

Action Report of the USS *Aroostook*, December 5, 1943 (excerpt), p. 1

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DECLASSIFIED Authority <u>NNOR 68133</u>		321 12 01513
AOC 14/116-3 Serial: 87	U.S.S. AROOSTOOK 5 FIVE POST OFFICE New York, N. Y.	few
CONFIDENTIAL		5 December 1943
From: Commanding Officer. To: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The Commander in Chief, United States Fleet.	- APPROVED - 18 Dec 1943	
Subject: Anti-aircraft action against the enemy - Report of.		
Reference: (a) Cominch. Restricted ltr. PV1/112-1/116-3 Serial 3899; October 19, 1942.		
Enclosure: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (A) Bari Berthing Plan, showing disposition of shipping. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (B) Copy of letter to Commander, U. S. Naval Forces, Northwest African Waters, describing action and recommendations for awards to personnel.		
<p>1. At 1927 to 2100, December 2, 1943, this vessel was in action against the enemy, suffering considerable minor damage, when a large force of enemy bombers, estimated at about fifty (50) in number, type unknown, inflicted a surprise attack on shipping and harbour installations in the port of Bari, Italy. Direct hits were scored on many ships, resulting in damage either by sinking, burning, or explosion, or a combination of all three, of an estimated eighteen (18) to twenty-one (21) ships out of a total of probably thirty-eight (38) to forty (40) ships of various types, mostly merchantmen, concentrated in the harbour and port.</p> <p>2. The U. S. S. AROOSTOOK, loaded with a cargo of approximately 19,000 barrels of 100 octane gasoline, was lying at anchor in the harbour in the position A, shown on Enclosure (A), with forty-five (45) fathoms of chain to port anchor in four (4) fathoms of water, head bottom.</p> <p>3. At 1925, without previous warning or alert, several flares were dropped over the harbour, and approximately fifteen (15) seconds later the first firing was opened by some of the shore batteries. At 1927 the U. S. S. AROOSTOOK opened fire with all guns, following the lead of the master gun on shore until that gun was silenced by a near-by explosion at about 1938.</p> <p>4. At approximately 1931, direct hits were scored on one or more merchant ships in berths 29-31, and on San Cataldo mole, about 1,300 feet distant from the secured end, and until</p>		
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<p>About 1950, direct hits were scored on other merchant vessels, including a tanker and ammunition ship, near berths 28-30, and at anchor in the harbour, causing great fires and terrific explosions. Fuel oil and gasoline from the sunken and damaged ships ignited and the fire spread over much of the harbour and partially across the harbour entrance. The U.S.S. <i>AROOSTOOK</i> was lying approximately 400 yards distant from the area where the most intense fires were raging and was still at this anchorage when the ammunition ship exploded. At 2133 she got underway and shifted anchorage further into the harbour, A-1, enclosure (A).</p>		
<p>5. Many bombs were seen to explode in the waters of the harbour, three of which fell approximately ninety (90) yards astern of the U.S.S. <i>AROOSTOOK</i>, seemingly lifting her entire stern out of the water. Judging from the force of the explosions, the intense fires started, and the rapid sinking of at least four medium and large sized merchantmen anchored in the harbour, it is believed that most of the bombs dropped were of five-hundred (500) to one-thousand (1,000) pounds in weight. It was later learned that from five (5) to seven (7) heavy caliber bombs were dropped at scattered points in the city, causing great damage to property and the loss of very much life.</p>		
<p>6. The "All Clear" was sounded at 2100 and, although two additional "Red" alerts were subsequently sounded, it is believed no enemy planes returned to the harbour area.</p>		
<p>7. At about 2130 the ammunition ship, at berth 28 or 29, exploded, sending flame, debris, and smoke what appeared to be at least 6,000 to 8,000 feet into the air. This explosion was felt as far as sixty-two (62) miles away, and the damage to ships, harbour installations, and buildings throughout the city as a result of this explosion was great. Explosions of a lesser intensity occurred throughout the night and following day as the fires reached the magazines and explosive cargoes carried in the burning ships. All of the ships in berths 11, 12, 17-31, and at anchor at different points in the harbour as shown on the plan, enclosure (A), were either sunk, burned, or severely damaged, as a result of direct hits by bombs or fires started from adjacent burning ships. The entire outer mole, berths 12 to 31 and adjacent waters, was a solid mass of fire and explosions, as well as in several areas among the anchorages.</p>		
<p>8. The U.S.S. <i>AROOSTOOK</i> maintained effective and consistent barrage throughout the entire action. All guns performed ex-</p>		
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colently, thirty-nine (39) rounds having been fired from the 3" 50 caliber without mishap, and 1,200 rounds fired from the four 20 1/2" guns with but two (2) minor jams, which were quickly cleared. All personnel performed in a highly commendable manner throughout the entire action. There were no casualties, other than concussion and partial deafness, sustained by personnel, which fact is considered nothing short of miraculous in view of the great amount of shrapnel and other missiles which fell on and about different parts of the ship. Approximately forty-five (45) pounds of this shrapnel and metal debris was collected from the decks and various other parts of the ship, some of the pieces weighing from six (6) to eight and one-half (8½) pounds.

9. The ship suffered no serious damage which would impair her fighting ability, though considerable minor and superficial damage was inflicted, which, until rectified, renders her uncomfortable, and unfit to perform fully and safely her present duties as a cargo gasoline carrier. Following is a summary of the damages sustained:

- (a) Both Mellin life boats pierced by shrapnel and seams opened in one (1) boat. (Temporary emergency repairs have already been made.)
- (b) Hole (3" x 5") in deck, midships, overhead of officer's Water Closet and shower, caused by shrapnel or other falling object from great height. (Temporary patch in place.)
- (c) Practically all plumbing fixtures, brackets, hangers, etc., throughout ship damaged. (Being repaired as time and material permits.)
- (d) All doors, officer's country, passageway and staterooms, blown off. (Ship's force can probably make temporary repairs to two (2) doors and nail canvas in place to serve satisfactorily on the others until permanent repairs can be effected.)
- (e) Six-inch fueling hose pierced by shrapnel. Must be replaced with new hose.
- (f) All windows in lower wheel house blown out.
- (g) 20 1/2" ammunition ready box pierced by shrapnel.
- (h) Belt under coaling line to heat exchangers carried away. Various other lines throughout ship ruptured and broken. (Ship's force repairing as time and material permits.)
- (i) Numerous shorts in electrical circuits. (Being cleared by ship's force.)
- (j) Suspected damage to starboard main diesel engine and engine foundation.

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