

CV5/A16-3  
(066)

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U.S.S. YORKTOWN

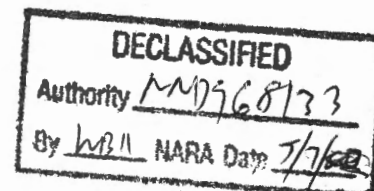
c/o Postmaster,  
San Francisco, California.  
May 16, 1942.

From: The Commanding Officer.  
To : The Commander Task Group Seventeen point Five.  
Subject: Air Operations of YORKTOWN Air Group against  
Japanese Forces in the vicinity of the  
Louisade Archipelago on May 8, 1942.  
Enclosure: (A) YORKTOWN Air Group Commander's report of  
action for May 8, 1942.

1. Forwarded herewith is an advance copy of the  
report of action of the YORKTOWN Air Group for May 8, 1942.

2. This copy is forwarded in advance of the com-  
plete report in order that information contained in it may  
be immediately available to Commander Task Group 17.5.

E. BUCKMASTER.



EX-91C DATE 11-12-63

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(02)

U.S.S. YORKTOWN

May 16, 1942.

**DECLASSIFIED**

From: The Commander, Yorktown Air Group.  
To : The Commanding Officer.  
Subject: Air Operations of YORKTOWN Air Group against Japanese Forces in the vicinity of the LOUISIAD ARCHIPELAGO on May 8, 1942.  
Enclosures: (A) Sketch of Disposition of Enemy Force.  
(B) Radar Plot of Contacts for May 8, 1942.  
(C) Photographs taken on Attack (1 to 11).

1. This report, where it pertains to aircraft operations, was compiled from the narratives submitted by the personnel participating in the attack.

(a) Task Organization of Air Group

Air Group Commander, Lt. Comdr. Oscar Pederson, USN.

VT-5 - 9 TBD's - Lt. Comdr. J. Taylor, USN,  
VS-5 - 15 SBD's - Lt. Comdr. W.O. Burch, Jr., USN,  
VF-42 - 14 F4F-3's - Lt. Comdr. C.R. Fenton, USN,  
VB-5 - 15 SBD's - Lieut. W. C. Short, Jr., USN.

(b) Weather

The U.S.S. YORKTOWN was operating to the south of a frontal zone in an area of light haze with one to three tenths Cumulus, base 1,500 feet and top 6,000 feet, visibility was 12 - 17 miles, winds were E. to ESE. 17 - 23 knots.

At the enemy position, a frontal area, which had been in our vicinity the day before, gave squally weather. The visibility varied from 2 to 15 miles. Winds were ESE. 15 - 20 knots. Cumulus, Alto-Cumulus and Cirrus Clouds covered the area. The cloud cover and squally weather aided one CV to avoid attack but it also helped our planes to escape enemy fighters.

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(c) Attack Group

At 0828, on May 8, received word that a LEXINGTON scout had made contact with an enemy force consisting of 2 CV's, 4 CA's, and many DD's. At 0847, received message from LEXINGTON stating enemy bearing 028°, distance 175 miles. At 0848 received orders from Commander Air to launch the Attack Group, commenced launching at 0900, completed launching at 0915. The Attack Group consisted of 6 VF, 7 VS, 15 VB, and 9 VT. The VS and VB planes were armed with Mark 13 - 1,000 lb. bombs, fuses Mark 21 and 23, and the torpedo planes with Mark 13 Mod 1 torpedoes set to run at 10 feet. The VS and VB planes escorted by 2 VF proceeded towards the contact, climbing to 17,000 feet enroute. The dive bombers sighted the enemy force at about 1032, it consisted of 1 BB (ISB Class), 2 CV's, 6 CA's, and 4 CL's or DD's on course 190°, speed 20 knots, disposition as shown in Enclosure (A). The weather was squally with some rain squalls and a broken lower layer of clouds at 2 - 3,000 feet.

At 1049 the planes were over the enemy ships and commenced circling waiting for the torpedo planes to arrive and take position for the attack. While the planes were circling 1 CV headed for a large rain squall, the other turned into the wind and commenced launching planes, some of the ships commenced firing their AA guns. At 1058 the torpedo planes were in position and a coordinated attack by dive bombers and torpedo planes was commenced. The dive bombing attack was made from 17,000 feet, down wind, altitude of release 2,500 feet. The CV maneuvered violently to avoid the attack. It was observed that five certain bomb hits and a probability of two more were made. The planes encountered considerable AA fire and were attacked by Zero fighters, both in the dive and on the pull out. It was noted that the fighters would attack until the planes joined up and then desisted. The numerous low clouds in the vicinity were used to good advantage to furnish protection when pursued by enemy fighters. In the ensuing action after the attack, VS-5 shot down two Zero fighters and damaged seven others, and VB-5 shot down three and damaged five. The dive bombers were again seriously handicapped by the fogging of their telescopes and windshields; unless the weather is clear, the telescopes and windshields

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will invariably fog. It is imperative that some action be taken on this as it greatly reduces the bombing efficiency of the SBD's.

