

DELISLE (May 4, 1942)

The starboard lifeboat was smashed from the concussion when the torpedo struck. The starboard raft was also launched or thrown overboard by the concussion of the torpedo. 26 of the crew disembarked in the port lifeboat and 8 in the port after life raft (approximately). The following is taken from the testimony of Mr. Clark, Chief Mate (?):

"Q. Was there any fault on the part of the personnel?

"A. Well, I guess the radio operator has been reported anyway by now. He was the first one in the lifeboat, and the whole crew has it in for him. He had been giving us trouble the whole trip.

"Q. Do you wish to make an official complaint against him?

"A. No. I will leave that up to the Captain.

"Q. Briefly and in general what was the trouble with the wireless operator?

"A. Well, he always had a constant fear of being torpedoed or shelled and that was all he talked about day and night. He broke down everybody's morale. When the time came, he was unprepared himself and showed his true colors.

"Q. What was his name?

"A. I don't know his first name. His last name is Neal, of Towson.

"Q. As a result of your experience could you give us some brief information as to how the lifesaving equipment functioned, and if you have any recommendations to make with regard to improvements. We are interested in the method of releasing the rafts, the boats, and anything pertinent to lifesaving equipment in general.

"A. We had the rafts and boats on sea painters, and the sea painter on the raft went around the raft completely and made fast with the wooden toggle, and if the ship had any headway at all, she would have pulled the sea painters off the raft.

"Q. Could you tell us the name of the rafts you had on board?

"A. I don't know what type they are. They are 18-person rafts, kapok filled.

"Q. Who built them?

"A. I don't know.

"Q. How did you have the rafts secured on the boat?

"A. By skids and rigging, forward and aft.

"Q. Were they released by pelican trip hooks?

"A. It was necessary to have a bar.

"Q. Is that link especially stiff?

"A. Some of them are, yes. There's quite a strain on that link, so we always use bars to knock them off. Somebody passed me an axe and we released the raft.

"Q. We are considering arranging some apparatus to release these rafts from three positions. What do you think of that? In other words, you can release the forward rafts from aft, and vice versa, also either end from the bridge by a pull on a rope or wire. What is your opinion about that?

"A. I think it's a very good idea in case of fire. When a ship is heavily loaded, it is necessary to put wire around it and it's quite necessary to have the sea painters led out, because this way we don't even get our feet wet."

"Q. Were the davits rigged with life ropes?

"A. Yes, sir."

"Q. Have you any other recommendations to give to this service?

"A. Yes. At least one officer on the bridge should know how to send messages on the emergency transmitter in case anything should happen to the radio operator. The Captain and I went into the radio room but we couldn't send any because the transmitter was hanging off the wire from the concussion."

The Chief Engineer gave the following testimony:

"Q. What kind of engines does the ship have?

"A. Reciprocating.

"Q. What kind of rig did you have for shutting off the engine?

"A. It was on the throttle lever.

"Q. That wasn't a very complicated rig you had?

"A. We had a line rigged from the throttle lever through a lead block fastened by eye bolts in the skylight. In fact we have three eye bolts altogether.

"Q. Now that throttle works horizontally?

"A. No, sir. Vertical up and down.

"Q. Is she oil burning?

"A. Yes, sir."

WEST ZEDA (February 22, 1942)

No lives were lost and all hands (35) abandoned the vessel within seven minutes in the two port boats. The vessel was torpedoed on the starboard side. No trouble was encountered in launching the two port boats. The boats were equipped with plain hooks and had been carried swung out in readiness for lowering. It was stated that all the life-saving equipment was in good condition.

Master relates to the Board what occurred at the time of the torpedoing of the vessel:

"A. She was struck by a torpedo by #2 hatch, and the hatch was blown