

4. The after six-inch ready service ammunition room which had been badly opened up, including the blowing out of the doors, was in the center of the fire area. Within a few minutes the powder charges heated sufficiently and commenced exploding. It was estimated that the explosion of projectiles commenced in about twenty minutes.

5. When it was learned from reports that all officers connected with damage control, engineering, and deck divisions, including the Executive Officer, were overboard or had been lost, the Gunnery Officer, Lieutenant Johansson, was sent aft to take charge. With men available from the damage control and aviation groups, and engineers without present battle stations he removed the six-inch charges from number three six-inch ready service ammunition room. This room was about

//

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report on the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

25 feet forward of the exploding charges and projectiles and directly above the cabin country which was burning heavily in spite of the fire fighting measures being taken in that particular area. The powder cans were so hot that they could not be passed through the scuttle hand to hand, but were shoved through and dropped to the deck. When it was reported that the ammunition was out of this ready service ammunition room the Commanding Officer ordered that the jettisoning of ammunition be discontinued for the present. The ship was approaching the beach. The ready ammunition in other groups had not been damaged by heat and it was felt undesirable to deposit ammunition on the bottom as the water shoaled up to the beaching depth. This was in mind particularly with respect to the two ready service depth charges for the plane. It was hoped that the fire could be brought under control, and was intended, that if necessary the remaining ready ammunition be thrown overboard after beaching where it could be later recovered.

J. Subsequent Damage by Fire:

1. Enclosure (C) lists the damage, mostly by fire, and received after the ship had to be abandoned. The burned area extended forward to frame 15 and aft to frame 141, and in general from the second deck up through the superstructure.

2. On the platform deck minor damage was found caused chiefly from heat transmitted through the deck above. Compartment A-305-1LA and 2LA was burned by fire that reached the compartment through holes made by exploding projectiles.

3. Fire did not enter the boiler room, main and auxiliary machinery spaces, or magazines, compartments and holds below the protective deck.

4. The main deck and all compartments in the superstructure above were badly burned.

5. Three six-inch guns, all 1v1 AA and three 20 mm guns were left in good condition except for damage to instruments, wiring, etc. The main battery director and radar antennae were apparently little damaged. The 36" searchlight was salvageable.

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

6. The boilers, main and auxiliary machinery, fresh water pumps, gyro and I.C. room equipment, and anchor windlass could all be placed in operation. The steering engine, after deck winch and ice machines were salvageable.

7. The decks which had been covered with linoleum were badly warped. The aluminum lockers throughout the burned area, containing clothing and other inflamables had been largely consumed by the fire. Bulkheads in the burned area were warped and distorted. Decks and bulkheads in the vicinity of the ready ammunition rooms were riddled with holes from the exploding projectiles. A large damaged area resulted from the explosion of ready service airplane bombs and depth charges.

8. There were no ruptures in any of the STS plating of the ready ammunition rooms. Small indentations were caused by projectile explosions within, but even at number four ready service room, where one of the sides was bulged inwards, the plating remained generally intact. The STS doors were blown open, breaking and bending the dogs, but the door plating remained true and little damage was noted.

9. As noted from reports of fire damage to other vessels, fire entered many compartments tightly dogged, transmitted through the bulkhead by heat of burning paintwork. All rubber gaskets in the burned area were melted or burned out.

10. Inspection of the damage to the ERIE confirms all former reports of the fire hazard presented by both interior and exterior paintwork, particularly when coupled with the ever present danger of fuel oil and gasoline fire. The hazard is great even when the paint is considered only thick enough for normal preservation. The best directive available regarding the reduction of fire hazard, particularly with respect to paint, was a despatch by Commander Cruisers Pacific, transmitted by the Commander in Chief, Atlantic, in October 1942. Copies of this despatch were kept at all times in the possession of the Commanding Officer and Executive Officer. Steps toward the removal and reduction of paint had been underway for sometime, but the entire elimination of interior paint

U.S.S. ERIE

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

called for in the despatch had not been undertaken up to this time. No paint was being issued whatsoever except for the waterline. A program of paint elimination was commenced, which, although the ship was always operating in submarine areas, permitted the opening up of below deck compartments during daylight under the direct supervision of the Executive Officer. Such a program was effective, but as seen later, was entirely inadequate. With the necessary Condition Watches months would have been required to remove all paint from interior spaces.

11. The ERIE had been only six years in commission and the paint in interior spaces was not heavy, comparatively speaking. With vessels operating in areas where damage from torpedo, or other hits is possible, a schedule of paint removal during operations and upkeep periods is not adequate. Steps toward immediate paint elimination should be taken.

12. The plane carried on board had proved of great usefulness during former operations in connection with advanced bases, patrol, and other operations in the Pacific. During the recent escort operations in the Caribbean the plane had been always available, weather permitting, for the morning and evening sweeps about the convoy in areas where air coverage by shore based planes was not present. With the present, and increasing facilities for air coverage of convoys by shore based planes, planes should not be carried, because of the fuel hazard involved, by vessels on anti-submarine escort duty in Sea Frontiers.

K. Attack on ERIE Appears to Have Been Planned:

1. For several reasons the attack on the ERIE instead of the convoy appeared to be a planned attack. From the several known contacts with submarines since departing Trinidad the enemy may have obtained information of the composition of convoy and escort, its speed, and probable general routing.

2. The submarine that torpedoed the ERIE was entirely inside the sound screen, and was between the ERIE and the convoy. He was in excellent position for attack on a valuable sixteen ship, eight knot convoy. He apparently fired four torpedoes, all at the ERIE. A reported fifth torpedo passing

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

just astern of the vessel has not been confirmed. A subsidiary convoy with much weaker escort had been in the same general area about a half hour earlier.

3. A few hours after darkness on the night of the torpedoing a Berlin radio station, with characteristic Nazi exaggeration announced that the thirteen thousand ton cruiser, ERIE, had been torpedoed and sunk off Curacao, with loss of two thousand lives.

L. Uniform in Areas Where Attack May be Expected:

1. The uniform on the ERIE at sea had been established as dungarees for the enlisted men and khaki for officers, chief petty officers and marines. Shirt sleeves were required to be long and undershirts without outer shirts were not permitted, even though always operating in tropical waters. Dungarees and khaki had proved to be the only proper camouflage uniform available. The tropical uniform of khaki material had been permitted, and even considered with favor because of its exposure of the arms and legs to the sun. Some thought had been given to the dangers from flash burns of arms and legs with the tropical uniform, as against the advantages of exposure to the rays of the sun. It was evident that the uniform of ordinary wear must be the uniform in which an officer or man would reach his battle station.

