

NAVY DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

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MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

July 8, 1942

Subject: Summary of Statements by Survivors of SS "CHEROKEE"  
American Passenger-Cargo ship, 5986 G.T., Clyde  
Mallory Lines, owners; Chartered to U. S. Navy.

1. The "CHEROKEE" was torpedoed without warning at 2230 EWT, June 15, 1942 at 42° 11'N - 69° 25'W, while enroute from Halifax to Boston in convoy with 350 tons of sand ballast; draft forward 15 feet, aft 18 feet. Vessel sank by the bow, listing 60° to port, within 5 to 7 minutes.

2. The vessel was on course 261° true, speed 8 knots (convoy speed), in 120 fathoms, not zigzagging, blacked out, radio had not been used since leaving port. Seven lookouts, 1 at bow, 2 on flying bridge, 2 after run, 2 after bridge. Weather partly cloudy, sea rough, fresh NW gale, visibility good. Six ships in convoy dimly visible.

3. First torpedo hit port side under bridge lifting boat out of water, destroying chart house and other damage, ship listed sharply to port. Second torpedo struck port forecastle head 1½ minutes later. No estimate of damage but ship slipped under within 5 to 7 minutes after first torpedo hit. Five minutes before attack the SS PORT NICHOLSON, approximately 1000 yards broad on "CHEROKEE"s port bow was struck by 2 torpedoes on the starboard side. "CHEROKEE" put on full speed and hard right rudder. Motors were not stopped, no distress signal sent. No time for counter offensive. Vessel carried 1-4" gun aft, 2-50 caliber machine guns aft, 1 each side top deck, 2-30 caliber machine guns each side bridge. Confidential codes in punched steel box sank with ship.

4. No lifeboats could be launched because of list. Seven life rafts cut loose, some survivors got on these, others clung to wreckage, others ran down deck and jumped into water. Of the latter some climbed on rafts, others drowned. There were 169 crew members, and passengers including armed guard. Forty-four survivors picked up in same vicinity June 16 by SS NORLAGO and 39 by U.S.C.G.C. ESCANABA and landed at Provincetown and Boston respectively. Eighty-six persons missing and presumed to be dead. Rough water and gale hampered rescue work.

5. Submarine was not sighted. Conflicting reports indicate there may have been more than one sub.

6. When the "PORT NICHOLSON" was struck flares were released which rendered other vessels in convoy better targets. No useful purpose was served as the explosions on the "PORT NICHOLSON" were observed by lookouts on all ships. Survivors also state that everyone around Halifax seemed to know sailing dates and destinations of all ships in harbor. Survivors suggest that 16-17 knot vessel should not have been included in an 8 knot convoy as slow speed made it difficult to maneuver.

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