

SECRET

U.S.S. NEWCOMB

care of Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, California,
10 April 1945

From: The Commanding Officer.
To: The Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet.
Via: (1) Commander Destroyer Squadron FIFTY-SIX.
(2) Commander Task Force FIFTY-FOUR
(Commander Battleship Squadron ONE).
(3) Commander Task Force FIFTY-THREE
(Commander Amphibious Group FOUR).
(4) Commander Task Force FIFTY-FIVE
(Commander Amphibious Group TWELVE).
(5) Commander Task Force FIFTY-TWO
(Commander Amphibious Group ONE).
(6) Commander Task Force FIFTY-ONE
(Commander Amphibious Forces, Pacific).
(7) Commander FIFTH FLEET.
(8) Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Subject: Action Report for Period 21 March to 6 April 1945.

Reference: (a) PacFleet Confidential ltr 1CL-45.
(b) CTF 51 Operation Plan A1-45.
(c) CTF 52 Operation Plan A106-45.

Enclosure: (A) Gunnery Officer's Comments and Recommendations. - p. 8
(B) Statistical Record of Fire. - p. 9
(C) Chronological Sequence of Events. - p. 11
(D) Anti-aircraft Action Reports of NEWCOMB for March
29, April 1, and April 2, 1945. - p. 13
(E) Copy of ltr to Bureau of Ordnance describing premature
explosion of cartridge in forty millimeter gun. - Missing

PARTS I and II: Summary and Preliminary.

NEWCOMB (Flagship of ComDesRon 56) departed March 21, 1945, from Ulithi, Western Carolines, in company with ships of the Gunfire and Covering Force for pre-landing preparation of Okinawa, and nearby small island groups of the Nansei Shoto. No rehearsal was held; most ships of the force were experienced in their assigned missions for this landing. NEWCOMB had participated in all major Pacific landings in previous ten months as a fire support ship. Her training and preparation were complete.

NEWCOMB carried out her part of the scheduled operations from March 21 to April 6, 1945, with several interesting and fruitful missions and a number of air actions until she was put out of action by seven suicide planes about

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1800 on April 6, 1945. This engagement is the subject of separate Action Report (NEWCOMB Secret Serial 0018 of 14 April 1945).

PART III: Chronological Account. All times used in this account are zone minus nine time.

NEWCOMB (Flagship of ComDesRon 56) sortied from Ulithi Atoll, Western Carolines, in accordance with CTF 54 Operation Plan 1-45 at 0800 on March 21, 1945, in company with Commander Amphibious Support Force (Rear Admiral Blandy in ESTES) and the Gunfire and Covering Force (Rear Admiral Deyo in TENNESSEE). Training anti-aircraft firing practices with towed sleeves and drones were held while clearing Ulithi, and at 1710 on March 21, 1945, cruising disposition was formed and course was set for Okinawa Gunto, Nansei Shoto.

March 22 and 23 were uneventful. Several false underwater sound contacts were reported but none were developed and the task group proceeded toward objective. At 1600 on March 24 the formation commenced breaking up and by 0500 of March 25 the Tonachi Fire Support Unit and Kerama Retto Fire Support Unit were proceeding separately, escorting the Kerama Retto Underwater Demolition Units. NEWCOMB remained in screen of main body, on March 25 fueling underway from NEW MEXICO. At 0225 on March 26 NEWCOMB proceeded in company with INDIANAPOLIS and FOREMAN to support minesweeping units off Tonachi Jima. The first enemy reaction seen by NEWCOMB appeared in the form of suicide planes attacking the main body at dawn of the 26th. KIMBERLY was damaged during this attack. The remainder of the day was quiet and night retirement was made as scheduled. While returning from night retirement to northwest of Okinawa, the formation was again subjected to suicide attack during dawn of March 27. NEVADA, BILOXI, and DORSEY were hit during this action. Throughout the day of the 27th NEWCOMB screened heavy units which were bombarding Okinawa off the preferred beaches. At 1730 March 27, NEWCOMB proceeded in company with H.L. EDWARDS to night patrol station seven miles to westward of IE SHIMA (CDS 56 in NEWCOMB OTC). The patrol was without event other than an enemy PT boat engagement by TOLMAN to southward of our station, and at 0600 on March 28, NEWCOMB and H.L. EDWARDS left station and proceeded to rejoin bombardment units. At 0857 NEWCOMB commenced search for submarine believed in area from report made by spotting plane of torpedo wake. Wake sighted containing debris and oil. After two hours of search with no contact, wake was evaluated as probable oil slick from damaged enemy torpedo boat. The remainder of the day was spent screening the heavy ships conducting bombardment of Okinawa. At 1817 NEWCOMB was detached from screen and ordered to proceed singly to night patrol station to westward of IE SHIMA.

