

Op-16-B-5
CONFIDENTIALNAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
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January 22, 1943

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors MV "CALIFORNIA EXPRESS", Norwegian Cargo Ship, 3649 G.T., A/S Wenoka, S. Herlofson & Co., Mgrs; Nortraship.

1. The "CALIFORNIA EXPRESS" was narrowly missed by a torpedo at 1020 - 1025 GMT on December 30, 1942 at 44° 18' N., 63° 16' W., while enroute from Barrow-in-Furness to Halifax, original destination St. John, N.B., in ballast. Ship suffered no further attack and continued to port undamaged.

2. Ship was on course 297° true at 15 knots, having changed from course 327° true with Sambro Light Ship just ahead, after 1000 GMT no longer following zigzag 30° either side of course because of close proximity to shore, 2 gunners on after gun platform. No data available concerning blackout or previous use of radio. Weather slightly overcast, sea light, E.N.E. wind - force not available, Sambro Light Ship had just been sighted. Information is not available concerning visibility and moonlight.

3. At 1015 GMT 2 gunners on after gun platform sighted Sambro Light Ship, examining their watches to verify the time. One felt cold and moved about, coming to extreme after edge. He noticed a hissing sound, unlike ordinary sound, from the ship's wake. He looked down and observed a torpedo track coming from starboard about 5° aft of the beam, passing about 5 feet from the stern, having progressed about 10 fathoms to port when he noticed it. He looked at the track through powerful binoculars for about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to starboard. Other gunner examined track through binoculars. Gunner attempted to telephone bridge; ran to report, to Chief Officer on getting no response. On order of Master W/T message was sent; "SSSS de BNTV - TORPEDO TRACK SEEN POSITION 8 MILES BEARING 117 DEGREES OFF SAMBRO LIGHT SHIP * BNTV." Time of message was 1037 GMT. No other torpedo tracks were observed and nothing was sighted on the surface in the direction from which torpedo came.

4. Ship was not damaged and there were no casualties.

5. Submarine was not sighted at any time.

6. In view of the close proximity to an important convoy port, it was considered that the Master acted correctly in breaking W/T silence in order to report the attack.

Accompanying sketch shows the ship headed on course 297°, and the track of the torpedo passing just to the stern of the vessel on estimated course 215°.

I. S. FLORY
Ensign, USNR

CC: ONI-B-8, 16-G(Ensign Judd), 16-Z(4 copies), F-10, Cominch, Cominch F-21-22, F-252, F-353, F-37(C&R), Op-20-G-M, Op-23-L, 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), 15 ND's.