2. The Commanding Officer had encouraged exercise for officers and men in abbreviated costume, that is, with upper body and legs exposed as a benefit, not only from the exercise, but from the exposure to the sun. Consideration had been given to the desirability of having a well sun tanned body in case of being adrift in a life raft or life boat for a period of hours or days.

3. In treating casualties from the ERIE, especially for flash burns, the medical officer in charge of the Army Hospital particularly commented upon the fast recovery of officers and men, and attributed it, in part, to their excellent physical condition. Fortunately at the time of the explosion of the torpedo only one officer and no men in abbreviated clothing were subjected to the flash. A mess attendant about forty-five feet from the point of impact was changing his outer shirt in preparation for serving the evening meal. The

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

area of his body protected by his undershirt was unhurt. His arms, neck and face were quite severely burned.

4. As a result of these observations, and in consideration of the situation which would have been created if a torpedo had hit a vessel of this size at other hours of the day or night, and in other locations, it is believed that:

(a) The practice of sun bathing, so usual on vessels in tropical areas should not be permitted at sea.

(b) Physical exercise is essential to well being, and must be continued and encouraged. The exposure of arms, legs and upper part of the body during such exercise is not safe. The body should be fully clothed, but with the lightest available covering during exercise periods, even in tropical waters.

(c) Sleeping with parts of the body exposed when an unexpected torpedo or bomb hit may be received is subjecting oneself to the danger of serious flash burns. The best solution appears to be in pulling a light sheet well over the body whether sleeping on topside or in below compartments. The natural weathering of face, neck and hands appears to build up some resistance to burns.

(d) On small ships and where weather conditions permit, both officers and men should be encouraged to sleep topside, and this berthing should be permitted over as wide an area of decks and upper works as possible. Concentrations of men at anytime except at battle stations must be avoided.

M. Casualties:

1. Six officers were killed. One enlisted man, a mess attendant, died the day after the torpedoing as a result of burns. One officer and four enlisted men were seriously injured. Two officers and five enlisted men received minor injuries.

2. The reason for the high percentage of casualties among officers was that the torpedo explosion practically destroyed the officers' country and wardroom. The quarter-deck above the wardroom country where several of the officers were taking or had just finished their afternoon exercise was

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

partially destroyed. The remaining casualties seriously injured, were among the mess attendant branch, except two men on watch at the depth charge racks at the stern. There were no further injuries after the initial explosions except of a minor nature.

3. Deaths and serious injuries can be classified generally as follows:

- (a) From the shock of the explosions; five killed and one injured.
- (b) From the flash of the explosions; one killed, one died, five badly burned.

4. It should be noted here that the work of the Force Hospital, U.S. Army Camp Suffisant, Curacao, in treating the injured officers and men of the ERIE was splendid, particularly in the treatment of severe burns. This excellent medical treatment, coupled with the very prompt rescue of injured officers and men in the water by H.M.N.S. VAN KINSBERGEN resulted in saving the lives of many of the injured.

N. Responsibility:

1. The Commanding Officer assumes full responsibility, and was in fact responsible, for all action in connection with the torpedoing of the U.S.S. ERIE. As Escort Commander all escort vessels were stationed and operating in accordance with his orders. He was fully informed as to known enemy submarine positions, and as to the unusual submarine activity on the route of his particular convoy on November 10th, 11th and 12th. He was on the bridge of the ERIE at the time of the first indication of possible enemy presence. All of his orders in connection with the torpedoing and subsequent fire, were carried out with a high degree of loyalty and personal fearlessness.

O. Performance of Officers and Crew:

1. The performance of the Officers and Crew was splendid in every respect. They displayed the highest degree of loyalty and personal fearlessness. With some there was more chance to show this absolute devotion to duty than with others, but each member performed as was expected of him, or initiated action in an effort toward saving the ship.

U.S.S. ERIE

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

2. It was known by all that the damaged and burning area was just aft of, and over the after magazine group. It was not known whether these magazines were flooded, thus the danger from their explosion could not be determined.

3. The six-inch charges and projectiles were exploding in the after ready ammunition room in the burning area, but this did not cause hesitation in fighting the fire as close as the heat would permit, or deter a damage control party including volunteers, from removing the heated powder charges from an adjacent ammunition room. One officer and one man, injured and severely burned, and isolated by fire and intense heat on the stern of the vessel, set the ready depth charges on "safe" before jumping overboard.

4. The performance of the engineering personnel in keeping the plant functioning properly and continuously, when it appeared that further severe explosions might occur or that the vessel might capsize, caused wide spread comment among many who saw the torpedoing including officers of our own and allied navies.

5. With many of the officers lost, the leading Chief Petty Officers took the initiative of action without hesitation or question.

6. The spirit of determination and fearlessness seen by the Commanding Officer in his officers and crew was the same spirit seen on all fronts among all American Forces. It is that spirit which will bring victory to the United Nations.

P. Recommendations:

1. Increase in Fire Fighting Equipment:

(a) The fire fighting installations of the ERIE proved entirely inadequate. A rupture in the fire main in the wardroom required cutting out the entire system aft. A similar rupture in the boiler room or crew's messing compartment would have disrupted the entire system forward. All magazine sprinkling and flooding is eliminated with the fire main in that part of the ship. It is quite apparent that the need for magazine flooding, and for counter-flooding, may occur just at the time when there is a demand for maximum

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

pressure on the system for fire fighting.

(b) As soon as practicable after the beaching a local tug at Willemstad, Curacao, went alongside the ERIE, and quickly smothered the remaining oil fire with foamite. Foamite was fed from a hopper into the stream of the fire hose in the vicinity of the fire plug. Great quantities of foamite were available, packed in thirty pound tin cans.

(c) With respect to vessels not already adequately equipped for handling fire and flooding simultaneously, and particularly for putting out oil and gasoline fires, considerations should be given to the following:

(1) Increase the capacity of pumping installations to such an extent that required pressure will be available for simultaneous fire fighting, sprinkling, and flooding.