The Torpedo Squadron proceeded to the contact point and commenced their approach from a SE. direction. As the Dive Bombers commenced the attack, the carrier commenced turning to the left and then reversed the turn sharply to the right; it was during this turn that the torpedo planes dropped. The torpedo planes approached in a loose echelon of divisions, with the planes in each division in columns; on reaching the attack point the planes of the division turned simultaneously towards the CV and from this point on each pilot made an individual run. The AA fire from the CV and other ships was very heavy during the approach and attack. The retirement, to avoid enemy aircraft, was made to the eastward into a large Cumulus cloud. Of the nine torpedoes dropped, three hit the objective, and three others were seen to run erratic.

It is estimated that the enemy had a Combat Air Patrol of at least 15 - 18 Zero fighters over the two CV's. A major factor in keeping our losses to a minimum was the close proximity of two large Cumulus clouds into which our planes flew as soon as they completed their attacks.

The escort fighters for the torpedo planes drove off an attack of six Zero fighters during the approach, and permitted the torpedo planes to make their drops unmolested by enemy aircraft. During the attack the escort fighters shot down three Zero fighters and one VSB while returning to the ship. The VSB escort fighters were greatly hampered in carrying out their mission by the necessity of conserving fuel, having had to climb to altitude with the bombers. On the return trip, the fighters attacked two enemy dive bombers, one of which gave out a puff of smoke and commenced gliding towards the water, leaving a small trail of vapor. It is not known whether this plane crashed.

When the Attack Group left the vicinity of the enemy, the CV attacked was afire on the bow and aft of the island.

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(d) Anti-Torpedo Plane Patrol

At 0730, on May 8, 1942, launched 8 SBD's of VS-5 to form an Anti-Torpedo Plane Patrol on orders of Commander Air. This patrol attempted to intercept the enemy torpedo planes, but they were too fast for them. They were then attacked by a large number of Type 97 and 00 fighters. In the melee that occurred, they shot down five fighters and damaged eight more. In the engagement, four of the SBD's were shot down by enemy aircraft and the remainder returned badly damaged by enemy fighter gunfire. This was a splendid example of courage and devotion to duty, although outnumbered and opposed by faster and more maneuverable aircraft, they were not outfought.

(e) Combat Air Patrol

Fighter Director control was on the U.S.S. LEXINGTON. At 0724 launched the first Combat Air Patrol. At 0804 an unidentified plane was picked up on the Radar screen, bearing 320°, distance 18 miles. Fighters were vectored out but did not make contact (See Enclosure (B)) and it disappeared off the screen at 0811. At 0831, another unidentified plane was picked up coming in from bearing 083°, distance 30 miles. Fighters were vectored out but did not make contact. This plane disappeared off the screen at 15 miles, it is believed that it may have been a friendly plane as it never was picked up going away. At 0941 launched a relief Combat Air Patrol and landed the first group. At 1008 an enemy four engine patrol bomber was sighted by the YORKTOWN lookouts bearing 040° and flying at a low altitude. A section of YORKTOWN fighters was vectored out and shot it down.

Enclosure (B) shows the track of the enemy attack group. Insofar as possible, the below is an account of how the enemy attack was met by the Combat Air Patrol, as compiled from the radio log, Radar Plot and the account of LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN pilots available. At 1055, the Radar screen showed a very large group of enemy planes approaching the formation bearing 020°, distance 68 miles. At 1059 all planes were recalled to the vicinity of the ship. At 1102 launched four

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additional VF, making a total of 8 VF from the YORKTOWN and 9 VF from the LEXINGTON on Combat Air Patrol. The designation of each of the two plane sections was as follows:

LEXINGTON - Agnes Red (3 planes) and White, Doris Red and White.

YORKTOWN - Wildcat Red, Blue, Orange and Brown.

