

113392

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

of a

BOARD OF INVESTIGATION

Convened on board the

U.S.S. PC 815

By order of

Commander, Fleet Operational Training Command,
Pacific

to inquire into and report upon the
circumstances attending the firing
of three shots from the U.S.S.
PC 815, and the anchoring of that
vessel in the vicinity of the
Middle Coronados Islands on
28 June 1943.

FINISHED FILE PERS 820
CONFIDENTIAL FILES

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UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
Flagship of Commander, Fleet Operational Training Command

A17-25

Serial 992

13 JUL 1943

The proceedings and findings of the investigation in the attached case are approved.

Lieutenant Lafayette R. Hubbard, D-V(S), U.S. Naval Reserve, has been relieved as commanding officer, and given a letter of admonition. Lieutenant (junior grade) George Milton Amann, D-V(O), U.S. Naval Reserve, has also been given a letter of admonition.

It is recommended that no further action be taken.

Frank A. Bruisted,
Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy,
Commander, Fleet Operational Training Command, Pacific.

(513)

FINDING OF FACTS

1. That the U.S.S. PC 815 fired 4 rounds of 3"/50 caliber target ammunition at about 1619 on 28 June, 1943, from the one 3"/50 caliber gun mounted on board.
2. That no navigational data was available to determine the position or course of the PC 815 at the time the shots were fired at about 1619 on 28 June, 1943.
3. That the position of the ship was in general, Northeast of South Coronados Island at an undetermined distance.
4. That land was in the line of sight at the time of firing and that this land was some part of the Coronados Island.
5. That neither a safety officer nor a check-sight observer was stationed at the gun.
6. That all the fall of shot of the 4 shots fired from the 3"/50 caliber gun were not observed by any officer on the ship.
7. That an undetermined number of splashes were observed in the water in the direction of land during the firing.
8. That evidence of shells hitting land or rocks on the Northern end of South Coronados Island was observed on two separate instances during the conduct of the firing.
9. That evidence of a shell hitting land or rocks on the Northern end of South Coronados Island or on land behind the Northeastern end of South Coronados Island in the line of fire was observed on a third instance during the conduct of the firing.
10. That the ship was underway at the time of firing making one-third engine speed, about 9 knots.
11. That there was no U.S. Naval directive prescribing that the PC 815 fire guns of any caliber in any area on 28 June, 1943.
12. That upon completion of firing of the 3"/50 caliber gun the PC 815 proceeded on various courses and speeds and at about 1706 on 28 June, 1943, anchored about 500 yards off the Eastern shore of South Coronados Islands in 7 fathoms of water with 65 fathoms of chain to the starboard anchor with the lighthouse structure on the Northeast sector of South Coronados Island bearing about 326° true and the left tangent of South Coronados Island bearing about 185° true.
13. That after anchoring on the afternoon of 28 June, 1943, firing of .30 caliber and .45 caliber weapons was conducted from the port and starboard quarters of the PC 815 by certain officers and members of the crew during the period from about 1730 until sometime after sunset.
14. That approximately 80 rounds of .30 caliber and 40 rounds of .45 caliber ammunition was expended, some of which were fired into the water in the direction of South Coronados Island.
15. That shots from the small arms firing were not observed to hit the South Coronados Island.
16. That the ship remained at anchor throughout the night of 28-29 June, 1943.
17. That the ship did not at any time on 28 June, 1943, anchor in the vicinity of the Middle Coronados Island.

18. That the PC-815 anchored in the vicinity of South Coronados Island on the afternoon of 27 June and remained overnight in approximately the same position as the ship anchored on 28 June, 1943.

19. That there was no U. S. Naval directive authorizing the PC-815 to anchor in the vicinity of the Coronados Islands on 27 and 28 June, 1943.

U.S.S. PC-815

Board of Investigation convened aboard the U.S.S. PC-815 on June 30, 1943.

