

BB40/A16-3  
Serial 015

Caro Fleet Post Office,  
San Francisco, Calif.,  
24 February 1944.

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NND 968133

By

NARS Date

11/1/97

From: The Commanding Officer,  
To: The Commander in Chief, United States Fleet,  
Via: (1) Commander Task Group FIFTY-ONE POINT FIVE  
(2) Commander Task Force FIFTY-ONE,  
(3) Commander Central Pacific Force.  
(4) Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas.

Subject: Action Report, Bombardment of TAROA ISLAND, MALOELAP ATOLL, 20 February, and WOTJE ISLAND, WOTJE ATOLL, 21 February 1944.

Reference: (a) Pacific Fleet Confidential Letter 2CL-44.  
(b) CTG Bombardment Order No. 3-44.

Enclosures: (A) Track Chart of Bombardments. -p. 8  
(B) Executive Officer's Report of Bombardments. -p. 10  
(C) Gunnery Officer's Report of Bombardments. -p. 11

In accordance with reference (a), the following Action Report is submitted:

### P A R T O N E

1. General Narrative - (a) The U.S.S. NEW MEXICO bombarded Japanese installations on TAROA ISLAND, MALOELAP ATOLL, on 20 February, and on 21 February bombarded Japanese installations on WOTJE ISLAND, WOTJE ATOLL. Main and secondary (five inch 51 caliber) batteries fired both bombardments. Both were made in company with the MISSISSIPPI AND IDAHO.

(b) Three firing runs were made on each target. In both instances, the main battery fired on the first run and the secondary battery on the second and third runs. The main battery expended 69 rounds on each island; the secondary battery expended 452 rounds on TAROA ISLAND and 450 rounds on WOTJE ISLAND.

(c) Rough weather prevented use of the ship's spotting aircraft on the day of the TAROA ISLAND firing. A carrier aircraft was assigned by Commander Task Group 50.15 for spotting, but this plane's Main Battery spots were unsatisfactory because of a communication difficulty; top spot was used with good results. The ship's aircraft spotted satisfactorily for the WOTJE ISLAND firing.

(d) The effectiveness of previous bombardments and air strikes on the two islands left few obvious targets for the subject bombardments. The ship's aircraft spotter reported no worthwhile targets were visible on WOTJE ISLAND after the subject firing was completed. This was the conclusion of the ship with regard to both islands. No personnel were seen on either island.

(e) A second bombardment of each island, planned in the bombardment order, was cancelled by the Task Force Commander.

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(f) The bombardments were routine, there being no counter-action or personnel casualties and no material casualties of sufficient importance to upset plans.

2. Preliminaries - (a) The NEW MEXICO, with the MISSISSIPPI and IDAHO, screened by four destroyers, got under way from anchorage in the lagoon of MAJURO ATOLL at 0701, 20 February (Zone Plus 12), to carry out the bombardment order, reference (b). The group proceeded to the vicinity of MALOELAP ATOLL.

(b) The ship's mission was to bombard targets specified in reference (b) in order to destroy the means of life of the garrisons and the supplies required for the operation of aircraft on the two islands. The ship's assumptions were as given in that reference. The ship's plans, prepared on a basis of the Bombardment Order and intelligence data accompanying it, are forwarded as Appendix I of enclosure (C).

(c) The NEW MEXICO, IDAHO and MISSISSIPPI were in column, in that order, in making the approach for the first day's bombardment, and in the reverse of that order in approaching WOTJE ATOLL on the second day.

(d) No enemy forces were encountered on either day.

## P A R T T W O

### CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF BOMBARDMENTS

(All times are Zone Plus 12)

20 February 44

1400 Went to General Quarters. Zigzagging on course 325° (T), at 17 knots. Wind 28 knots from 061°(T); sea moderate with moderate swell from 078°(T); barometer 29.77; temperature 80° F.; visibility 20 miles.

1405 Changed speed to 15 knots.

1410 Ceased zigzagging.

1417 IDAHO AND MISSISSIPPI took distance 1000 yards.

1420 Ships left to 285°(T).

1439 Ships right to 325° (T).

1441 Commenced ventilating main battery magazines.

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1445 Column right to 045°(T).  
1450 Secured ventilation to main battery magazines.  
1452 Ships left to 005°(T).  
1503 Ships right to 045°(T).  
1508 Commenced firing main battery on assigned targets on TAROA ISLAND.  
1517 Column left to 000°(T).  
1533 Column left to 315°(T).  
1556 Ceased firing main battery.  
1557 Ships right to 355°(T).  
1611 Ships right to 135°(T).  
1620 Ships right to 175°(T).  
1624 Changed speed to 17 knots.  
1626 Ships left to 135°(T).  
1629 Commenced firing five inch 51 caliber secondary battery to starboard on assigned targets on TAROA ISLAND.  
1632 Column right to 195°(T).  
1640 Ships left to 165°(T).  
1645 Ships right to 195°(T).  
1651 Ships right to 205°(T).  
1700 Ceased firing secondary battery to starboard.  
1702 Ships left to 195°(T).  
1709 Ships left to 015°(T).  
1715 Ships right to 035°(T).  
1716 Changed speed to 15 knots.