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Patrol was commenced at 1911 and at 2355 NEWCOMB went to general quarters to repel air attack. No enemy planes closed within gun range until 0134, March 29, at which time a large plane, believed to be a "Betty", was shot down in flames by NEWCOMB. Other enemy planes were fired on at 0231 and 0403 with unobserved results. It is believed these planes were from nearby bases and were landing on IE SHIMA or OKINAWA because of their sustained activity and disappearance after passing over these islands.

NEWCOMB left night patrol station at 0536 March 29 and joined the bombardment units under air attack at 0623. Three enemy planes were observed shot down. When detached at 0835, NEWCOMB took close screening station until 1137 at which time she joined Fire Support Unit Five to cover mine sweeping off preferred beaches. At 1725 NEWCOMB joined night retirement unit two to northwest of Okinawa.

Upon returning to Okinawa at 0710, March 30, NEWCOMB proceeded with Fire Support Unit One to vicinity of preferred beaches for support of Underwater Demolition Teams. At 0900 she commenced firing off Red Beach 1 in support of Team Number Eleven and ceased firing at 1130 and took screening station to seaward of heavy ships. During this firing a cartridge in one gun of twin mount number 45 exploded prematurely and put the gun out of action with two minor casualties to personnel of the gun crew. This casualty is covered in Enclosure (E). Night Retirement Group Two was joined at 1754.

After being detached at 0615, March 31, NEWCOMB proceeded in company with logistics group to Kerama Retto. Fuel and ammunition were received during forenoon and NEWCOMB escorted ST. LOUIS and MINNEAPOLIS to vicinity of preferred beaches, Okinawa, arriving at 1400. NEWCOMB took assigned screening station to southwest of Okinawa until 1830 when she rejoined the Bombardment Group and took station in screen of night retirement group two.

April 1, landing day on Okinawa preferred beaches, presented nearly perfect weather conditions for landing. NEWCOMB in company with bombardment units approached the beaches ahead of the assault units and was ordered to operate independently after 0355 near assigned firing station.

While patrolling slowly off landing beaches, two enemy planes approached for attack. NEWCOMB shot down one Nate assisted by many other ships at 0615 without damage to our ships. No other enemy reaction was noted as landing hour drew near. At 0755 NEWCOMB was on firing station and commenced preparation firing in accordance with schedule (See Enclosure B for details).

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Landing on the northern beaches was made at 0830 after beautifully coordinated air and ship support. Opposition appeared to be negligible. NEWCOMB ceased firing at 0840 and stood by, clear of boat lanes for call fire. Since progress on the beach was rapid no missions were called. At 1730 NEWCOMB was relieved by IRWIN and proceeded to join TF 54 for night retirement.

During the night retirement, April 1-2, enemy planes were periodically in the area. At 0348 and again at 0603 NEWCOMB fired at enemy planes without observed results.

April 2 was spent lying to north of landing beaches awaiting call for firing missions. At 2118 night harassing fire was ordered and commenced on selected roads and towns to prevent enemy activity (See Enclosure B). This harassing fire was continued throughout the night, interrupted by "Flash Red" at 0230. At 0705, April 3, NEWCOMB relieved BILOXI on call fire mission. No fire was called for remainder of day and at 1720 when relieved by PRESTON, NEWCOMB joined night retirement group.

