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31 JAN 1945

From: The Commanding Officer.  
To : The Secretary of the Navy.  
Via : (1) Commander Task Unit 11.5.6.  
(2) Commander Service Squadron, South Pacific Force.

Subject: Official Report of Loss of Ship.

Reference: (a) Article 841, U.S. Navy Regulations.

1. At approximately 2317 on the 29th of January 1945, the U.S.S. SERPENS (AK-97) was totally destroyed by an explosion of undetermined origin.
2. At the time of the explosion the U.S.S. SERPENS (AK-97) was riding at anchor in Berth 24 as that berth is delineated on H.O. Field Chart 1009 at Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands.
3. The ship was being loaded at the time by the 492nd Port Battalion, United States Army, located on Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, with depth bombs, plane parts, and general cargo.
4. The ship, all of its crew, with the exception of the ten survivors hereinafter referred to, and all of its cargo were lost. The cargo consisted of depth bomb fuzes, airplane wings, airplane engines, airplane belly tanks, and depth bombs and miscellaneous freight.
5. I am unable to state whether the explosion which destroyed the ship was due to enemy action and the explosion of the depth charges constituting its cargo or to the explosion of cargo alone.
6. At the time of the explosion I was ashore standing in the quarters of Captain Conklin, 319th Fighter Control Squadron, just preparatory to returning to the ship. I felt a shock and asked if it was an earthquake. Immediately following there was a great glare in the sky followed by a tremendous explosion. I immediately set out for the dock and tried to determine from the position of the smoke whether it could have been the SERPENS. Officers with me who lived in the vicinity did not think it could be, saying that it might be the ammunition dump at Henderson Field. Upon arrival at the dock I found that the SERPENS had exploded and since the SERPENS's gig had been wrecked by the explosion I commandeered a boat and in company with Lieutenant Commander Audrey A. Scott, U.S. Coast Guard Reserve, searched the area covered by debris along with many other boats until between 0100 and 0130, 30 January 1945. When I returned to the dock and reported to Captain Mark L. Hersey, Jr., Commander Naval Bases, South Solomons Sub-Area, I located Lieutenant John R. Clark, U.S. Coast Guard, Stanley M. Jones, 515-547, CCS, USCGR, Morris M. Houseknecht, 563-428, Flc, USCGR, William E. Hughes, 519-163, Slc, USCGR, Fidel O. Carmana, 676-292, S2c, USCGR, Robert J. Smart, 675-709, Slc, USCGR, and Richard M. Figgs,

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7009-229, St3c, USCGR. George S. Kennedy, 587-983, S2c, USCGR and Kelsie K. Kemp, 599-922, Slc, USCGR, had been removed from the bow of the SERPENS by Captain Hersey. All were quartered at Naval Advanced Base, Guadalcanal.

7. The search of the area disclosed only about thirty or forty feet of the bow floating keel up which sank in about two hours. Some of the belly tanks which were parts of the cargo were seen. Large patches of what appeared to be explosive residue were seen.

8. One body has been found and identified as CAMMARATA, Michael L., (685-177), S2c, U.S. Coast Guard Reserve. Portions of other bodies have been found but identification is impossible.

9. The following material of the ship was saved being ashore at the time of explosion: One  $\frac{1}{2}$  ton reconnaissance car, One 28' motor whale boat and one landing craft vehicle.

  
PEERY L. STINSON.

cc: Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard.