

The Chief stated that they found, by questioning a native, that they were in the Gilbert Islands group, on the island of Nikinau, and they were there treated with the greatest kindness and consideration by the natives.

DELVALLE (April 12, 1942)

The Master stated the vessel was struck by torpedoes on the starboard side and all the starboard boats were carried away. No. 1 boat was hanging on the forward davit, No. 3 boat hanging on the after davit, and most of the passengers and crew got off the ship in the motorboat and the No. 4 lifeboat. Two rafts were launched successfully. The Master and five others got clear on a raft. In lowering No. 4 boat, it hung up a couple of times, apparently from the grab rails.

The Second Assistant Engineer stopped the ship when the first torpedo struck and the vessel lost way immediately, thus facilitating the lowering of the boats.

The Master stated the following in regard to the grab rails:

"Q. Would you like to make a suggestion as to the removal of these grab rails from the bottom of the lifeboats in order to facilitate launching at this time?

"A. I do believe that they are a hazard, especially on a ship that has anything protruding below. I come up on the Army Transport and we had a boat drill on there and I was on the disembarkation deck and the boats were up above. The grab rail was the same as our ship and on the side of that ship it was any number of times they would catch that boat, providing the vessel started to listing. On her it was especially bad.

"Q. Then it is your contention that if the vessel has the least list these guard rails catch and hang up on all the projections on the side?

"A. Yes, sir. This vessel is a hog island ship and has that foot extension on the deck. Well, the Chief Officer had taken, on his own, and put in guide boards or timbers so that there was no chance for that boat to come down and get caught on that ledge affair. That's something that should be on those ships, otherwise I don't see how they are going to get those boats over it in good shape.

"Q. Did these grab rails hang up on the plate laps on the ship's side?

"A. I would suggest that the Chief Engineer could give you better information as to this hanging up than I could."

He also made the following comments:

"Q. Have you any suggestions for additional equipment or improvements to existing equipment other than the changes spoken of?

"A. Yes. I would like to suggest that an awning be put on the liferafts, a piece of canvas to be used as a shade. Before I left the motorboat to get away I got two blankets, maybe three, from the motorboat and on each liferaft we shoved down oars in the liferaft and put these as

an awning, otherwise you would just burn up.

"Q. Is that the only suggestion you would have to make, Captain?

"A. I would suggest one thing, that everybody goes to that boat has to have some sort of hat or cap or a certain amount of hats or caps as part of the equipment because if they are out there exposed that sun comes down mighty hot, especially a man that don't have much hair. On my boat drills I have always insisted on my men putting their hat on or something. Of course, in getting away in the middle of the night a lot of the men didn't have clothes on.

"Q. Have you any suggestions or criticisms on the handling of the life saving equipment?

"A. No, sir. I think we did pretty good.

"Q. Did your abandoning the vessel coincide pretty well with your prearranged procedure?

"A. Yes. As I said, the starboard boats were carried away at the first torpedoing and the Chief Mate and Second Mate took charge of lowering away the port boats, got everybody into them, lowered them away, also he was assisted by one of the A.B.'s.

"Q. Were any signals rang to the engine room after the vessel was hit?

"A. When I come from my room the first thing I did was turn the general alarm and try to signal the engine room but the telegraph was froze.

"Q. Was the engine stopped and headway taken off the vessel by the man on watch?

"A. Yes. The engineer on watch stopped the engine and vessel lost immediate headway.

"Q. Had this procedure been prearranged?

"A. No previous arrangements had been made any more than with the Chief Engineer. I had instructed him to see that the engines were stopped. There had been a temporary line run from the engine to the top grating of the engine room in case that the men down below couldn't stop the engines so it could be stopped from the top grating.

"Q. You have no criticism to offer in this?

"A. No, sir. I don't.

"Q. Have you any further recommendations, Captain, that you could offer this Board that would insure the safe launching of boats and abandoning of ship?

"A. I recommend that some means be provided whereby the engines can be stopped from the top grating or upper deck in case the men below were unable to do so."

"Q. What is your opinion as to the advantages or disadvantages of carrying your boats swung out?

