

DECLASSIFIED - OPNAV INST 5500.30
BY J. Kier DATE 7-15-60

ARS22/CET:had
894/LB-5
Ser: 011-53
7 September 1952

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SECURITY INFORMATION

From: Commanding Officer, USS CURRENT (ARS-22)
To: Commander Service Force, Pacific Fleet
Via: Commander Service Squadron THREE

Subj: Salvage Operations USS SARSI (ATF-111) conducted by
USS CURRENT (ARS-22) periods 31 August 1952 through
5 September 1952; narrative of

Encl: (1) Diving log period 31 August 1952 to 5 September
1952
(2) Report of damage USS SARSI (ATF-111)

1. In accordance with dispatch orders from Commander Service Squadron THREE, this vessel was ordered to Hungnam, Korea to conduct emergency salvage operations on subject vessel with view of recovering classified documents and material, to report condition of vessel and determine the practicability of refloating.

2. USS CURRENT was underway at 1900, 29 August 1952 and arrived off Wonsan Harbor at 0800, 31 August. Arrangements were made with Island Defense Commander, Yodo Island, for use of LCM boat. Accordingly CURRENT stood into Wonsan Harbor, rendezvoused with LCM at buoy "Easy" and towed LCM out and north to Hungnam, arriving at 1830, 31 August. Weather at this time was: wind - 18 knots; sea - heavy; visibility - 1 mile. On arrival, Hungnam, USS CURRENT closed with Commander Task Group 95.6 in USS BLUE (DD-744) and Commanding Officer boarded for conference. Was ordered by Task Group Commander to report for operational control to Commander Task Group 95.6 in USS COMSTOCK. Accordingly, Commanding Officer reported in person and was given all pertinent information in regard position of sinking, presence of enemy batteries, gun fire support available and an offer of all assistance possible.

3. Weather at this time had abated and the CURRENT was anchored in a position bearing 134°T, distance 8,000 yards from supposed location of wreck. LCM was brought alongside and fitted out as a diving boat.

4. At 2130 the LCM was underway to try and buoy wreck and after a four hour search returned to ship unsuccessful. Wreck was located next morning 800 yards North of charted

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position. The LCM was manned at this time by the following officers and men and remained manned by essentially the same crew throughout operations: Salvage Officer: LT C. E. TIERNAN, 319546, USN (Commanding Officer, USS CURRENT (ARS-22)); Diving Officer: CHBOSN, R.E. KREISS, 442705, USN on TAD from USS GRAPPLE (ARS-7); Divers: NERISON, N.P., 224 10 58, GMC(DV), USN. CARKIN, C.L., 201 79 12, BM1(DV), USN. JAMES, A.J., 225 00 55, EM1(DV), USN. DONNIGAN, J.T., 276 45 93, BM2(DV), USN and KRONN, M.A., 259 58 67, BMFN(DV), USN. Boat Crew: GAY, C.J., 976 69 14, BM2, USN; ASHBURN, W.E., 428 32 02, SN, USN; KNOTT, R.D., 369 54 03, SN, USN and GROSSNICKLE, D.I., 323 50 27, EM3, USN.

5. Temporary command of the USS CURRENT during absence of Commanding Officer was assumed by LTJG S. W. GAYLORD JR., 513042, USN, Executive Officer, who performed his duties in an outstanding manner during operations.

6. The following morning at first light the LCM with salvage crew again stood in and located the wreck about 1000 Item. Several dives were made, buoys were planted, mooring laid and work well started until shore battery fire forced withdrawal of boat. LCM returned to ship, returning to wreck shortly before dark. A moor was made over wreck and diving was resumed. Divers entered the ship during night, opened and recovered the contents of two safes in Captain's Cabin, recovered all papers and material of value in chart house and pilot house and made preliminary search of lower decks.

7. Upon return to ship about 0700, after nights operation, the Commanding Officer reported to Commander Task Group 95.6 in person to report progress. The diving boat was sent back to wreck with LTJG F.J. ZWOLINSKI, 452191, USN as salvage Officer and CHBOSN R.E. MILLER, 326777, USN as diving officer. The boat moored over SANSI and a search of bottom in vicinity of wreck was conducted. Safe in Executive Officer's room was opened and contents brought to surface. At 1500 the boat was taken under fire by shore batteries and after several near misses, slipped her moorings and got underway. The CURRENT stood in at flank speed to cover withdrawal. No hits were made on either boat or ship.

8. A strike was requested from Group Commander by CURRENT and accordingly USS BREMERTON (CA-130) stood up and down coast bombarding for two hours. Dive bombers also struck area.

