

AXTELL J. BYLES (April 18, 1942)

Vessel was proceeding in a convoy, which included 7 other vessels. The convoy was not zigzagging.

The torpedo struck the vessel on the starboard side in #3 tank, and exploded, doing considerable damage to Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5 tanks, and demolishing the midship deck houses, including the navigation bridge. None of the ship's personnel was killed and none was seriously injured. The vessel did not sink, her after steering wheel was connected and, steering from aft, she was brought into port by her own personnel.

SAN JACINTO (April 21, 1942)

Of the crew of 79, there were 74 survivors, and 95 passengers of a list of 104 were saved. Several persons were killed and wounded when the ship was first attacked. The deck around one of the lifeboats was blown away, rendering the boat useless. The engines were immediately stopped and orders given to abandon. Within 10 minutes the lifeboats were ordered lowered, and several life rafts were cut loose. In about 15 minutes nearly everybody had left the vessel. After the initial attack, a period of 15 to 18 minutes elapsed before firing was resumed, possibly to permit abandonment of the ship. The ship was then subjected to what appeared to be a cross fire from two and possibly three enemy submarines, which were flanking it at a range of about 500 yards. This action caused the ship to burst out in flames in various parts of the superstructure. An explosion was also heard, which blew a large part of the after housing apart.

During all this confusion, the Master of the vessel remained on the bridge, directing the effort to abandon ship, and it is believed that some posthumous award should be made.

Statements from the Chief Officer:

"A. --- and in the morning we went to work and located a hole in the boat. It looked like bullets struck it or something. I plugged it up with a toggle bolt and we were all set.

"Q. Did you have any available bolt for that purpose?

"A. Yes, sir, we had a whole kit of stove bolts, and toggles and washers, everything, all complete."

"Q. Have you any recommendations at this time that you wish to offer to the Board for the betterment of conditions aboard merchant vessels engaged in the trade?

"A. I have one, yes, sir; that's about the compasses in the lifeboats. I would recommend that there should be some kind of a change in the compasses because what we had there was absolutely useless, the compasses, which were up to regulations. They were the regulation compasses we had, but evidently they were no good.