(2) Duplication of fire mains and magazine flooding systems.

(3) In addition to the above, auxiliary systems, either diesel or gasoline should be installed, which would, in general, parallel the main system. For these auxiliary installations, additional firemains are not essential. An adequate supply of hoses for inter-connections, and for fire and flooding will be sufficient. For a ship of the size of the ERIE three or four such auxiliary installations are advocated. The one gasoline handy billy on the ERIE was stowed in the area destroyed by the torpedo.

(4) In addition to the fog nozzles now provided, hoppers for foamite might be installed at the fire plugs in the firemain system. With adequate pressure and foamite, the fire on the ERIE could unquestionably have been localized and extinguished.

2. Paint Elimination:

On vessels where it has not already been accomplished, immediate steps should be taken toward paint elimination. At the first possible opportunity, vessels requiring it should be sent into a yard or base, and additional gangs of paint scrapers sent aboard, if necessary. In some cases it will be

U.S.S. ERIE

PG50/A16-3/L11-1
Serial 051

December 9, 1942

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

Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

desirable for part of the crew to be quartered ashore during the paint elimination process.

3. Storage Spaces Ashore:

Each vessel operating in war zones should have an assigned storage space ashore at its base of operations. At this store house should be kept all the supplies, ship's equipment, and gear which are necessary in the upkeep of the vessel, but which are not properly carried on board while at sea.

4. Training in Fire Fighting:

Extend as rapidly as possible the system of training of the already established Navy Fire Fighting Schools.

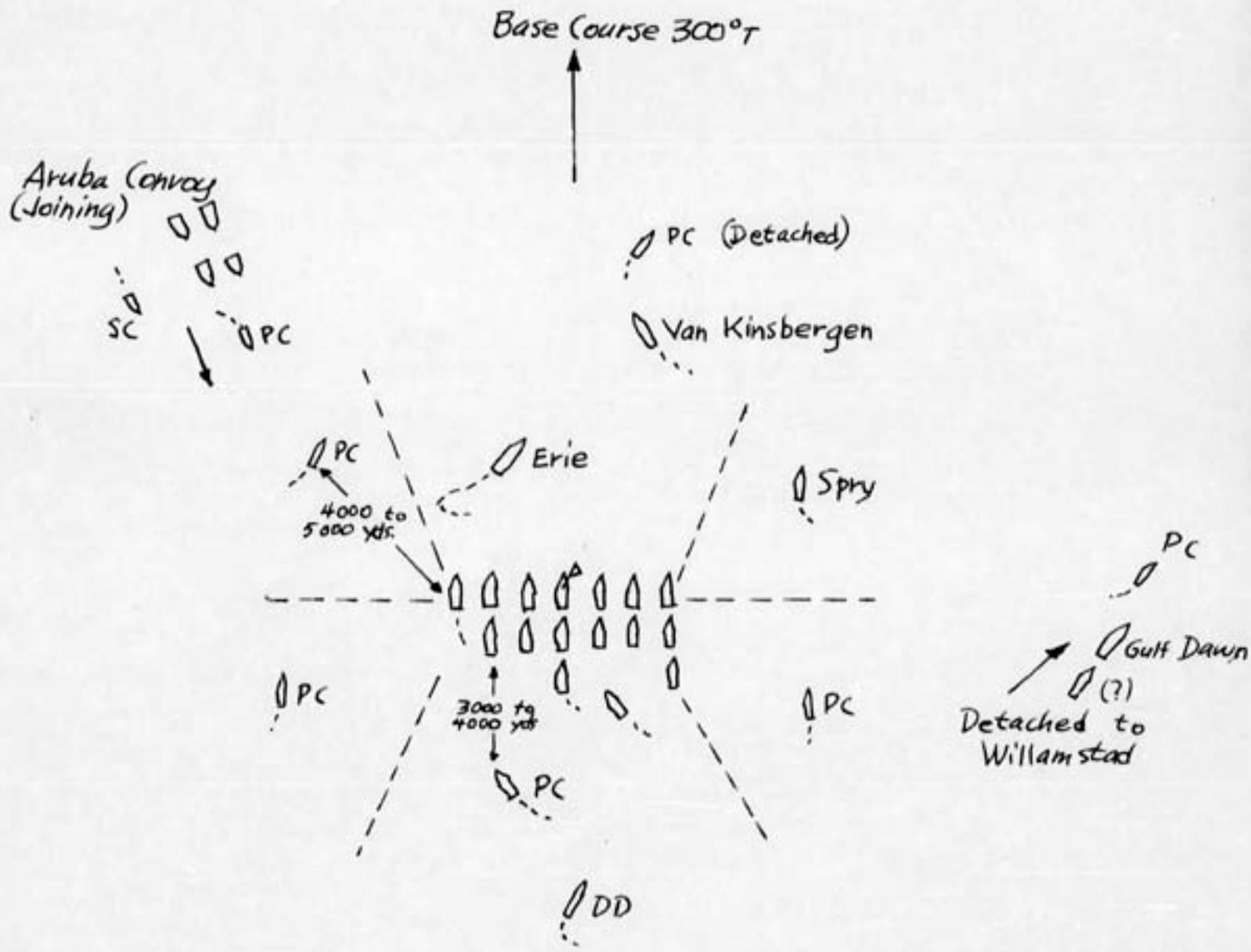
5. Drastic Measures Required:

Protection of the ship against fire resulting from enemy action has proved to be the most important feature of damage control. Nothing short of drastic action, in all matters pertaining to such protection, can be considered acceptable.


