

History: [Prewar](#) - [1941](#) - [1942](#) - [1943](#) - [1944](#) - [1945](#) - [Postwar](#)
[The Ship](#) - [All Hands](#) - [Decorations](#) - [Remembrance](#)

BOMBING TWENTY ACTION REPORTS

[Home](#) > [Action Reports And Logs](#) > [AG-20 History](#) >

Bombing Twenty Action Reports

The following excerpts from VB-20's action reports mostly concern the Battle of Leyte Gulf (24-26 October 1944), with additional information regarding raids against enemy shipping at Okinawa and in the Philippines.



VB-20 Insignia, courtesy Enterprise CV-6 Association.

I. Destruction of Enemy Shipping, Okinawa Jima: 10 October 1944

Assigned target, Baton Ko. Upon arrival at target at 0720, more suitable targets were reported at anchor off Naha Town. We were directed to make a coordinated attack on these ships, which consisted of 4 AK and one DD. Made approach from west to east at between 12,000 and 13,000 feet. Dived on these ships, sections picking various ships. Hits were observed on all ships. One was seen to blow up and sink. One hit was observed on DD and hits were observed, on other AK's, which were left burning intensely. The DD was seen to sink along with another AK as a result of bomb hits and torpedo hits by VT-20. These sinkings were verified by next strike. Upon retiring, one lugger was strafed with 20mm and left in a burning and sinking condition. Group rendezvoused and returned to base. Observer stated that all bombs were hits with the exception of 2 or 3, which were very near misses. Other units, which followed us down, were *Franklin* group and 4 VT from *San Jacinto*. Heavy AA was moderate and inaccurate. Light AA was intense and inaccurate.

II. Search and First Strike on Enemy Task Force: 24 October 1944

Information had been received of the presence of units of the enemy fleet in the Sulu Sea, proceeding N. E. The *Enterprise* was ordered to launch two search teams. Two sector searches were launched at 0600. Each search was composed of 6 bombers and 8 fighters, one sector being from 230° to 240° and the other sector from 240° to 250° for a distance of 325 miles, true sector from latitude 11° 30', longitude 12° 6' 30". Planes were loaded with wing tanks and two 500-lb. SAP bombs. An expeditious rendezvous was made and departed on search at 0615.

Search was uneventful until 0754, at which time two DD's and one DE were sighted in latitude 90° N. 123° 10' E. It was decided not to break radio silence to report this contact. These ships were apparently going no place in particular, and an attack would have been made on return leg. At about 0830, planes in both search sectors sighted a group of large ships. The planes in sector number 2, 240° to 250° true, led by Lieut. Raymond E. Moore, made a contact report of the enemy units, which consisted of 2 BB's, *Fuso* class, one CA, *Mogami* class, and 4 new DD's. The position of the first report was 121-30 08-55; their course at this time was 000°, speed 15 knots.

Planes in Sector One, led by Commander Robert E. Riera, proceeded to that area and were joined by Lieut. R. E. Moore's division. Both divisions of bombers and fighters joined up at about 0840 and continued to climb. At this time the battleships and heavy cruisers were firing on the group with main batteries, using a few fused AA projectiles. The range was about 10 miles, altitude of group about 12,000 feet. Bursts were fairly accurate considering range and altitude. Some bursts were as near as 500 feet at same level, and some above the formation, very spectacular, some being purple, red, blue, yellow, and white. Some bursts contained double-bursting streamers.

The major ships were in a column led by the *Yamashiro*, second *Fuso*, third *Mogami*. The destroyers were disposed in a square about the major units. The major ships maneuvered in such a way as to keep our formation under fire from the main batteries. Climb was continued to an altitude of 15,000 feet, at which point we were to eastward disposition. Projectiles, apparently 5 inch, followed the formation during the approach; most bursts were behind the formation but fairly accurate as to altitude. Targets were assigned as follows: lead BB, first division, led by Comdr. Riera; second BB, second division, led by Lieut. Moore; fighters to strafe and fire rockets, diving just ahead of bombers. The coordination was excellent, both divisions diving almost simultaneously.

Enemy units maintained a fairly good disposition, but started a turn as dive was commenced. The dive was made from out of the sun, and was pressed home, bombs being released from 2,000 to 2,500 feet. Rocket hits were observed on both BB's, on the first doing little apparent damage. Rockets were also observed hitting heavy cruiser. The effect of rockets on the CA was unobserved, due to intense AA fire. Upon pull out, all planes heavily strafed destroyers on port side of screen in direction of pull out. The lead DD was seen to be hit with many .50 calibers and 20mm's, but still continued to pour out a heavy AA barrage. AA fire followed planes as far as 10 miles from screen. AA of all calibers was intense and accurate.

Hits were observed on both BB's. The *Fuso* was observed to have a large fire started amidships and aft. This fire was still continuing when we departed from the scene about 30 minutes later. A small fire was observed on stern of *Yamashiro*, but this apparently died out shortly. When the bombs hit the *Fuso*, she slowed down considerably and sheered out of column to left, regaining position in about 5 minutes. AA was too intense for extremely accurate observations.

