

U. S. S. BARNETT

June 9, 1942.

AP11/
Serial

FROM: The Commanding Officer.
TO: Commander Western Sea Frontier.
SUBJECT: Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet Secret despatch 311221 of May 1942; Report of Investigation Regarding Compromising and Decoding of.

1. In accordance with verbal instructions of Commander Western Sea Frontier an investigation of the subject matter has been conducted by the commanding officer and a report of this investigation is contained in the following paragraphs.
2. Stanley Johnston of the Chicago Tribune reported on board the U.S.S. BARNETT on May 15, 1942, with the officers and men of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON. Mr. Johnston was assigned to a room with Commander M.T. SELIGMAN, USN., the Executive Officer of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON and Commander H.S. DUCKWORTH, USN., the Air Officer of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON.
3. The Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT did not see or speak to Mr. Johnston during the period he was on board and the Executive Officer and Communication Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT only had slight conversations with him and gave him no information.
4. Due to the shortage of qualified officer personnel it has not been the practice of the ship to decode Fox Schedule messages which were not addressed to the ship. After the U.S.S. LEXINGTON officers reported on board the Executive Officer of the LEXINGTON, Commander SELIGMAN, proposed to the Commanding Officer that he utilize the five qualified decoding officers of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON for a communication decoding watch and that they be permitted to decode Fox Schedule messages concerning impending fleet action in the Pacific as was customary on the U.S.S. LEXINGTON. The Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT then established a decoding watch composed of the five qualified LEXINGTON decoding officers.

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5. Commander SELIGMAN stated that it was customary on the U.S.S. LEXINGTON for the Executive Officer and department heads to see all decoded Fox Schedule messages and requested that this same arrangement be permitted on the U.S.S. BARNETT. This was agreed to as it was proposed by a responsible officer.

6. The following U.S.S. LEXINGTON officers were assigned to the decoding watch:

Lt(jg) P.C. BREWER, NR
Ens. J.B. JOHNSON, NR
Ens. GY. MCKINNON, NR
Ens. R.E. HEBBLER, NR
Ens. E.H. RAILSBACK, NR

One or more of the above officers decoded the subject named despatch and all probably read it. This despatch was also seen by the Captain of the U.S.S. BARNETT, the Executive Officer, the Communication Officer and possibly the Assistant Gunnery Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT, as well as the following officers from the U.S.S. LEXINGTON:

Comdr. M.T. SELIGMAN, USN
Lt Comdr A.F. JUNKLER, USN
Comdr. H.S. DUCKWORTH, USN

7. The security measures on the U.S.S. BARNETT for the handling of secret messages of this character consist of:

(a) A locked decoding room containing a ECM decoding machine in a Type 8 Safe and a three-combination lock safe to which only ~~the following officers~~ designated decoding officers and the ship's Communication Officer have access.

(b) The decoded messages are not copied but the tape is pasted on a sheet of paper and placed in a secret folder.

(c) The secret folder containing the messages was then delivered to the Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT by the Communication Officer, who also showed it to the Executive Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT. The secret folder was then turned over to Lieut(jg) P.C. BREWER, NR, the senior U.S.S. LEXINGTON decoding officer, who in turn was to show it to the Executive Officer and heads of departments of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON.

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7. (cont)

(d) It was thoroughly understood by the Executive Officer of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON that the LEXINGTON officers to whom these messages would be shown were himself and the three heads of departments.

(e) When the messages had served their purpose they were burned by the Communication Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT.

8. It has come to the attention of the Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT that Commander M.T. SELIGMAN, USN., the Executive Officer of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON made a statement in substance as follows: to Lieut(jg) D. BONTECOU, NR, the Communication Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT that he had been authorized on the U.S.S. LEXINGTON to show all secret messages and letters to Mr. Johnston." The Communication Officer of the U.S.S. BARNETT did not pay much attention to this statement at the time as it came out in a general conversation being conducted. In view of the above it seems probable that the subject named despatch was shown to Mr. Johnston by a member of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON organization. The U.S.S. LEXINGTON officers would appear to have justified such a disclosure in view of the fact that Mr. Johnston had been permitted to witness a large sea battle and become familiar with the details of the naval operations connected therewith.

9. Commander M.T. SELIGMAN, the Executive Officer of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON, had in his possession a copy of the secret report of the Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON regarding the loss of his ship, and while on board prepared a complete tracing of the Coral Sea Battle and its attended operation. If Mr. Johnston was shown the subject named despatch he was probably also shown the above reports and tracings.

W. B. PHILLIPS



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