A. R. MACK.

Copy to:
SecNav (Advanced Copy)
C.C.S.F.
CAFAC
Com15
File

ENCLOSURE (A) DIAGRAM 1
 ESCORT and CONVOY FORMATION
 Approximate Positions 1733 Queen-Roger November 12, 1942



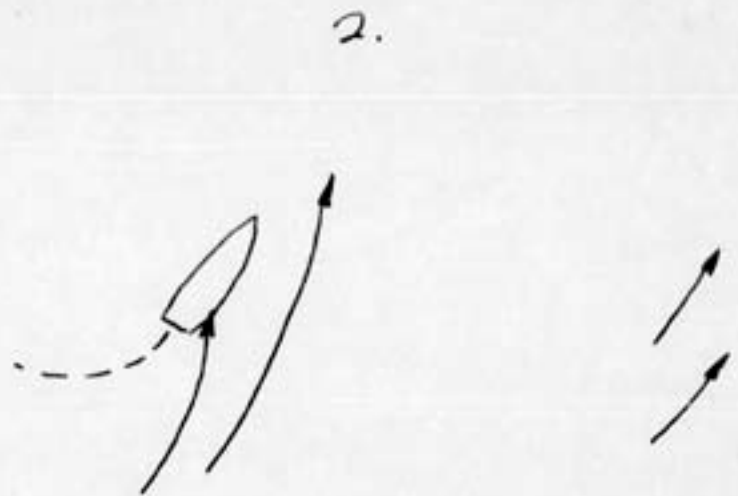
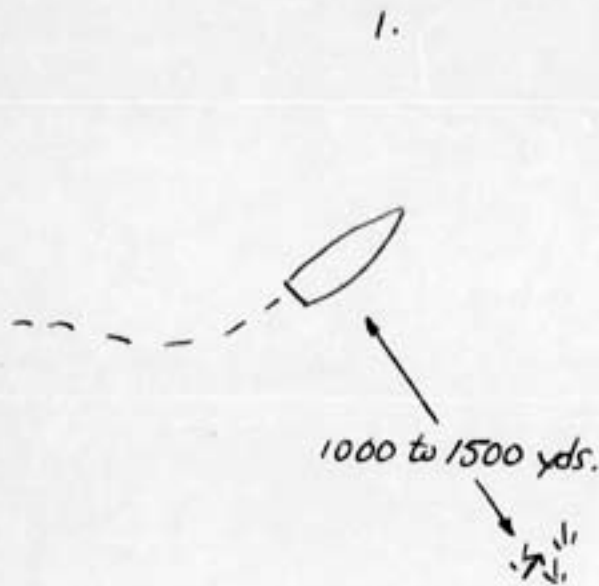
ENCLOSURE (A)
 DIAGRAM 1

ENCLOSURE (A) DIAGRAM 2

THE TORPEDO HIT

Positions of ERIE

1. Spray Sighted.
2. Torpedo Hit.



CONVOY

CONVOY

ENCLOSURE (A)
DIAGRAM 2

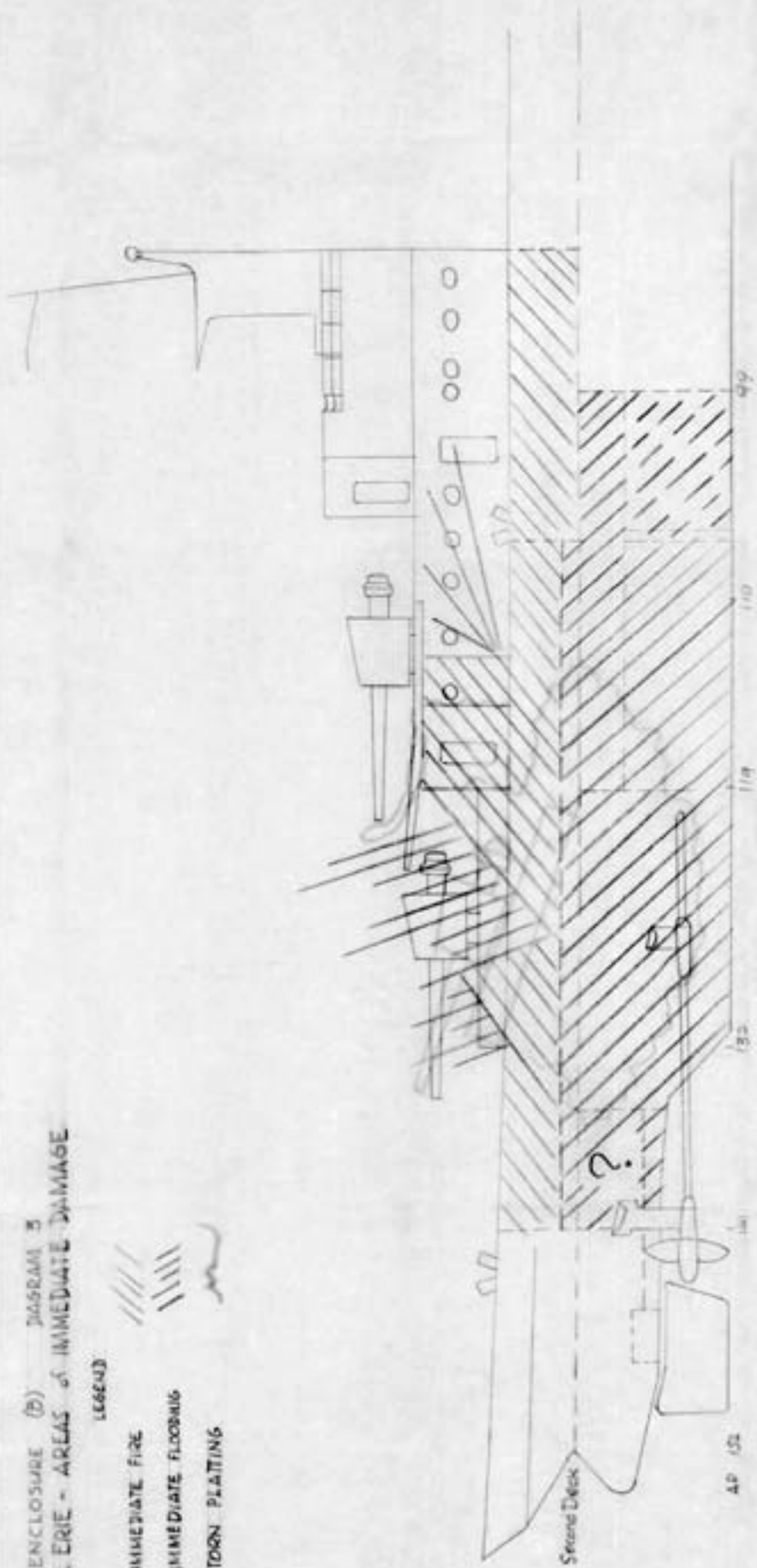
ENCLOSURE (B) DRAWING 3
USS ERIE - AREAS of IMMEDIATE DAMAGE