On orders from CTF 54 at 0635 April 4, NEWCOMB reported to CTF 55 off Okinawa southern landing beaches for firing mission. Fire was ordered in area 47A and commenced at 0915. Area fire was continued throughout morning but at 1330 a spotting plane reported for duty and directed our fire on a tank farm with good results. On orders from CTF 55 at 1500 NEWCOMB ceased firing and proceeded to go alongside LST 558 in transport area off Okinawa beaches to replenish ammunition. Underway from alongside LST 558 at 1723. NEWCOMB was ordered to take station for night harassing fire. At 2100 commenced firing as ordered. (See Enclosure B). Mission had been completed at 0612 April 5 and we were awaiting further assignment when orders were received to join destroyers, cruisers, and battleships on north-south patrol 5000 yards off landing beaches in preparation for anti-aircraft defense line to west of transport area. NEWCOMB was detached to take station to deliver fire in area 8177G and proceeded immediately at 1158. Before mission was commenced WADSWORTH relieved NEWCOMB who rejoined anti-aircraft patrol formation at 1430 after stopping to investigate reported mine which was identified as part of an LST launching ramp.

At 1700 the night retirement unit was formed with NEWCOMB taking station in screen. Many enemy reconnaissance planes were in the area throughout the night. Few closed and many were observed to drop "window" when taken under fire.

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At 0640 April 6, NEWCOMB was ordered to take station as screening destroyer for ST. LOUIS covering mine sweeping off IE SHIMA. This duty was performed throughout the day. An enemy plane, believed a Myrt, was sighted in clouds and taken under fire by ST. LOUIS at 0624. Enemy planes were reported in area periodically throughout the day. At 1600 several formations of enemy planes were reported to northward and northwest of Okinawa at ranges from 45 to 90 miles. Intense air activity commenced at 1609 with many friendly planes engaging enemy planes just north of IE SHIMA. About ten enemy planes got through the Combat Air Patrol and attacked mine sweepers in our vicinity. One mine sweeper was hit. At 1624 NEWCOMB assisted in shooting down one Val, other ships accounting for six or eight others. At 1625 one enemy plane was damaged by our gunfire while diving on NEWCOMB and crashed close aboard on starboard quarter without damage to NEWCOMB. Radical maneuvers, at high speed, had much to do with the Jap's failure to hit NEWCOMB on this attack. Several more ships were hit by planes in actions which continued for the next hour with increasing intensity. At 1706 NEWCOMB shot down a second enemy plane. At 1800 a third plane attacked NEWCOMB, was damaged by gunfire but crashed into NEWCOMB's after stack. Two minutes later a fourth plane attacked NEWCOMB and was shot down about 6000 yards away. A fifth plane approached at 1806, was under fire but crashed into ship in vicinity of after fireroom followed by a terrific explosion and loss of all power, both steam and electrical, on NEWCOMB. At 1807 NEWCOMB was dead in the water when a sixth plane was seen approaching on port bow. This plane was taken under fire by 5 inch and 40 mm batteries in local control but succeeded in crashing into NEWCOMB's forward stack. LEUTZE came alongside at 1811 to assist in fighting fires. At 1815 a seventh plane was taken under fire by NEWCOMB but skidded across NEWCOMB's deck and crashed into LEUTZE's port quarter, causing extensive damage to LEUTZE. BEALE came alongside to port at 1829 with water streaming from all her fire hoses to assist in fighting fires. At 1835 LEUTZE cleared NEWCOMB's side in a near sinking condition. Several ships were standing by to assist NEWCOMB and many of her crew were picked up from water. At 2055 TEKESTA (ATF93) took NEWCOMB in tow for Kerama Retto.

A complete and detailed action and casualty report of the above prolonged aircraft engagement of 6 April will be submitted separately. (NEWCOMB Secret Serial 0018 of 14 April 1945).

PART IV: Ordnance.

Performance of own ordnance material and equipment was good. One material casualty, covered by Enclosure E, was easily repaired by obtaining

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necessary replacement parts from U.S.S. O'BRIEN (DD724) for damaged 40 mm gun. Gunnery Officer's Comments, Enclosure A, describes control methods used in bombardment and states a strong reliance on VT projectiles in combatting suicide attacks. A four to one ration of VT to Mark 18 fuze is recommended.

No observation was made of enemy ordnance.

PART V: Damage.