All planes were forced to withdraw a considerable distance from the formation to rendezvous. Comdr. Bakutis was hit and landed in the water about 10 miles due east of the disposition. He was located and a two-man life raft was dropped to him from an SB2C. The heavy units of the enemy fired on planes circling the downed aircraft with main batteries. It was decided not to search for and attack the destroyers and DE's sighted in Sector One because it was thought more expedient to return to base in order to launch another strike. The flight lasted from 5 hours and 45 minutes to 6 hours. All bombers returned with about 60 to 80 gallons of gas. Total gas was 436 gallons. It is believed that they would have returned with considerably more gas if a high-speed, high-powered climb had not been necessary in the immediate vicinity of the task force.

The coordination of the attack was excellent. The escort and attack by VF-20 was outstanding throughout. Although no fighters were encountered, our escort maintained their position, dived ahead, strafed and rocketed with complete disregard of personal safety.

III. Attack on Enemy Task Force, Sibuyan Sea: 24 October 1944

Launched at 1315. Made one turn toward rendezvous and proceeded on course to target, finishing with a running rendezvous. Flight consisted of 9 bombers, 8 torpedo planes, and 12 fighters. Proceeded on course 278° toward reported position of enemy force, passing over east coast of Samar Island at 1355. When over Masbate Island at 1425, we received a new position report which placed the enemy force 15 to 20 miles west of Banton and Simara Islands. Course 090. Changed course to 301° toward new position. Enemy force was sighted at 1430, latitude 12° 32' N., longitude 122° 20' east. When sighted, fleet was in cruising disposition, circular screen, course 090, speed about 20 knots.

Fleet consisted of 2 task groups, one ahead of the other, hereinafter referred to as east and west groups. Western group was immediately picked as our target, and majority of attention was focused on this group. This west group consisted of 2 battleships, one of the *Yamato* class, the other thought to be of the *Kongo* class; one *Mogami* class cruiser, 3 unidentified cruisers, and 7 or 8 destroyers. The east group consisted of two battleships, believed to be one *Nagato* class and one *Ise* class; 4 cruisers, unidentified, and 6 destroyers. The air group flew on a westerly heading, passing south of both enemy task groups.

The western task group opened fire with heavy guns when planes were about 15 miles away, altitude 12,000 feet. This fire was very inaccurate. We proceeded on westerly heading until passing group, and then turned north to get in an up-sun position. Enemy task force started evasive tactics, all ships turning toward planes in a right-hand turn except the northernmost battleship in the disposition, a heavy cruiser and a destroyer, which made a 180° turn to left, holding westerly heading. This gave a slight separation between majority of task group and our target. This separation was almost closed by the time we attacked, but target remained the northernmost ship in the group.

Approach was made to the disposition from west to east, starting a high-speed approach from 13,000 feet. Dives were made to north, thereby eliminating the risk of retiring over screen. During approach, heavy AA was intense, there being shells of different color and also double-bursting shells. This fire was fairly accurate, and continued throughout dive and retirement. Notable was the fact that cruisers and battleships fired their heavy batteries at planes during attack and during retirement to a point up to 15 miles away. Reports from pilots and aircrewmembers give all VB planes hits except two near misses. Pilots and aircrewmembers of the bombing squadron observed at least 2 and possibly 3 torpedo hits. The fighters, having nothing larger than 5" rockets, attacked a cruiser and 2 destroyers.

Rendezvous was made 20 miles north, all planes being present, plus 2 planes from Pedro Base. Pilots from Pedro Base discovered their error approximately halfway back to base. Course back to ship covered coast and bay area of Burias Island, no shipping being observed. We flew down the west coast of Legaspi Peninsula, turning through Sorsogon Bay, no shipping being sighted in the area. On passing over village on the very eastern shore of Legaspi Peninsula, people were seen in the streets waving at planes as they passed over. We then turned to course 085 and proceeded to base, arriving at 1645.

Battleship attacked by this group was very heavily damaged, and could be considered as probably sunk as a result of this attack. When last seen, which was approximately 30 minutes after attack, the bow of the ship was just barely showing above water and a heavy column of smoke caused by fires started during attack was not decreasing in density, indicating that fires were probably out of control. It is of interest that AA fire from all the ships was well coordinated, indicating the possible existence of centralized fire control for the various ships in the disposition. However, it was also noted that AA fire ceased entirely when our planes flew above a cloud as they circled within AA range of the formation. In view of this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Japanese are not using radar fire control.

IV.



Nine VB-20 SB2C Helldivers in a V-of-Vs formation.

Attack on Enemy Task Force: 25 October 1944

Took off at 0630, rendezvoused and were directed to proceed 50 miles to north and orbit to await instructions as to location of Jap task force which had been previously reported to the northward. Commander Smith was strike leader. Another large group of planes from the other two task groups were orbiting same point. Climbed to 13,000 feet and received instructions as to location of enemy task force, which consisted of 2 CV's, 2 CVL's, 2 BB's, 3 CA's, and 3 or 4 DD's. Proceeded on course for enemy. Sighted enemy at 0810, distance about 25 miles. Planes of other task groups who were ahead, were assigned as target the CV on starboard side of formation and CV in center. Our group closely followed their attack.