LEGEND

IMMEDIATE FIRE

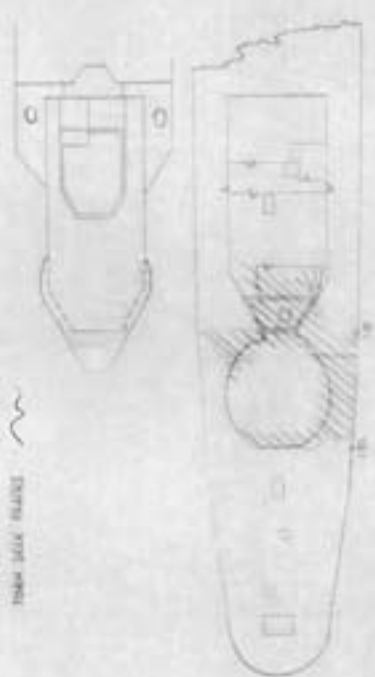
IMMEDIATE FLOODING

TORN PLATING



CASE REPORT / 21. Progress of
 U.S.S. EDG - Areas of Immediate Damage

- LEGEND
 Hatched Area
 Hatched Area
 Zigzag Area
 Wavy Area
 Thick Line Markings



U.S.S. ERIE

ENCLOSURE (C)

SUBSEQUENT DAMAGE BY FIRE

1. Condition of Compartments:

(A) Hold:

A-1-W; A-401-W; A-402-A; A-403-AE; A-420-C (I.C. Room).

Dry and undamaged.

A-404-W:

A-406-W: Fresh Water Tanks.

Shell holes in top.

A-405-W:

A-407-W: Fresh Water Tanks.

Undamaged.

A-2-C: Underwater Sound Room.

Burned. Equipment damaged.

A-408-M: A-414-M:

A-409-M: A-415-M:

A-410-M: A-416-M: Magazines

A-412-M: A-417-M:

A-413-M:

Dry and intact. Subjected to some heat.

A-418-F: A-4-F:

A-419-F: A-5-F: Fuel Oil Tanks.

A-3-F:

Not damaged.

A-6-V: Cofferdam.

Slow leak from forward fuel tank.

B-1: Boiler Room.

C-1: Machinery Space.

C-2: Auxiliary Machinery Space.

Dry, no apparent fire damage.

D-1-W: Reserve Feed Tank.

Slow leak - can be pumped.

U.S.S. ERIE

ENCLOSURE (C)

D-2-W: Reserve Feed Tank.

Dry and intact.

D-5-F to D-12-F:

D-401-M to D-409-A: Area of Explosion.

Condition indicated in Diagrams 3 and 4.

D-410-A:

D-411-A: Store Rooms.

No visual damage - dry.

D-901-V:

D-413-V: Voids.

Believed to be dry. Manhole plates not removed.

(B) Platform Deck:

A-301-E: Chain Locker.

No damage.

A-303-A: Paint Locker.

A-302-T: Trunk.

Dry - no fire damage.

A-304-A: GSK Main Issue Room.

Dry but damaged by fire.

A-305-1LA:

A-305-2LA: Mess Attendants' Compartment.

Damaged by fire and shell fragmentation.

A-307-A: Small Stores.

Severe fire damage.

A-308-1A: Cold Storage and Dry Provisions.

Fire damage - fair condition.

A-309-AE: Ice Machine Room - Store Room.

Partially flooded - minor fire damage. Machinery salvageable.

U.S.S. ERIE

ENCLOSURE (C)

D-302-A: Spare Parts Storage.
D-304-A: Stores.

Flooded - area of explosion.

D-412-E: Steering Engine Room.

Flooded and pumped - little fire damage.
Machinery salvageable.

(C) Second Deck:

A-201-A: Bos'n Stores.

No damage.

A-202-EL: Anchor Windlass Room.

No damage.

A-203-L: Crews' Washroom.

Severe fire damage.

A-204-L; A-205-L; A-206-L; B-201-2LA; C-201-L.

Completely gutted - shell fragmentation.
Removal of structural work required.

C-204-L to D-205-1L: Area of immediate explosion
and fire.

See Diagrams 3 and 4.

D-206-A: Sail Locker.

Some fire damage.

D-208-A: After Hold.

No damage.

(D) Main Deck:

Completely gutted by fire from approximately frame No. 23 aft. Severe shell fragmentation from approximately frame No. 21 to 50. Severe bomb damage from approximately frame No. 63 to 70. Severe shell fragmentation from approximately frame No. 92 to 119. Main deck in area of initial explosion blown out causing No. 4 gun to settle into this area. Number 4 gun has since been removed.

U.S.S. ERIE

ENCLOSURE (C)

(E) Superstructure Deck:

Completely gutted by fire and will require complete renewal. A good deal of shell fragmentation and etc.

(F) Navigational Bridge including Conning Tower:

Completely gutted by fire and will require complete renewal as will all structures above this level. Nothing in this area salvageable.

(G) Foremast and Forward Searchlight Platform:

One leg of tripod blown out. 24" Searchlight badly damaged.

(H) Top of After Deck House:

Damaged by fire. 36" Searchlight salvageable. Boat booms not damaged.

Note:- A set of photographs of the burned areas of the ERIE were taken by Lieutenant E.E. Scanlon of the fire fighting party. Prints are not available, but have been submitted to the Bureau of Ships by Lieutenant Scanlon.

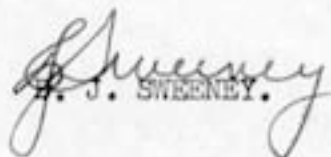
From: Lieutenant Commander D. J. Sweeney, U.S. Navy.
Executive Officer.
To : Commanding Officer.
Subject: Report on Torpedoing and Subsequent Action of U.S.S. ERIE
on November 12, 1942.

1. At the time that the torpedo struck the ship I was in my room having just completed a shower. I was completely disrobed. A heavy explosion was heard and then a sound as of metal tearing. I was knocked down and several lockers fell on me. I was next conscious of water wetting my feet. I had to push several heavy metal objects off of me before I could arise. The lights were out and I could see nothing. I sensed a large opening at a location which I assumed had formerly been the door to my room. I walked through this and after a short distance saw light overhead. I was able to climb over jagged metal and finally over the weather deck life lines onto the main deck. When I arrived on deck I discovered that I was completely covered with fuel oil. The ship was entirely in flames just about abeam and forward of No. 4 gun mount.

