

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON

I.O.F.

Op-16-B-5

CONFIDENTIAL

1943 January 11, 1943
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SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by survivors of the MS BUCHANAN, Panamanian freighter, 5614 G.T., owned by the U. S. Maritime Commission and operated by W.S.A.

1. The BUCHANAN was torpedoed without warning at 2100 GMT, on November 12, 1942, in 52.06 N, 25.54 W, enroute independently from New York to Liverpool with a cargo of fuel oil and gasoline in special tanks, 5,000 bags U.S. mail and a deck load of planes and invasion barges, mean draft about 25'. The vessel sank plunging stern first at 2100 GMT.
2. She was on course 51° true, speed 15 knots, ship had been zigzagging but had stopped at time of attack, blacked out, radio had been used at 0100 on the 11th to report the vessel's position in accordance with instructions, 5 trained lookouts; 2 on each wing of the bridge and one on gun platform aft. The weather was cloudy, sea smooth, wind SW, force 2, no moon, visibility low, no ships in sight.
3. Two torpedoes struck on the port side, one in No. 5 hold and one in the forepeak. The explosion burst the ship's side, main and shelter decks. Almost immediately Nos. 4 and 5 hatches were ablaze. Engineroom telegraph was rung to stop engines but it was possible that the propeller shaft had been broken. Neither the torpedo nor the track was seen at any time. After ship had been abandoned the sub surfaced and fired a second torpedo which struck the vessel. Distress signal was sent and an answer received. No counter offensive offered and confidential codes were thrown overboard in a perforated metal box, except one copy of S.P. 02413(345) which was being used and that either went down with ship or was destroyed by fire.
4. After the two torpedoes struck the vessel, it remained on an even keel and was obviously foundering. The master and chief officer had a short conference and decided to abandon ship. All hands entered 4 lifeboats and pulled clear. All boats remained on the spot until noon November 13, when, on orders from the master, set sail for Ireland. Boats became separated because of a push breeze springing up. The SS LIGHTNING picked up 1 boat on November 16; the HMS CLAIRE picked up the 2nd and 3rd boats on November 21 and the HMS LEAMINGTON picked up the 4th boat on November 20. There were 48 crew members, 14 armed guard, 12 Army passengers on board, and all were rescued.
5. The submarine was described as small 250 tons, the same as pictured in ONI-220-A & ONI-204, except that there appeared to be a wire or cable running from bow to conning tower and back to stern, painted solid black, new and shiny, conning tower similar to German conning tower as shown in ONI-220-A(250T) except that it appeared to extend further aft with a gun mounted about amidships, bulges on side of hull but not on superstructure, 1 gun forward, appeared to have a net cutter, bow appeared to be like that of 517 ton sub in ONI-204. The survivors were interrogated by the sub commander,

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who asked name of ship, flag she was flying, departure point, destination, and only the name of the ship was given and the commander said "Thank You". The commander spoke good English with a slight German accent and his age was estimated from 40 on up. Submarine was handled beautifully, one time survivors thought their lifeboat would be rammed but skillful maneuvering prevented it. The sub was last seen disappearing in the darkness. The sub was also described as a 740 ton German type.

6. Discussion with survivors indicated clearly that neither the passengers, merchant crew or the armed guard had been properly indoctrinated as to behavior under questioning by the enemy. The ship sparked slightly through the funnels at dusk and dawn when speed was increased to the fullest extent; this sparking may have disclosed vessel in low visibility. The following suggestions were made:

Each ship going singly should be equipped with sound detectors, by which the sound waves of the submarines could be picked up and thus avoid the attack.

The ammunition for use in the flare guns should be the same size as that used in a Very gun - as in their case a plane dropped ammunition for a Very gun which was useless because it wouldn't fit their flare gun.

Lifeboats should be equipped with Aldis lamps for the purpose of attracting attention and identification.

Each lifeboat should have a portable radio for the purpose of hastening rescue.

Wooden lifeboats should have the windshields fastened on the outside rather than on the inside to prevent swamping.

Each lifeboat should be equipped with smoke pots to attract attention.

Cigarettes should be packed in watertight packages, otherwise they get watersoaked and are useless.

H. V. STEBBINS
Lieut., U.S.N.R.

CC: ONI-B-8, Op-16-C(Ensign Judd), F-10, COMINCH, COMINCH F-21-22, F-252, F-353, F-37(C&R), Op-20-G-M, Op-23-L, Op-28, Op-30, Op-39, BuShips, BuOrd(Re-6-B), BuOrd, Atlantic Fleet Anti-Sub Unit, BuPers-222-23322, CG, DIO-1,3,4,5,6,7(3 copies),8,10(4 copies),11(3 copies),12,13,14(4 copies), 15ND's.