No battle damage was suffered by NEWCOMB until 6 April. Damage which put NEWCOMB out of action will be covered in separate report of anti-aircraft actions of 6 April 1945.

Estimate of damage to enemy ground installations is not known. Enclosure B gives areas fired. One enemy plane was destroyed, one damaged, and one shot down "assist" prior to 6 April as covered in Enclosure D.

PART IV: Special Comments.

Communication difficulties were numerous on fire support frequencies, particularly in early evening due to "night effect". Plans for night missions should be put out well in advance of darkness with specific instructions for what procedure to follow in case of communication failure. It is believed that more use of band shifting could be made to overcome this difficulty.

Some missions called for were difficult and at times impossible to carry out because of special circumstances near station required of firing ship. An instance of this was one mission which called for illumination on eastern side of Okinawa. The only firing station possible was one near Brown Beaches because of maximum range considerations. This station was impossible to attain after dark because of shoal water and myriad of small craft in area. Had assignment been given before dark it is possible that a suitable anchorage could have been picked from which to deliver this fire. Another instance was a question of unswept water in area for missions. In most cases no difficulty was encountered and missions were easily carried out.

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PART VII: Personnel Performance and Casualties.

As usual, personnel performance was good. Two minor casualties were suffered as previously mentioned in Part III and in Enclosure E.

The performance and casualty reports for actions of 6 April 1945, are included in separate action report for that day.

I. E. McMILLIAN.

Advance copies to:

- ComInch (1)
- CinCPac (3)
- ComDesPac (1)
- Commanding General Tenth Army (1)
- Commanding General, Fleet Marine Forces,
U.S. Pacific Fleet (1).

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GUNNERY OFFICER

NEWCOMB participated in shore bombardment of Okinawa Shima during the period March 30, 1945 - April 6, 1945. During this time five (5) separate missions were fired.

, For all fires delivered, with the exception of night missions, director control was used. The computer was placed in semi-automatic with synchronous "E" knob out. Guns were in full automatic and fire was delivered using continuous level. For night firings the only change was in placing the computer in local.

Forty millimeter guns were used in UDT coverage and Love Day firing only. The forty millimeters were placed in main battery control and resulting control of fire was very satisfactory.

Mark 29 Mod 3 fuzes were obtained for use with white phosphorous projectiles. These fuzes could not be used because all white phosphorous projectiles had their fuzes pin-punched in place, thus making it impossible to remove the Mark 18 fuzes from the white phosphorous projectiles.

One unusual casualty occurred; a 40 mm HET cartridge exploded in the chamber while it was still one inch from being seated. The slide and housing were damaged beyond repair. Only two minor personnel casualties resulted. Detailed information on this casualty is covered in a separate report (Enclosure E. Original of this report and damaged parts plus case of exploded shell are being forwarded to Bureau of Ordnance for further study).

When firing Victor Tare fuzed shells at suicide planes flying low on the water many prematures were seen. This is believed normal, however, and when all power was lost, after being hit by suicide planes on 6 April the 5 inch battery in local control using Victor Tare projectiles was our best defense against further suicide attacks.

Total ammunition expenditure for shore bombardment was as follows:

1656 AAC 5"/38 Cal; 2025 40 mm HET.

ENCLOSURE (A) TO NEWCOMB SERIAL 017 DATED 10 APRIL 1945.

CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

April 6:

- 0350 - Opened fire on enemy plane - Negative results.
- 0352 - Ceased firing.
- 0610 - Reached patrol sector off IE Shima.
- 1624 - Commenced firing at enemy plane diving on mine sweepers.
assisted in shooting plane down.
- 1625 - Shot down enemy plane which narrowly missed NEM/COMB.
- 1709 - Splashed plane 3000 yards off starboard beam.
- 1800 - Suicide plane hit NEM/COMB in after stack and No. 2 torpedo mount.
- 1804 - Splashed another Val at 6000 yards.
- 1806 - NEM/COMB hit by plane on number 2 torpedo mount, plane came from
astern.
- 1807 - NEM/COMB hit by Val on forward stack, plane came from port beam.
- 1815 - Plane hit NEM/COMB and skidded over deck into IE TZE.