At 1102, 5 VF (Agnes Red and White) were vectored out on 020°, distance 30 miles, Angels 10. Later Agnes White was told to go low to intercept torpedo planes. Agnes Red made contact with the enemy force about 20 miles out, they were 1 - 2,000 feet below the enemy. One of these pilots stated that there were about 50 - 60 planes, stacked in layers extending from about 10,000 to 13,000 feet, approximately 1/3 of them being fighters. The lowest level was the torpedo planes and above them fighters, then dive bombers and fighters, in that order. Agnes Red attacked the enemy formation while they were about 15 - 20 miles from the fleet. Agnes White, as shown from the radio log, attacked torpedo planes at 1116 about 4 - 5 miles from the fleet. At 1108, 4 VF (Wildcat Red and Blue) were vectored out on 020°, distance 15 miles and Angels 1. Upon reaching this position and not sighting anything, instructions were requested. They were informed by the LEXINGTON Fighter Director that the force was being attacked, and to return, climbing to 10,000 feet. They returned after the attack was over, but were able to attack some enemy planes in the vicinity and shot down one Zero fighter. Of the two remaining LEXINGTON sections, it is believed that one section (Doris White) was over the ship and was there during the attack as no other orders were given to him. The other LEXINGTON section (Doris Red) was told to orbit overhead, he climbed to 12,000 feet and attacked the tail end of the enemy formation. Wildcat Brown and Orange were kept over the ship at about 8 - 10,000 feet. The Orange section was not able to intercept the enemy before they attacked, but did shoot down one Zero fighter and one dive bomber that had already released his bomb. The Brown section attacked a formation of dive bombers as they commenced their dive



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and went down with them, they shot down one dive bomber before it dropped its bomb and another afterwards.

A resume of the above shows that only three of the Combat Air Patrol intercepted the enemy at about 15 - 20 miles. The others were not in position to attack until after the enemy had commenced or finished his attack. The YORKTOWN Combat Air Patrol shot down two Zero fighters and three dive bombers. A Combat Air Patrol and Anti-Torpedo Plane Patrol was maintained for the remainder of the day.

(f) LEXINGTON Planes

Due to the breakdown of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON, the following LEXINGTON planes landed on board this ship:

6 F4F-3's and 13 SBD's, and have been retained on board.

2. Summary of Damage done by Air Group

(a) Damage inflicted on enemy

(1) One large CV damaged and possibly sunk by three torpedo hits and 5 - 1,000 lb. bomb hits.

(2) Shot down the following number of planes

15 VF - Type 00 and 97.

4 VB - Believed to be type 99, Navy Dive Bombers.

1 VP - Four engine patrol plane - Type 97.

(3) Damaged the following number of planes

20 VF - Type 00 and 97.

1 VB - Type 99, Navy Dive Bombers.

NOTE: It is believed that there is duplication between the number of planes shot down and the planes damaged.

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(b) Damaged Suffered by Air Group

(1) Personnel Missing in Air Action

6 Pilots  
6 Rear Seat Gunners

(2) Personnel Wounded in Air Action

4 pilots  
3 Rear Seat Gunners

(3) Planes Missing in Action

2 F4F-3's (Pilots recovered)  
7 SBD's (One pilot and passenger recovered)

(4) Planes Damaged in Action

1 TBD - Bullet hole in right wing.

3 VF - One had about 10 holes in fuselage, five of which passed through the emergency fuel tank and were stopped by the armor. One bullet hole in main fuel tank. One through the vacuum tank and one along left side which hit the instrument panel. This plane will require a major overhaul.

One had about thirty small calibre hits in tail and fuselage. Requires major overhaul.

One had one small caliber hole in left wing.

18 VSB - Planes damaged:

One was so badly damaged that it crashed on landing and was a total wreck.

Three require major overhaul, due to numerous 20 mm and 7.7/<sub>mm</sub> hits.



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The remainder of the planes had anywhere  
from 1 to 26 hits in the fuselage, empen-  
age, wings, gas tanks, and armor.

Leak Proof Gas Tanks

A total of 20 self-sealing tanks were hit:

Three by one hit.  
Eight by two hits.  
Four by three hits.  
Four by four hits.  
One riddled by a direct hit on wing by  
a 20 mm explosive shell.  
The only tank to develop a leak in the  
air was the last one, which leaked  
badly. Two others developed leaks  
later in the day.

Armor:

The armor in three planes was struck with  
one to three small caliber bullets. In no  
case was the armor pierced.

(c) Ammunition Expended

VS-5 dropped 7 - 1,000 lb. bombs Mk 13, fuses Mk. 21 and  
23

VB-5 dropped 15 - 1,000 lb. bombs Mk. 13, fuses M1. 21  
and 23.

VT-5 dropped 9 - torpedoes Mark 13 Mod 1 set to run at  
10 feet.

Expended 32,610 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition.

Expended 4,660 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition.