2. On the after deck when I arrived were Captain A. W. Levi, U.S.M.C.R., Lt(jg) J. B. Elliott, U.S.N.R., with his right leg practically off just above the ankle, Day, T.W., GM2c who was on depth charge watch, and Enriquez, G., Mattlc. Upon inquiring about the second man of the depth charge watch, Davis, J.P., GM3c, U.S.N., I was informed that he had been blown overboard. These officers and men had all been severely burned or injured. The flames from the fire were blowing back on the fantail as the ship proceeded through the water, and the forward part of the ship was thus blocked off. Men on No. 3 gun platform were attempting to reach us but could not. Ammunition in No. 4 gun shelter was exploding. I then asked Day, T.W., GM2c, U.S.N., to help me set the depth charges on safe and after accomplishing this, we jumped overboard. Three were supported on one life ring, two on another.

3. The ERIE soon steamed away from us. A short time later shells struck the water close to us and depth charge shocks were distinctly felt. After an undetermined length of time in the water the five of us who had jumped from the ship plus Davis, J.P., GM3c, U.S.N. the man who had been on depth charge watch and blown overboard, were picked up by a small boat manned by a Dutch crew. No other officers or men were seen in the water.

4. The report of action on the ship required to be submitted by the Executive Officer is being submitted by Lieutenant Commander D. L. Roscoe, Jr., U.S. Navy, due to my being forced to jump overboard.


D. J. SWEENEY

ENCLOSURE (D)

29

From: Lieutenant Commander D. L. Roscoe, Jr., U.S. Navy,
Navigator.
To : The Commanding Officer.
Subject: Report on Torpedoing and Subsequent Action of U.S.S. ERIE
on 12 November 1942.

1. Due to the fact that the Executive Officer was injured and forced to jump overboard, this report will contain, in considerable detail, an account of what happened in an endeavor to cover those points required in the Executive Officer's report.

2. General Situation:

At about 1730, Zone / 3.5 time, on Thursday, 12 November 1942, the convoy, of which the ERIE was acting as Convoy Escort Commander, was about four miles south of the entrance to the harbor of Willemstad, Curacao, N.W.I. The convoy was on base course 300°T. The ERIE, on station in the anti-submarine screen in the van of the convoy, was at this time about 3500 yards dead ahead of the right center columns of the convoy. The ERIE had recently completed a turn to starboard and was proceeding diagonally across the path of the convoy from a position on the port bow of the convoy towards the starboard bow, and zig-zagging. At the moment the course was about 340°T.

The QCL sound apparatus was in use and search was being made, "Pinging" through a sector from 60° on either side of the base course. The subsidiary convoy from Aruba had recently joined the main convoy and the ships were still in the process of adjusting their positions. The additional escorts had reported for duty and were proceeding to their assigned stations. H.N.M.S. Van Kinsbergen had been ordered to a position in the van and was about 4000 - 5000 yards ahead on our port bow. The Gulf Dawn and another vessel had been detached to proceed into Willemstad and were approaching the entrance to that harbor and were about a mile from it.

The sea was slightly choppy with light swells from S.E. with a light S.E. breeze. The ship was in Condition of Readiness Three and Material Condition Affirm with modifications as approved by the Commanding Officer. The crew's evening meal had been piped down and the majority of those not on watch were in the mess hall.

3. Sequence of Events Preceding Torpedo Hit:

At this time I was standing on the starboard side of the signal bridge of the U.S.S. ERIE conversing with the Captain. I was looking aft towards the starboard quarter. Suddenly bearing about 140° relative, distant about 1000 yards, I saw spry being thrown up by something moving at high speed and breaking the surface. It was moving in the direction of and on a slightly converging course to the ERIE. I raised my binoculars and could then see the green water of the torpedo wake and spray shooting up when the torpedo ran through the troughs of waves. I said, "Captain, that looks to me like a torpedo out there on our quarter. I think we had better come left."

Smith, R.B., SMLc, U.S. Navy, then said he saw it also, and the Captain, after looking, went to the bridge where I heard him order the Officer of the Deck, Lieutenant Johansson, to come right to investigate something in that direction. By this time I could see that the torpedo had turned towards the ship. It appeared to be headed to hit us about amidship from a direction still somewhat abaft the beam. It had by then been seen by the battle lookout who called out "Torpedo! starboard side," I then shouted, "Hard left, Captain." The Captain immediately ordered "Hard left" and the ship commenced swinging left after barely starting the swing to starboard. I watched the torpedo approach. It was running very shallow and I could see the copper colored war head. Just before the torpedo struck I went to the navigation bridge and braced myself against the conning tower for the shock. As I did this I saw what appeared to be the wake of another torpedo crossing our bow from starboard. At about 1733 the ship was swinging to port when the torpedo hit on the starboard quarter just opposite No. 4 six-inch gun. The Officer of the Deck had sounded the siren a few seconds before the torpedo struck and the whistle also was blown as well as the general alarm. The shock also caused the gas alarm to sound. Word was immediately passed to belay the gas alarm as many men started to put on their gas masks in spite of the obvious lack of necessity for them. About ten seconds after the torpedo explosion another explosion was felt. It was of less intensity than the first and was believed to have been the aviation gasoline.

The explosion heeled the ship over to port about fifteen degrees. Some men were knocked down and various things on the bridge were broken and scattered about. The ship then took a list to starboard and a trim down by the stern.

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

31

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 magazines 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 wardroom 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., CCM(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, F.J., QMlc, 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, CCM(AA), U.S. Navy.
- (3) DICKERSON, William J., 274 44 07, SF1c, 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, UGM(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 engineroom
TRIBBLE, Henry R., 265 56 45, CWT(AA), U.S. Navy	In charge of fireroom
DANCS, Lewis J., 243 47 53, CMM(AA), U.S. Navy	In charge of pump room and generators.

All orders to the engineroom 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 but whom I did not observe, but the situation was not one which called for any 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.