INDEX

Organization of the board	Page
Findings of fact	1
Final entry	71
Adjournments	72
	24, 31, 34, 72

TESTIMONY

Name of Witness	Examined by the Board	Examined by the Recorder	Examined by Interested Party	Examined by Counsel for Interested Party
HUBBARD, Lafayette, R., Lieut., USNR.	.1, 2, 3, . . . . .	.1, 2, 5		32, 64
NAVARRO, Lewis J., Ensign, USNR.	. . . . . 33, 70			
WALKER, Darrell, Ensign, USNR.	. . . . . 6, 9, 11, 42 . . . . .	. . . . . 5, 23, 43 . . . . .	. . . . . 11, 12	
MORAN, George A., GM3c, USN.	. . . . . 7, 67 . . . . .	. . . . . 6 . . . . .	. . . . . 69	
WEST, Billie J., S2c, USN	. . . . . 12, 50 . . . . .	. . . . . 12		
McCONCHIE, Robert J., jr., S2c, USN	. . . . . 14 . . . . .	. . . . . 14		
ASMANN, George H., Lieut. (jg) USNR.	. . . . . 15 . . . . .	. . . . . 15, 16 . . . . .	. . . . . 16	
PRICE, G. T., SM1c, USN	. . . . . 17, 19, 20, 52 . . . . .	. . . . . 17, 19, 20 . . . . .	. . . . . 20	55
COATS, C. C., SC1c, USN	. . . . . 21, 47, 49 . . . . .	. . . . . 25 . . . . .	. . . . . 21	49
SOBCZYNSKI, A/P, MoMM2c, USN	. . . . . 22 . . . . .	. . . . . 22		
WEYMOUTH, C. E., Ensign, USNR.	. . . . . 23, 64, 65 . . . . .	. . . . . 23		64
WEAVER, J. E., Cox, USN.	. . . . . 27, 44, 46 . . . . .	. . . . . 26, 46		28, 46
McGUIRE, George, Som2c, USN.	. . . . . 29 . . . . .	. . . . . 29		30
WELCH, Lonnie W., jr., Som2c, USN.	. . . . . 37 . . . . .	. . . . . 35		43
DEXTER, J. S., QM3c, USN.	. . . . . 57 . . . . .	. . . . . 56		
RIESING, Robert, MoMM1c, USNR.	. . . . . 61, 63 . . . . .	. . . . . 60		62, 63
	. . . . . 65 . . . . .	. . . . . 65		

Exhibits :	Character of	Admitted in evidence	Page
A :	Extracts from Quartermaster's notebook of the PC 815	:	:
:	from 1400 to 2100, June 28, 1943	:	3
B :	Extracts from Engineer's Bellbook of the PC 815 from	:	:
:	1400 to 2100, June 28, 1943	:	3
C :	Extracts from Deck Log of the PC 815 from 1400 to 2100	:	:
:	June 28, 1943	:	3
:		:	:

(215)

D	: Weekly Operating plan formulated at District Operations	:	
	: Officer's conference, Saturday, June 26, 1943.....	:	3
E	: Extracts from Navigation Workbook of the PC 815 dated 28-29	:	
	: June, 1943, for the hours applicable to the investigation.	:	5
F	: Chart of the Los Coronados Island.....	:	24

(10)

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
Flag ship of Commander, Fleet Operational Training Command.

A17-25

Serial 847

30 June 1943.

From: Commander, Fleet Operational Training Command, Pacific.
To: Commander Jacob E. Cooper, U.S. Navy.

Subject: Board of investigation to inquire into and report upon the circumstances attending the firing of three shots from the U.S.S. PC 815 and the anchoring of that vessel in the vicinity of the Middle Coronados Islands on 28 June 1943.

1. A board of investigation consisting of yourself as senior member and of Lieutenant Gene M. Harris, D-V(S), U.S. Naval Reserve, and Lieutenant Frank G. Morris, jr., D-V(G), U.S. Naval Reserve, as additional members, and of Ensign Noel J. Dyer, D-V(S), U.S. Naval Reserve, as recorder, will convene on board the U.S.S. PC 815 at the earliest opportunity for the purpose of inquiring into and reporting upon the circumstances attending the firing of three shots from the U.S.S. PC 815 and the anchoring of that vessel in the vicinity of the Middle Coronados Islands at or about 1600 on 28 June 1943.