Their attack was splendid. One carrier was smothered with bomb hits and was difficult to see from almost directly overhead. It is believed this was the *Zuikaku*. Our group was assigned a large CV to the north in the disposition. AA fire at this time was intense and fairly accurate. Many different colored bursts were observed. A barrage of phosphorus had apparently been laid directly over one of the carriers. It appeared as cumulus clouds, about .5, it was so thick. This AA layer was at about 6,000 feet. There was another intense layer at about 12,000 feet of black smoke.

The carriers were maneuvering violently, taking evasive action. The disposition still remained fairly intact, ships giving each other mutual support. The one carrier hit by the other task groups had sheered out of the disposition to the right. Further observations on it were not made, as we were rapidly approaching our pushover point. We started our dive from a northerly course out of the sun, and dived from east to west on a large CV of an unidentified class. All planes released at an extremely low altitude. Many hits were observed on this carrier and several fires were soon started. Retirement was made between a heavy cruiser of the *Nachi* class and a battleship of the *Ise* class. These ships maintained an intense and accurate AA barrage of all calibers, firing at planes until they were at least 10 miles from the disposition. One tremendous explosion was observed, flames and smoke rising to at least 1,000 feet. It is believed this was caused either by a torpedo hit or bomb hit which exploded a magazine on a cruiser.

Group rendezvoused expeditiously and returned to base. Time of attack was 0845. Two VB-20 planes landed on the U.S.S. *Franklin* due to being low on fuel. They operated with the *Franklin* group on a subsequent strike and returned to the *Enterprise* before dark.

V. Attack on Enemy Task Force: 25 October 1944

Launched at 1200, our group consisting of 10 bombers, 5 torpedo planes, and 6 fighters. We joined up with planes from the other three carriers in Task Force Group 38.4, with the *Franklin* planes in the lead. This entire striking group comprised 25 bombers, 27 torpedo planes, and about 30 fighters. Group proceeded to reported position enemy disposition. At 1315 the group of enemy cripples sighted at reported position. At 1325 the enemy's main force sighted, consisting of 2 carriers, both damaged, one very slightly, one battleship, 2 cruisers, and 4 or 5 destroyers. Strike from Task Group 38.3 attacked and sank the large CV (*Zuikaku*). The *Franklin* planes attacked the smaller carrier (*Otaka*) with no apparent major damage resulting.

Then we delivered our attack. Approach was made from the southwest, planes coming in exactly out of the sun, and with above average benefit from a cloud cover. Dive was made to the north. Due to planes coming out of the sun and cloud cover, there was no AA fire during approach, and very little during dive. All ships opened up with intense AA of all calibre on retirement, maintaining this fire until planes were 15 miles away. Due to clouds and the necessity for expediting the retirement to a considerable distance, there was little chance for good observation of bomb hits. From 4 to 6 bombs were reported as being near misses in the water around the stern of the ship. Each plane having a bomb load of one 1,000 lb. AP and one 1,000 lb. SAP, this leaves a total of 14 to 16 bombs that were possibly hits. Carrier started burning and CAG-20 reported seeing internal explosions following this attack. While rendezvous was being effected to west of enemy forces, Target Coordinator kept us informed of the condition of this ship, which we left burning badly dead in the water and settling. He subsequently saw the carrier sink.

When we left this northern enemy force, it consisted of this one badly damaged carrier, one battleship, two cruisers, and 4 or 5 destroyers. On the way back to base, we again passed ships which had been with crippled enemy group. These ships had apparently forsaken the small carrier lying dead in the water to the south and were steaming north to join other forces. The ships seen steaming north were one battleship, one light cruiser and one *Terutsuki* class destroyer. The battleship seemed to be slightly damaged.

VI. Attack on Troop Convoy, Ormoc Bay: 11 November 1944

Took off at 0900. Rendezvoused 15 VB, 12 VT, and 19 VF, and headed out on course 200, climbing to 15,000 feet on the way to the target. Crossed over the middle of Samar Island and swung around so as to approach the target from the east. Targets were already under attack by other groups, who had sunk or badly damaged all except five destroyers and one AK. At 1115, received orders to attack.

Torpedo planes were assigned the damaged AK and one destroyer, and each of the three bomber divisions was assigned one destroyer. Dives were made from south to north, as closely out of the sun as possible. Anti-aircraft was moderate and accurate. During retirement and rendezvous, the following damage was observed:

- One destroyer rolled over and sank.
- One destroyer continued on varying courses eastward and finally blew up and sank.
- A smaller DD had the bow blown off and was dead in the water.
- AK seen to blow up and disintegrate.

Upon rendezvous, this group was ordered to go in and strafe an apparently undamaged *Terutsuki* class DD. This group then rendezvoused with the torpedo planes and returned to the ship by way of Leyte Gulf.