(11) Casualties

After the ship was beached a muster was held and it was established that the following officers were missing:

KUNKLE, George Owen	Lieutenant, USNR.	Engineering Officer.
PETERSON, Ernest Carl	Lieutenant, USN.	Pilot.
GREENWOOD, Frank (none)	Lieutenant(jg), USNR.	Asst. Gunnery Officer.
GORSUCH, Gilbert Franklin	Lieutenant(DC), USN.	Dental Officer.
LLOYD, Albert Lincoln	Lieutenant Commander(SC)USNR.	Supply Officer.
WENTZ, Ned James	Lieutenant(SC), USN.	Supply Officer.

The following named officers and men were injured and hospitalized at the Army Hospital, Camp Suffisant, Forces Curacao, Curacao, N.W.I.

SWEENEY, Daniel Joseph	Lieutenant Commander, USN	Executive Officer
ELLIOTT, John Buckingham	Lieutenant(jg), USNR	First Lieutenant
LEVI, Alan Wilder	Captain, USMCR	Commanding Officer Marine Detachment

SHEMA, Francis Joseph, FM1c, USN	ENRIQUEZ, Gavino (none), Mattie, USN
DEL ROSARIO, Francisco, (none), OC1c, USN	LEAGAN, Jack Harvey, F3c, USN.
REBATO, Placido (none), CC2c, USN	CONRAD, Roy Enness, Slc, USN
DAY, Troy William, GM2c, USN	PATE, Stephen Wall, Pfc., USMC
CARINO, Maximo (none), OS2c, USN	HALSEY, John (none), Y2c, USN
DAVIS, Joseph Pinkney, GM3c, USN	PARKER, Willard Charles, F3c, USN.
BRADSHAW, Reuben Bona, Cox., USN	ASH, George Richard, S2c, USNR.

In addition thirty-five men suffered minor injuries and were given medical treatment at the above named Hospital.

D. L. Roscoe, Jr.
D. L. ROSCOE, JR.

From: Lieutenant Commander T. P. Lowndes, U.S. Navy.
To : Commanding Officer, U.S.S. ERIE.
Subject: Statement in Regards to Action on November 12, 1942.

All times are zone plus 3 1/2.

At about 1730 on November 12th, I was in the code room, which is situated directly below the bridge on the port side. The first indication I had of the attack was the word "Torpedo" being passed on deck followed by a tremendous explosion aft in the vicinity of the quarterdeck. A few seconds later when I was on the ladder leading to the signal bridge I heard and felt a second explosion of less intensity than the first. Upon reaching the bridge I looked aft and saw flames and black smoke coming from the vicinity of number four six inch gun. I noticed at this time that the ship was taking a trim down by the stern and listing to starboard. I next went into the pilot house and learned here that the communications to the engine room were out, and also, that the assistant communication officer was in the radio room with a message to send reporting the attack. A few minutes after I came on the bridge I heard the reports that communication to the engine room had been reestablished and that the starboard engine was out of commission; also that steering control had been regained. I asked the sound operators if the QCL was in operative condition and they said no. After verifying this by trying the controls, I told the sound operators to assist fire fighting on the main deck. Later I heard ship of the escort using the voice radio (the loud speaker of this circuit was situated on the bridge). I turned on the transmitter found it apparently working and reported to the Captain. The CPhm reported to me that he had three wounded and would like to get them in the first boat. All boats by this time were lowered to the rail so I told him to put them in the motor launch, which he promptly did. I then tried calling the U.S.S. SPRY in the voice radio set, but got no answer after one call - by this time she was close enough to use a megaphone so I did not call again. About this time I went to the code room and took the bags of registered publications out of the safes tied them up and took them to the bridge and put all secret and confidential matter on the bridge in them. They were then tied up ready for throwing overboard when the order was given. I then noticed that the port engine was going ahead, and the ship was headed toward the beach at about seven knots, and the ship was listing about, 1520 degrees to starboard. An attempt was now made to roll the gig over the side, and thereby decrease the list - This was not accomplished before the ship was beached. At this time there was a doubt as to whether the ship would turn over before she was beached, or another explosion would spread the fire, which was out of control, throughout the ship. Although fire main pressure had been regained the reports from the fire fighting party were that the pressure was low. Every few minutes there was a small explosion in the vicinity of No. 4 gun shelter. Men were attempting to remove powder from No. 3 gun shelter.

ENCLOSURE (D) 36

When I first came upon the bridge the ship was headed across in front of the convoy and was several thousand yards from the convoy. The U.S.S. SPRY was going across our bow to port distant about 2,000 yards and dropped two depth charges. She continued to circle the ERIE and later came close aboard the starboard quarter to use her fire hoses on the fire. However her streams were not long enough to reach the fire. The SS GULF DAWN asked by flashing light if he could be of any assistance and he was asked to move close aboard to starboard (windward) and attempt to put out the fire with his hoses. I saw three men in the water astern of the ship and a raft and life buoy which had been thrown over for them. At one time I saw a raft alongside about frame 100 to port with a man in it whose face was covered with oil so that I could not recognize him.

Shortly before we reached the beach the port engine was stopped and we approached the beach at about 3 knots. The first indication of grounding was a slow smooth righting of the ship and a very smooth, gradual loss of headway. After the ship grounded I saw burning oil coming from the starboard quarter and spread rapidly forward to about amidships where the rapid spread stopped but continued to move slowly forward. At this time the order was given to abandon ship on the port side forward. The talkers were told to pass this word to all stations and to abandon ship. I proceeded to the forecabin and looked over the starboard side and saw that although there was oil on the water almost to the bow the burning had checked amidships.

The conduct of the crew throughout was excellent, and the order to abandon ship was carried out without confusion or undue hurry.

From the time the torpedo struck until the order was given to abandon ship everything was done to get the fire under control and to save the ship if possible. An attempt was made to remove powder and shell from No. 3 gun shelter, the hoses were used to their fullest extent with the reduced pressure, evidently caused by ruptured fire main. A bucket brigade was formed to wet down decks and increase the amount of water at the fire.

J. P. Lowndes
T. P. LOWNDES.

From: Ensign Donald H. Madsen, U.S. Naval Reserve.
To : Commanding Officer, U.S.S. ERIE.
Subject: Torpedoing of U.S.S. ERIE November 12, 1942 - Personal Account of.