2. The board is empowered to call witnesses and to take testimony under oath.

3. You will notify Lieutenant L. Ron Hubbard, D-V(S), U.S. Naval Reserve, of the time and place of meeting, and that he will be a party to the investigation in the status of an interested party and will be accorded the rights of such party in accordance with the provisions of Naval Courts and Boards.

4. The court will thoroughly inquire into the matter hereby submitted to it and will include in its findings a full statement of the facts it may deem to be established.

5. The proceedings will be conducted in accordance with the provisions of Chapter X, Naval Courts and Boards.

Frank A. Braisted,
Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy,
Commander, Fleet Operational Training Command, Pacific.

(87)

FIRST DAY

U.S.S. PC 815
San Diego, California
30 June 1943.

The Board met at 1:00 p.m.

Presents:

Commander Jacob E. Cooper, U.S. Navy, senior member.
Lieutenant Gene M. Harris, D-V(S), U.S. Naval Reserve, and
Lieutenant Frank G. Morris, jr., D-V(G), U.S. Naval Reserve, members; and
Ensign Noel J. Dyer, Ensign, D-V(S), U.S. Naval Reserve, recorder.
The recorder introduced Russell H. Facewalk, yeoman second class,
U.S. Navy, as reporter.

The convening order, hereto prefixed, was read by the Recorder, and the Board determined upon its procedure and decided to sit with open doors.

Lieutenant L. Ron Hubbard, D-V(G), U.S. Naval Reserve, Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. PC 815, entered as Interested Party, and stated that he was unable to obtain counsel and waived his right to counsel for the first day's proceedings.

The Interested Party was informed of his rights.

No witnesses not otherwise connected with the investigation were present.

The Interested Party was called as a witness by the Recorder and was duly sworn.

Examined by the Recorder:

1. Q. State your name, rank, and present station.
A. Lieutenant Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, D-V(G), U.S. Naval Reserve, Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. PC 815.
2. Q. How long have you been attached to the PC 815?
A. Since her commissioning on April 20, 1943.
3. Q. Were you on board on June 28, 1943?
A. I was.

Examined by the Board:

4. Q. Relate the movements and operations of the PC 815 from 1500 to 1700 on 28 June 1943.
A. The operations during that period to the best of my knowledge and belief is, that at 1600 or thereabouts, this ship received permission from OTC to secure from exercises. In view of the fact that it was only 1600 and in view of the fact that this ship had been informed that it must make every effort to complete its shakedown, of which it had had very little, due to delay in repairs at the Destroyer Base, San Diego, California, I ordered general quarters and exercises at general quarters. The ship came to general quarters and as there was a target in the vicinity used by aircraft for bombing practice I ordered that four rounds of target ammunition be expended when I observed the range was clear of ships. The order to commence fire was given. The exercises having been concluded and the night appearing foggy and this vessel being without accurate calibrations, and in that I had had a very arduous day and have not yet been able to train my officers to dependability in piloting, I proceeded to the bank at the East side of South Coronado Island and anchored there in 7 fathoms of water after the chain had been veered, bearing 182° on the South Point, 336° on the North Point of South Coronado Island - degrees are gyro.

The ship secured and the men at dusk fished for whatever they could catch. The gunner's mates and other people of the landing party fired small arms from the starboard side of the fan tail at a target thrown over from

the ship. The firing was to the Eastward and no shots could have possibly ricocheted into the Coronados as I supervised it personally. A very small quantity of ammunition was expended for I was trying to teach my officers to safely handle a .45.

At no time was I aware of invading Mexican Territorial waters, and had no intention whatsoever of causing any damage to Mexican property, or to frighten the Mexican population.

During the night a skiff approached the ship, evidently from shore, and the men in it requested of us 10 gallons of gas to get to the mainland, which gas my Executive Officer did not see fit to expend. There were several fishing vessels, names not recorded, lying well inside us close to shore and in communication with it. At no time did anyone even casually refer to the Island being shelled.