NOTE:

Three torpedoes made erratic runs.

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3. General Comments

(a) Conduct of Personnel

The conduct of the Air Group personnel can not be praised to highly. In the space of five days they made five attacks on enemy forces, three on May 4th, and one each on May 7th and 8th, despite the many hardships and dangers involved, the pilots and other personnel lost none of their enthusiasm, high morale and aggressive spirit. Their performance was an outstanding exhibition of courage, determination and will to win!

(b) Enemy Tactics

(1) Ships

The enemy ships repeated their tactics of the 4th and 7th. The ships of the formation scattered to obtain plenty of sea room and attempted to avoid the attack with individual AA fire and violent maneuvers.

(2) Aircraft

The Japanese fighter planes invariably make a high side or high rear approach when attacking our planes. They then try either to get on the tail or pull sharply away to regain altitude for another attack. They seem reluctant to attack a formation of VSB, especially if it has completed its attack and is well closed up.

(c) Own Fighter Tactics

(1) Against OO Fighters

The Japanese Zero fighters are the equal of the F4F-3's in speed and climbing ability and can out maneuver them. It is therefore imperative that our fighters maintain an altitude advantage from which they can dive, attack, and zoom back to altitude from where another

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attack can be launched.

It is believed that the Zero fighter has neither armor or seal-proof fuel tanks, nor is it as rugged as our planes. Most pilots were amazed at the quickness with which they caught fire when given a short burst in a vital area.

The lesson that impressed itself most on the fighter pilots on May 8th, was "Do not become separated from your formation". The planes that did become separated were so busy maneuvering to get Jap fighters off their tails, that they had time for nothing else. It would appear that the Japs have learned this lesson and maintain formation better than do our pilots. They also seem much more eager to attack strays than formations. It can not be repeated too often that planes must stay together and furnish mutual protection, for the stray plane is a lost plane.

(2) VF escort for VT

The following method of protecting VT planes during their approach, attack and retirement is recommended. At least 4 - 8 VF depending on the opposition expected should be assigned as escort. They should take position up sun from, and at least 5 - 6,000 feet above the torpedo planes. From this position they can readily observe any attack coming in and can dive down and break it up before it develops sufficiently to interfere with the VT. It is essential that the escort maintain a good altitude differential otherwise they are helpless in breaking up an attack that starts from above.

(3) VF escort for VSB

The crucial points in a dive bombing attack for the dive bombers is just before the push over and the short period between the time of pull out and rendezvousing. The VF should take position 2- 4,000 feet above the dive bombers, up sun, where a good view can be obtained. As the dive bombers approach the push over point,

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Some of the escort fighters should commence a steep spiral descent around the dive path and down to 4 - 5,000 feet to protect the pull out. The number of fighters staying up or going down depends entirely on the situation. It is essential that the fighters know the direction of pull out and rendezvous point if maximum protection is to be given.

(d) Fighter Aircraft

In the engagement of May 8th, the fighter escorts were seriously hampered by their lack of range. It is essential that a long range fighter be provided as escort for Torpedo and Dive Bombing planes. An escort fighter cannot do his best, nor perform his mission successfully if he has to continually worry about his gasoline supply, and be afraid to use full throttle while engaging the enemy. It is hoped the addition of wing tanks to the F4F-3's will alleviate this situation.

It is believed that the proportion of fighters to other types assigned to a carrier should be greatly increased. A minimum of 27 fighters and preferably 36 would be none too many, if we are to engage Japanese carriers on equal terms. It seems probable that about 50% of the planes on the Japanese carriers were fighters. The lack of fighters was keenly felt on May 8th, when some 30 - 35 fighters had to be divided up to protect two Attack Groups and the carriers. As a consequence, they were outnumbered at both places and at neither place were they able to successfully accomplish their mission. While the 6 fighters sent in with the YORKTOWN Attack Group did an excellent job, it is felt that the main factor that prevented heavy losses to our planes was the close proximity of a large number of low cloud formations that afforded ideal coverage after the attack. It is estimated that the enemy had 15 - 18 fighters on Combat Air Patrol over the carriers and about 24 - 30 escorting her attack groups. The above figures are only

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approximations made from pilot estimates. Due to the fact that the LEXINGTON and YORKTOWN Air Groups attacked at different times, the escort fighters for each group were outnumbered at least 2 to 1.

It is understood that the VF Squadron on the YORKTOWN class is to be increased to 27. Two carriers in company, each with this number of planes will allow enough for both an escort for the attack group and a Combat Air Patrol, but the number on board should not be allowed to fall below 27. The best defense against an air group attack is a vigorous fighter offensive before it is in sight of the carrier.