As I entered the port side of the pilot house at 1720 ship's time to show the Captain a message that had been decoded, the cry "Torpedo!" came from the lookouts above. The Captain and Officer-of-the-Deck were on the starboard wing of the bridge maneuvering the ship in an attempt to avoid being hit. The Officer-of-the-Deck sounded the siren; I saw a torpedo's spray and wake headed toward the starboard bow as it passed amidships; I braced myself for the anticipated blow. A few seconds later the shock came, not from the torpedo I had seen, but from another that hit the starboard quarter. A second explosion followed, not quite so severe as the first, but which I thought at the time was a second torpedo hit. The general alarm sounded and then stopped due to power failure. When auxiliary power later came on, the general alarm and gas alarm both sounded. Word was quickly passed that the gas alarm should be ignored. Those who had broken out gas masks quickly dropped them.

Looking aft I saw a huge column of black smoke coming from the hole in the side while small flames ate at the main deck near the fantail. Fire fighting parties got to work instantly. With no pressure on the hoses, all available extinguishers were rushed to the fire, but little progress against the fire was made. Fuel oil kept pouring out of the hole, and flames quickly converted it to smoke.

When I left the bridge for my general quarters station, I asked the Captain what message he wanted sent. He said, "ERIE torpedoed off Curacao." In the radio room Gallagher reported no power, but a few minutes later when auxiliary power came on, Gallagher sent the message I gave him: "ERIE torpedoed off Willemstad." This differed from the Captain's instructions only because in the excitement of the moment I could not remember "Curacao," only "Willemstad."

The fire which raged aft soon enveloped number four gun ready room, and from that point in time rounds of ammunition periodically exploded. To prevent further explosions the Gunnery Officer took a party to the ready room of number three gun and removed the powder bags, some of which were thrown overboard.

A bucket brigade was formed on the main deck to help confine the flames aft of the Admiral's cabin, but the increased number of ammunition explosions and the spreading fire hazarded the men and made the work ineffectual.

In the meantime the closest escort vessel, the U.S.S. SPRY, layed down a depth charge barrage, part of which I observed on our starboard side. She later came alongside with streams of water trained on our flaming fuel tank, but this also proved ineffectual and she was ordered away; I also observed the GULF DAWN, a Navy tanker in our convoy that had just been detached, turn from her course toward the harbor as though bent on giving us aid.

She too was ordered away, however, while she was still well over a mile away.

I returned to the bridge and asked Lieutenant Commander Lowndes what he wanted done with the secret and confidential publications in the code room. He said to bring the weighted canvas bags to the bridge, which was soon accomplished with the help of some radiomen. The ECM was disconnected and made ready for throwing overboard. I returned to the bridge and after helping to collect all registered publications in the chart house remained there until ordered to abandon ship.

Good speed was maintained after the initial stop until we beached. The torpedo hit caused temporary severe list to starboard. The ship came back to an almost even keel, but as more and more water poured into the aft compartment, the immediate danger of capsizing became constantly more critical. As we approached the beach we asked a dutch motor torpedo boat that came alongside what spot we should head for. They pointed out Piscadero Bay. We turned left toward it, but did not make it by several hundred yards. As the ship grounded at about a 45 degree angle to the shore, she came up on an even keel and gradually stopped.

"Now," said the Captain, "Let's get everything we've got on that fire!" With the lost motion of the ship the oil that had been flowing in the wake of the ship now spread forward along her sides and the danger of having the entire ship surrounded with burning oil became apparent to all. It was only a few minutes later that "Abandon ship on the port bow" was passed and promptly obeyed. At all times the men showed commendable behavior. After the initial excitement had died down all hands were extremely calm and hard working. Their orderliness and freedom from any type of hysteria was especially noticeable on the beach as they mustered by divisions and accounted for those not present. Army officers on the beach remarked that they were amazed at the calmness and good discipline of the men.

D. H. Madsen
D. H. MADSEN.

COPY

13th November 1942

Dear Admiral Robinson:

I would like if I may to express to you the sincere sympathy of my staff & myself in the loss of your fine ship the "ERIE" and in the very sad news which we have just heard that possibly six officers have lost their lives. 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.

Yours sincerely,

G. M. RAYNE

(Captain, R.N.)

ENCLOSURE (E)

40

EXTRACTS FROM QUARTERMASTER'S NOTEBOOK

Steaming as before, on various courses patrolling station under boiler No. 1, base course 290°T, 291°pge. at S/S 170 rpm 14.4 knots.

- 1655 C/C of convoy to 300°T, 301°pge.
- 1733 Ship torpedoed on port (starboard) quarter. Fire broke out astern. All engines stopped. No power. (Starboard engine).
- 1738 U.S.S. SPRY made attack.
- 1740 Ship listing to starboard.- down by stern.
- 1740 Some power gained - starboard engine in use.(port engine).
- 1744 Stopped starboard engine.
- 1744 Cut in No. 2 boiler.
- 1745 Explosion in after magazine [2 explosion] (#4 ready ammunition room).
- 1749 Explosion in after magazine (#4 ready ammunition room).
- 1750 Explosion in after magazine (#4 ready ammunition room).
- 1755 All engines stopped.
- 1800 Lowered boat with injured.
- 1801 Ahead on port engine heading toward beach north of Willemstad.
- 1810 SPRY passed alongside port (starboard) playing fire hoses on ship.
- 1812 Commenced heaving powder over the side from No. 3 ready room.
- 1818 Stopped all engines.
- 1820 Main deck aft under water.
- 1823 Back full.
- 1823 Ship beached.
- 1825 Oil on water afire.
- 1826 All hands abandon ship.

() Added by Commanding Officer as corrections.

CCSF/A16-3
Serial: 0627

HEADQUARTERS
CARIBBEAN SEA FRONTIER
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

Staff/jar

CONFIDENTIAL

23 December 1942.

FIRST ENDORSEMENT to:
conf. ltr. of C.O.,
U.S.S. ERIE file PG50/
A16-3/L11-1 Serial 051
dated 12-9-42.

From: The Commander, Caribbean Sea Frontier.
To : The Secretary of the Navy.
Subject: Report of the Torpedoing, Fire and Beaching
of U.S.S. ERIE.

1. Forwarded.

RECEIVED - C FILES

NOV 28 1942

DEC 28 1942

OFFICE NO. 23

File No. (SU) L11-1/P950

Doc. No. 70491

Area No. 102

RRV 188.34

See Doc 70367

S. A. Clement
S. A. CLEMENT,
Chief of Staff.

Finished-LEESE-File
Amf