My actions during this period were based upon: (1) the necessity of training the gun crews at every possible chance; (2) the unofficial statements to me at the Saturday conference by Commander Ferguson that it would be all right for me to arrange for planes which I took to include as permission to hold non-scheduled firing practice; and, (3) an attempt to obtain enough rest for myself so that I could competently instruct my officers on the following day in mousetrap firing and anti-submarine warfare training.

That is the answer to the Board's question to the best of my knowledge and belief.

5. Q. Who was the OTC of your group at about 1600, 28 June 1943?
 A. The YP 593.

Reexamined by the recorder:

6. Q. Are you the custodian of the Quartermaster's Notebook?
 A. Yes, I am, here it is.

7. Q. Refer to the Quartermaster's Notebook which you have, and state at what time you gave the order to commence firing to the 3" battery.

A. At 1617 general quarters was sounded - it must have been immediately thereafter and I do not know the exact moment. To the best of my memory, a very short time after general quarters sounded. Not more than 10 minutes until the 4 rounds were expended.

8. Q. What guns fired when you gave the order?
 A. Number 1 gun only.

Reexamined by the board:

9. Q. At what time did you secure from general quarters?
 A. At 1652, according to this notebook.

10. Q. At what time did you anchor?
 A. At 1706.

11. Q. How much chain did you have out?
 A. In 7 fathoms of water with 5 shots of chain out.

12. Q. What time did you get underway the next morning?
 A. At 0734 anchor was weighed.

13. Q. At what time did you conduct the firing from the ship at small arms?

A. After we anchored, no specific time can be stated. We had been at anchor about 35 to 40 minutes, approximately 1745.

Reexamined by the recorder:

14. Q. Are you the official custodian of the Quartermaster's Notebook, Engineer's Bellbook, and Deck Log of the PC 815?

A. I am.

15. Q. Please produce them.

A. Here they are.

I offer in evidence these documents and ask that an extract from the Quartermaster's Notebook from 1400 to 2100 on 28 June 1943, be made, certified as a true copy by the recorder and attached to the record as Exhibit "A". I further ask that extracts from the Engineer's Bellbook and the Deck Log for the same time and date be appended to the record as Exhibits "B" and "C" respectively.

They were submitted to the Board and Interested Party. No objection was made and the documents were admitted in evidence and permission given to append certified copies of extracts from them.

16. Q. I show you an operating plan dated 26 June 1943. Do you recognize it?

A. I do.

17. Q. Did you receive a copy of the operating plan dated 26 June 1943?

A. I did.

I offer in evidence this document and ask that it be admitted in evidence as Exhibit "D".

There being no objection the document was admitted in evidence as Exhibit "D".

Reexamined by the board:

18. Q. Referring to Exhibit "D", did the operating plan authorize you to anchor for the night?

A. It does not specifically so authorize.

19. Q. Did you remain in the areas assigned during 28 June 1943?

A. Yes, the areas assigned includes the Coronados.

20. Q. Did you have authority to anchor for the night?

A. Yes, sir.

21. Q. What was this authority?

A. The authority of custom as given to me by the Sound School instructor who was aboard as instructor (Ensign Weymouth) and whom I believe to be in possession of all pertinent data.

22. Q. Did you receive orders for night steaming or night operations in the areas assigned for the night of 28-29 June 1943?

A. An examination of my radio log and signal logs will demonstrate that I had received no such orders while operating, and none had been given to me prior to departing on Sunday, 27 June 1943.

23. Q. Had you received any verbal orders prior to departure in connection with the operation of your vessel during the night of 28-29 June 1943?

A. No operating order was given me for that period aside from those contained in Exhibit "D".

24. Q. During the small arms firing, which occurred after anchoring on the 28th, what was the largest caliber weapon that was fired?

A. .45 pistol.

25. Q. What authority did you have to fire your 3" gun in the afternoon of 28 June 1943?

A. Only the authority that I did not know it was forbidden to fire a non-scheduled firing. On Wednesday, 30 June, on which date, with the knowledge of Commander Ferguson, and on his advice, I had arranged for a plane with the Air Command here to rendezvous with me during a blank period of the schedule. Nothing was said to me of authorized firing areas and I happened