(e) Fighter Direction

At 1055, the Radar screen showed a very large group of planes approaching from 020°, distance 68 miles; five fighters were vectored out to meet it. They made contact somewhere between 15 and 20 miles from the ship. The remainder of the fighters either did not make contact with the enemy until they were close aboard, or until after they had completed their attack.

It is believed that fighters should be vectored out at least 30 miles to meet the enemy and if no RADAR altitude reading is available, and the day clear with unlimited ceiling, they should be sent out at about 20,000 feet.

The fighters making the first contact must immediately broadcast the enemy's altitude and composition of his force. It is imperative that all fighter pilots be indoctrinated to report contacts with enemy planes before attacking, this is of the utmost importance if it is a large group.

(f) Anti-Torpedo Patrol

Not having sufficient fighters for an Anti-Torpedo Patrol, SBD's were used as an expedient. The torpedo planes passed high over this patrol and at such high speed as to preclude interception.

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(g) Torpedo Planes

From the experience gained by VT-5 in the attacks of May 4, 7, and 8th, certain factors became apparent insofar as Material, Personnel and Tactics are concerned.

(1) Material

As previously stated in the report on the engagement of the 7th, this command is firmly convinced that a satisfactory torpedo plane must be fast, have a long range, the ability to dive, and sufficient gun power to defend itself. In connection with this a torpedo must be developed that can be dropped at high speed and from a height of 200 feet altitude.

(2) Personnel

Torpedo plane pilots must be given every opportunity to make drops against a maneuvering target and to observe the torpedo run. This will clearly bring out to the pilot (1) The relative slowness of the torpedo after striking the water, (2) The great amount of lead necessary for a beam or close to beam shot, and (3) the large effect of small errors in target course and speed, if torpedo is dropped at long range. The practice of carrying and dropping dummy torpedoes is considered useless and a waste of time except for brand new pilots.

(2) Tactics

In the recent engagements, the Japanese screen has scattered instead of closing in to support the ship being attacked. This is, however, no indication that in the future it will be done. Such a method would be an excellent counter to our system of attack. Due to the slow speed and low altitude of drop required for the Mk 13 torpedoes, our planes are forced to come in low and slow. In the event that the Japanese change their system and put a heavy cordon of ships around their large vessels, it is doubted whether a successful torpedo attack could be launched by TBD's without the loss of the major part of the squadron.



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Torpedo attacks alone, are not very effective against high speed maneuverable targets. This was amply proved in the attack on TULAGI, where VT-5 attacked a Japanese CA maneuvering at high speed outside the harbor and was unable to obtain a hit; another example was the inability of the Japanese torpedo planes to score a hit on the YORKTOWN on May 8.

In order to inflict the maximum damage on a maneuvering ship it is essential that the torpedo and dive bombing attacks be coordinated so that the dive bombing attack starts just before and continues through the torpedo attack. This has the following advantages:

- (1) It provides mutual support and forces the enemy to divide his fire.
- (2) The spray and smoke from close misses will partially obscure the torpedo planes from the target, and the concussion will reduce the accuracy of the AA fire.

With the present type torpedo plane it is essential that they be furnished with fighter protection. It is considered that on the attack of May 8th, VT-5 would have suffered severe losses from enemy aircraft if they had been unescorted. While it is understood that TBF's are being provided, and the present type torpedo is being modified to allow for dropping at higher altitudes and greater speeds; the need for these has been so clearly emphasized by the BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA that it is again urgently recommended that immediate steps be taken to replace the TBD's with TBF's.

(h) Torpedoes

In recent operations against enemy forces, VT-5 had occasion to drop 41 torpedoes, of those 32 were Mark 13 and 9 were Mark 13 Mod 1. All of the Mark 13 apparently functioned perfectly; but 3 of the Mark 13 Mod 1 ran erratic. The reason for this is unknown, they were inspected carefully before use and apparently were in perfect condition. An examination of Photograph No. 9 shows what may be two torpedo tracks that might have some relation to the erratic runs.

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(1) Anti-Aircraft Fire.

The Anti-Aircraft fire encountered by the Dive Bombers has been relatively light; the Japanese ships seem to devote their main efforts against the torpedo planes.

The Japanese method of scattering when attacked from the air, works against them insofar as AA fire is concerned. The ships spread too far apart to furnish mutual support; as a consequence although the volume of AA fire is large, the range is too great to be effective. This was shown in the torpedo attack on the 8th, when the torpedo planes were subjected to heavy fire from about 5 CA's and the CV, yet all planes returned.

OSCAR PEDERSON.