"A. Not knowing which side of the boat you are going to be torpedoed I would rather take a chance with the boats put out."

"Q. Could you tell the Board anything about these rafts, as regards their seaworthiness and so on?

"A. I think they were fine. We had a pretty good swell running and it rode them wonderfully; nothing broke over them.

"Q. Were they dropped from the ship?

"A. Yes.

"Q. About how far did they drop?

"A. Well, the last one couldn't have been very far. As I say, I stepped from the rail right on the raft and they had it over just a minute or so before I got off. In fact, when the last torpedo hit the mate was done (down?) under this raft releasing these pelican hooks. We always had bolts or whatever you would want to use tied there to be sure to be able to free these pelican hooks. It should be tied with something that won't swell.

"Q. What type rafts did you have - the catamaran rafts?

"A. Yes, I think three separate tanks on each side if I remember right, but they were good and after being taken off they attempted to sink them by shell fire but gave it up claiming their bullets must be ricocheting. I guess the tanks were full of this kapok."

The Chief Officer had this to state in regard to the grab rails on the lifeboats being caught up on projections on the ship's side:

"This can be taken care of on this particular ship by putting 4 x 4's as skids for the lifeboats, which automatically takes care of the grab rails, also the boats will hang up on a plate but I also feel that they would clear, so I hadn't done anything about that particular thing. It's so easy to do, just weld two small wedges in the lap of the plates and it will be taken care of.

"Q. Do you think the grab rails catch on the plate laps?

"A. Well, they will catch on anything sticking out. It caught on the gunwale of the boat.

"Q. How much list did the vessel have at this time?

"A. About thirty-five degrees.

"Q. To starboard?

"A. Starboard."

He also made the following recommendations:

"Q. Have you any suggestions for improvements to existing equipment?

"A. It's a good idea, we should be able to stop the ship from the top there. If that torpedo struck anywhere near there he couldn't have done it. I would like to make one other recommendation; I think there should be a speaking tube from the wheelhouse to the wing of the bridge so that the officer on watch can talk to the wheel house without taking his eyes off the water. I am almost sure I could have gotten us out of there if

I would have been able to. I think every officer, deck officers, should be allowed to carry a gun, certainly the deck officers. I think the engine officers as well."

"Q. What kind of liferafts do you have on that ship?

"A. I think they call them the catamaran type, the ones with long tanks in the side. No American ships should ever sail without them. I have seen those in the water, we seen them tested, even with a heavy swell. They stay right on top, and machine guns can't sink them because that Canadian ship that picked us up he put fifty caliber machine gun bullets in them and they just can't sink them.

"Q. How far did you drop that liferaft?

"A. One fell practically no distance at all, but the one on the other side must have dropped about twenty feet or more.

"Q. Did you use both of them?

"A. We used two.

"Q. And the one that was dropped about twenty feet, how did the equipment stand up? Stayed right in the locker?

"A. Everything was fine."

Chief Engineer had this to say in regard to the No. 4 boat being hung up on the ship's side:

"Q. Have you any suggestions for improvements to existing equipment?

"A. Only to provide some provision that the lifeboat wouldn't hang there. She was in a critical condition. I was afraid she was going to roll over before I got away.

"Q. Were these the grab rails hanging up on the plate laps?

"A. I am not sure whether it was the seam, the plating on the boat, or whether it was the grab rails. We didn't examine to see."

Chief also had this to say of the watch engineer stopping the ship:

"Q. Which engineer was on watch at this time?

"A. The Second Assistant Engineer, Alexander H. Kullgren. He deserves a lot of credit for stopping that vessel. He stopped the vessel cold before he left the engine room - a nice piece of work. We asked him how he got out - he was in lifeboat #4 without - he don't know how he got out.

"Q. As the communication system from the bridge was disrupted and of no use, did Mr. Kullgren stop the engine and take the headway off the vessel of his own accord?

"A. I believe so, yes. I am not sure of that but I believe that he did. After the lights went out I am pretty sure he stopped her of his own accord." (Note - According to the Master's testimony, the telegraph was jammed and the Second Engineer stopped the engines on his own initiative.)