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1719 Commenced firing five inch 51 caliber secondary battery to port on  
assigned targets on TAROA ISLAND.  
1730 Ships left to 015°(T).  
1740 Column left to 335°(T).  
1750 Ceased firing secondary battery to port.  
1753 Ships right to 035°(T).  
1755 Secured from General Quarters.  
- - Operated during the night north of WOTJE ATOLL.

21 February 1944

0800 Went to General Quarters. MISSISSIPPI, IDAHO and NEW MEXICO in column  
in that order on course 230°(T), speed 17 knots. Wind 15 knots from  
053°(T); sea slight with heavy swell from 074°(T); barometer 29.82;  
temperature 80°F.; visibility 10 miles.  
0801 Commenced zigzagging in accordance with plan number six.  
0812 SK Radar picked up land bearing 205°(T), distance 23 miles; identified  
as northeastern island of WOTJE ATOLL.  
0815 Ceased zigzagging.  
0823 Commenced ventilating main battery magazines.  
0824 Column left to 180°(T).  
0834 Ships right to 210°(T).  
0844 Secured ventilation of main battery magazines.  
0845 Ships left to 180°(T).  
0854 Ships left to 160°(T).  
0856 Catapulted spotting plane.  
0900 Ships left to 140°(T).  
0904 Ships right to 180°(T).

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0913 Ships left to 150°(T).  
0923 Commenced firing main battery on assigned targets on WOTJE ISLAND.  
0933 Ships right to 180°(T).  
0955 Column right to 215°(T).  
1010 Ceased firing main battery.  
1018 Ships right 180° to 035°(T).  
1028 Commenced firing 5"/51 caliber secondary battery to port on assigned targets on WOTJE ISLAND.  
1049 Column left to 345°(T).  
1107 Ships left to 325°(T).  
1112 Ceased firing secondary battery.  
1113 Ships right to 345°(T).  
1120 Ships right 180 degrees to 165°(T).  
1132 Commenced firing 5"/51 caliber secondary battery to starboard on assigned targets on WOTJE ISLAND.  
1202 Column right to 220°(T).  
1211 Ceased firing secondary battery. Bombardment completed. Retired to South of the Atoll to recover aircraft.  
1300 Recovered spotting plane.  
1305 Secured from General Quarters.

P A R T T H R E E

1. For detailed information on gunnery performance, see Gunnery Officer's Report of Bombardment, enclosure (C).

2. No information on the performance of enemy ordnance material or equipment is available.

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P A R T F O U R

1. This ship suffered no battle damage.
2. Destruction of enemy installations on TAROA ISLAND and WOTJE ISLAND was considerable before subject bombardment was begun. This ship's firing added to the destruction. The details of observed damage by this ship's fire are given in enclosure (C).

P A R T F I V E

1. Special comment is made on the following matters:
  - (a) Communications for the operation were satisfactory with the exception of the spotting frequency for the bombardment of TAROA ISLAND when a carrier plane did the spotting. During the first run it was necessary for the IDAHO to relay spots over the TBS and the SCR 522 from the spotting plane. The NEW MEXICO was unable to reach the spotting plane over the SCR 522. During the rest of the bombardment the secondary spotting frequency (6525 kcs) was used. This also proved unsatisfactory for it put both the NEW MEXICO and the MISSISSIPPI on the same frequency. During the bombardment of WOTJE ISLAND communications were entirely satisfactory. Own ship's plane was used for spotting on the assigned ship spotting frequency.
  - (b) Navigation - The prepared intelligence charts to the scale of one inch equals one nautical mile were used for navigation. Although not all of the smaller islands were located accurately, enough were so charted as to obtain good fixes. The starboard alidade failed, due to a tube failure, during the last firing run on WOTJE ISLAND, when all land was to the starboard. Radar ranges and bearings were used while shifting to the Flag Bridge alidade, and could have been used satisfactorily for an indefinite time.
  - (c) Air operations were without event on the second day; the ship's only seaplane was not launched the first day because the weather would have been hazardous for recovery. Because the aircraft remained aboard on the first day, Turret IV was not fired. The firing of Turret III did not damage the plane, which was on the catapult. (Only one aircraft is now aboard the NEW MEXICO).
  - (d) Engineering and Construction departments - The performance of personnel and material and the operation of machinery in the Engineering Department and Construction Department was excellent during the bombardments. No machinery casualties occurred in either department.

2. The Executive Officer's Report is submitted as enclosure (D).
3. Lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations.

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(a) The obvious lesson that experience is an excellent teacher was presented forcefully in these bombardments. The ship's three previous bombardments (KISKA ISLAND, MAKIN ATOLL; and KWAJALEIN ATOLL) have followed days of planning and drilling; little more than 24 hours intervened this time between receipt of the bombardment order and the commencement of firing. The experience of the earlier bombardments enabled officer and enlisted personnel to execute the order efficiently despite the minimum of time for planning.

(b) It is recommended that if the SCR 522 is to be used in future operations (as in this case when a carrier aircraft did the spotting instead of the ship's seaplane), a permanent installation, along with the necessary power supply, be provided to replace the jury rig now aboard.

P A R T   S I X

1. There were no personnel casualties during the action.
2. All officers and men performed their duties satisfactorily during the action.

*E. M. Zacharias*  
E. M. ZACHARIAS.

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