

Frightening, to Put It Mildly

In the Sulu Sea—and about an hour after the attack on *Nashville*—sailors of the Heavy Covering and Carrier Group were busy with incoming bogeys. There were seven *kamikazes* and three fighter escorts to begin with, but C.A.P. waylaid and splashed all but three, and two more fell to ship AA on the rim of the group's formation. When the last plane exited the gauntlet, its pilot climbed, banked into a dive, and aimed for destroyer *Haraden* (DD-585), then speeding to an air defense station.

Haraden gun crews barely opened fire on the diving aircraft before it careened into the ship's starboard side, its inboard wing slicing across the starboard bridge wing and its engine and fuselage uprooting the forward stack. The momentum of impact catapulted both plane and stack wreckage over *Haraden*'s port side while the explosion of the plane's bomb cratered *Haraden*'s forward fire room.

To Thomas Inman, a machinist mate petty officer in charge of the forward engine room just aft of the fire room, the collision was a loud *boom* followed by a cloud of fiber and dust from the room's forest of steam piping. Steam pressure plummeted, leaving Inman no choice but to ring up stop and secure the throttle. When engine room lights dimmed and the steam generator began vibrating wildly, he secured the entire engine room and took his gang topside.

When he reached the starboard-side boat deck, Inman saw destruction everywhere: the forward stack gone; the main mast bent; a piece of the bridge sliced away; bright scraps of signal flags strewn across the deck; bulging deckhouse bulwarks; torpedo warheads riddled with shrapnel and leaking molten TNT; a whaleboat splintered, afire and hanging from one davit.

Inman crossed the deck, stepping carefully to avoid tripping over bodies. On the port side he spotted the canister-shaped turret housing that sat atop No. 2 torpedo mount (what torpedomen called the "dog house") lying on its side, the head of Chief Torpedoman William Sproule crushed beneath its rim.

Haraden lost power to its remaining boiler and engine room, leaving the ship momentarily dead in the water, without water pressure or communications, its guns only able to fire in manual control. Damage control personnel converged on the scene and split into teams. While power and water main pressure were out, men used gasoline-powered portable pumps to battle fires. Others, including Carl Spiron, 19, an electrician's mate in the after damage control party, began retrieving dead and wounded.

The day before, Spiron had been reassigned from the amidships repair party. The men in this party were among those bearing the brunt of the crash and explosion. One wounded sailor Spiron ended up helping was the very man with whom he'd just switched assignments.

The casualties—they would total 14 dead and another 24 wounded—were brought forward by stretcher to a triage area set up in a passageway near the ward room. *Haraden*'s medical officer (this time, at least, no medical personnel were wounded or killed) sorted through a collection of casualties mirroring the plane's trail of destruction. Fatalities, in addition to the ship's chief torpedo man, included a water tender, a signalman, a quartermaster, another torpedoman, and a fire controlman. The wounded men who stood a chance of surviving were carried inside; others were removed to a stretch of main deck nearly awash in blood.

Destroyer *Twiggs* (DD-591) was along *Haraden*'s port side within minutes of the crash, using her own fire main pressure and hoses to help contain fires. As with destroyers *Stanly* and *Dashiell* closing with cruiser *Nashville* to render aid, *Twiggs*' time alongside *Haraden* was a chance for her sailors to get a firsthand look at the destruction caused by one plane and its suicide pilot. *Twiggs* and *Haraden* were both Fletcher-class destroyers, so it was a little bit like coming upon an identical twin after a horrible accident—like seeing your own self in ruins and wondering just how that happened and how it might feel. To Robert Melville, 19, a quartermaster on *Twiggs*' bridge, "It was frightening, to put it mildly", to see *Haraden*'s bridge (Melville's own station on *Twiggs*), in such bad shape.

Excerpt from "At War With The Wind" by David Sears. Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, 13 December 1944