

Op-16-B-5

NAVY DEPARTMENT

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23 Mar 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

1945 MAR 28 PM 3 28

ALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS ALCEDO, Panamanian Freighter, 1349 G.T., owned by J. Lauritzen, Ltd., Copenhagen, Denmark, chartered to War Shipping Administration.

1. The ALCEDO was torpedoed at 2305 GCT, 28 Feb 45, in 64.09.30N - 23.12W, having sailed from Loch Ewe, Scotland, 21 Feb in convoy UR-155 for Reykjavik, Iceland, loaded with a general cargo comprised of Army, Navy, and NAAFI (Navy, Army Air Forces Institution (British)) stores and mail, draft 16'2" aft, 15' forward. Vessel sank stern first with a starboard list at 2325.

2. Vessel was on course 021<sup>0</sup>, speed 10 knots in 57 fathoms, not zigzagging, degaussing on 27 amps, radio silent, port and starboard navigational lights were burning dimly in accordance with instructions issued by the convoy commodore, 2 lookouts, one on the bridge and 1 Armed Guard on aft gun platform. The weather was clear, slight sea, wind NNW force 4-5, full moon, visibility good. The SS LYRA (NOR) was clearly visible 3 cables ahead and the MS YEMASSE (PAN) was visible 3 cables abeam of the LYRA's port side; 2 Armed trawler escorts ahead and one to starboard. ALCEDO's convoy position was #22.

3. At 2305 a torpedo struck on the starboard side between #3 and #4 holds. Explosion was weak and muffled and sounded much like a depth charge explosion. Survivors thought torpedo struck low and that it was nearing the end of its run. Track of torpedo was not seen. Explosion gave off black smoke with burning embers, followed by white smoke which possibly came from the boilers. Ship veered slightly to starboard. Mainmast was sheared off and it fell to port. Propeller shaft was broken and engines were secured immediately. There was immediate flooding forward of #4 hold. Ship sank at 2325 going down by the stern with a starboard list. Survivors could not agree as to the number of torpedoes which struck the ship but there was one dull, muffled explosion which everyone heard. Some survivors insist they heard a second explosion but this could not be verified. Distress signal sent twice giving SSSS and position; radio operator did not wait for a reply. No counter offensive possible. Confidential publications were stowed in a steel chest in the chart room. The chart room door was closed but unlocked and it is assumed the publications went down with the ship. Special delivery mail pouch in Master's cabin sank with the ship.

4. Captain ordered abandon ship almost immediately upon arriving on deck as the starboard side aft was already awash. Ship was abandoned at 2315; most of crew left in lifeboats and rafts, 8 jumped overboard and swam for a raft. Survivors were picked up at 0130, 1 Mar by the HMT HOME GUARD, which had made a preliminary search for the sub, and were landed at Reykjavik at 1010. Total complement on board was 38, including 32 merchant crew, 5 Armed Guard, and one U.S. Navy passenger; 3 merchant crew missing presumed lost, 35 survived, 2 merchant crew injured and hospitalized.

5. The sub was not sighted by the survivors.

6. All survivors were somewhat perturbed over the fact that navigational lights were used when visibility was favorable and since it was known that the

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convoy was passing through a danger area.

Armed Guard crew considered the open locks on the boat falls to be very unsatisfactory and they recommended that another type lock be used as difficulty would possibly be encountered with the lifeboats in heavy weather.

The interviewing officer stated that more emphasis could have been made towards merchant crew watchstanders wearing lifejackets at all times.

The Master and 2 officers of the MS YEMASSEE stated they observed at 0230Z, 1 Mar, in 64.11N - 21.54W, a periscope 50-100 yards off the starboard quarter proceeding on the same course and speed as the convoy, 100° and 12 knots. None of the Armed Guard saw this periscope therefore guns were not fired. Interviewing officer stated that at 0030, 1 Mar, an escort aircraft obtained a radar contact, saw a light colored patch in the water but made no attack. Position was in vicinity of ALCEDO. Contact was lost almost immediately.

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