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9. At 1830, diving boat with LT TIERRAN, CHEBON KREISS and divers, stood in to wreck and moored to one remaining buoy. Other buoys had come adrift, probably being struck by shell bursts, and unfortunately four valuable hours were wasted replanting moorings.
10. At 0530, 3 September, after a number of successful dives and recovery and a quantity of material the salvage party returned to the ship. At 0945, Commander Task Group 95.6 boarded CURRENT for conference and requested explosives be placed inside radio room, radar room, chart house and around masts and superstructure, anticipating distraction orders from higher authorities. About 2,000 pounds of explosives were taken from ship's magazine and placed in LOM.
11. At 1045 a diving boat was about to leave ship, Force Commander sent warning of immediate approach of bad weather. Boat was stripped and placed in well-deck of COMSTOCK just before storm "Mary" struck area. CURRENT stood out to sea and at 2300, 3 September, anchored off Wonsan. USS CURRENT underway at 1245, 4 September for Hungnam, storm having apparently passed. Weather rapidly abated. Upon arrival Hungnam at 1800, 4 September the LOM was delivered this ship from USS COMSTOCK and again rigged as diving and salvage boat.
12. Commanding Officer, with boat crew and divers, stood in to wreck about dusk, moored and commenced work. The boat was taken under inaccurate fire by automatic weapons from beach shortly after dark. After firing stopped, divers were again down. This was the best night in view of material recovered. Previous nights diving had familiarized divers with interior of ship and they were able to work more easily. Further, definite information had been received concerning location coding room and mail bags.
13. About midnight two star shells from an unknown source burst directly over boat and caused temporary secession of work. During night a body was recovered from ship's office in addition to four bags of mail. One weighted bag of highly classified material was recovered and two bags of classified documents were filled from inside ship.
14. A diver worked seventy minutes inside the shambles of the ship's office in total blackness attempting to identify and recover personnel records and pay accounts without success.

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File cabinets were overturned, furniture jammed and deck bulged by explosion. The deck was covered with paper and eight inches of silt. It is doubtful if any further material of value can be recovered from ship's office.

15. The wreck was located 6000 yards from nearest enemy battery and within point blank range of numerous other shore batteries. The waters are known to be mined and moored mines were reported in immediate vicinity of SANSI wreck by helicopter. Numerous floating mines are constantly reported and destroyed in area and on the night of September 4, a large floater was detonated about 150 yards from diving boat.

16. Of necessity only dives outside the wreck or in superstructure were made during daylight. All deep interior dives were during night hours, dressing, tending and diving being done in total darkness. The training, supervision and skill of the divers were demonstrated by the fact that no diving accidents were encountered during entire operation.

17. Divers were working deep inside the wreck with the constant knowledge that their tending boat above them was subject to attack and sinking or immediate withdrawal at any moment. Only a person familiar with the hazards of diving can fully realize the cool courage required to enter the pitch dark interior of sunken, torn ship in ninety feet of water under such conditions.

18. It is the opinion of this Command that few diving and salvage operations have been conducted under more hazardous conditions and accordingly recommendations are being prepared for appropriate recognition of the courage, skill and devotion to duty displayed by divers and salvage personnel attached this vessel.

19. Shortly after daylight, boat returned to ship and was stripped of salvage and diving equipment and returned to USS COMSTOCK. CHEOSN KREISS was transferred to COMSTOCK to await arrival USS GRAPPLE.

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20. At 0807, 5 September, USS CURRENT got underway in compliance orders and returned to Sasebo, Japan.

G. E. TIERNAN

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The starboard side was clear to a depth of approximately nine feet from the water line at frame 25, and five feet from the water line adjacent to the tripod. No hull damage was noted amidships or aft on the starboard side.

Port side of the hull was not examined closely. Mud was noted amidships approximately five feet below the main deck. No damage of the hull plating was noted.

A considerable amount of silt was observed within the MARSII and over the five days this vessel worked on her a five degree list to port from the upright had developed.

Salvage of the MARSII is considered within the capabilities of the naval salvage forces at present except for the proximity of enemy territory and shore batteries.

It is believed that the impending season of inclement weather and the soft mud bottom surrounding the vessel will cause her to topple within the next few months.

In her present condition the mainmast and tripod could easily be cut loose by the use of demolition charges. It is believed that she could be toppled by the proper use of explosives.

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The salvage operation conducted by this vessel on the USS SANSI (ATF-111) was primarily concerned with the recovery of crypto material, classified letters and publications and U.S. mail.

In the course of the operation the Diving Personnel found several indications of major damage to the vessel.

All the compartments entered such as the pilot house, chart house, Commanding Officer's and Executive Officer's cabins, ship's office and sick bay, the furniture and fixtures were thrown about and wrenched from their fastenings. In several instances the items were tumbled in a forward direction.

On the starboard side approximately forty feet from the bow and three feet below the boot topping a roughly circular opening about two feet in diameter with the edges rolled outward was found. Nothing could be felt inside this opening. Six feet forward a vertical split approximately eighteen inches long and one half inch wide was discovered. The hull, forward of this split about three feet, was found to be indented in to a depth of about one foot over an area of about eight feet horizontally and vertically from the boot topping extending into the mud which was approximately nine feet below the boot topping. The hole itself was evidently buried in mud and from its depth would indicate a moored rather than a floater.

Decks and bulkheads in the vicinity of the ship's office were badly damaged. The coaming on the water tight door at frame 29 centerline first platform deck was bent aft with the door open. The passage deck outside the ship's office was buckled upward approximately eighteen inches and just aft of frame 29 on the starboard side of the passage a jagged split was found. The starboard bulkhead of the passage from frame 29 aft about six feet in the vicinity of the sick bay was pushed into the passage twelve to fourteen inches. Access forward could not be gained through the door at frame 29 due to a large sheet of jagged metal jamming the passage just forward of the door.

The mechanical rudder angle indicator on the steering stand was indicating full right rudder.

A considerable amount of mud and shale was observed on the forecastle.

No apparent damage was observed on topside and the foremast and tripod appeared in good condition.

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