

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON
MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

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January 25, 1943.

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements of Survivors of the SS DONA AURORA, American Passenger-Cargo Vessel, 5011 G.T., De La Rama Steamship Co., Chartered to the U.S. MARITIME COMMISSION.

1. The "DONA AURORA" was torpedoed without warning at 1030 GCT, Dec. 25, 1942, at 02° 02' S - 35° 17' W., while enroute from Capetown, to Baltimore, with a general cargo of manganese ore, cow and sheep hides, wool, coffee, and dyestuff; draft forward 23', aft 25' 3". The ship sank stern first about 15 minutes after the one torpedo struck her.

2. The ship was on course 291° true, speed 11½ knots, in approximate 2000 fathoms, zigzagging on #1 issued from Capetown routing office. Ship radio was not used after leaving Capetown. Seven lookouts on duty: 2 officers on bridge, 2 seamen on bridge, 1 in crow's nest, 2 gunners aft. Weather was hazy, moderate swells, NE wind, force 3, visibility 3, broad daylight, no ships in sight.

3. Just before 1030 GCT, lookouts on bridge saw torpedo when it was about 300 to 350 yards from ship, travelling toward ship and in direction of port stern. Captain ordered ship put hard to port. This action put torpedo and ship on parallel course. However, when torpedo got abreast, it made a right angle turn in the water and struck ship port amidship, striking engines and stopping ship. There was a flash of flame and blue smoke which was thick, acrid smell, choking. Vessel flooded immediately, lots of Kapok but not known where it came from. Survivors interviewed stated torpedo made a sound resembling a motorboat under water and about 20 yards from ship jumped out of water like a porpoise. It was grey in color with a black nose and about 12' long. No distress signal sent because main antenna was knocked down and turret fell on emergency aerial, grounding it. Gun crew manned aft gun and fired 2 rounds at a spot where they believed submarine was submerged, but no hits recorded. Confidentials, consisting of British SP 21-20-5, sank with ship.

4. At 1045 GCT, ship abandoned on orders from Captain. Crew and passengers left in 1 lifeboat and 3 liferafts. One boat with 53 survivors picked up by British freighter SS TESTBANK at 02° 42' S - 38° 17' W., Dec. 27, at 1500 GCT, and 3 wounded transferred to the USS MOFFETT; the remaining 50 landed by TESTBANK at Port of Spain, Trinidad, at 0930, Jan. 3, 1943. Total crew 47, armed guard 12, passengers 12. One passenger, American Citizen of Italian parentage, and a member of the steward's department, believed aboard Italian submarine which fired torpedo and sank ship. Eight members of crew, nine members armed guard, one passenger missing (which included 2 believed aboard sub that surfaced and circled area).

5. Submarine was painted light grey; approximately 1200 tons; no streaks or stripes; conning tower egg-shaped, contained port holes forward; aerial running from bow to conning tower to stern; crew appeared to be Italian with about 1 month's growth of beard; one 4" gun forward and 1 aft, twin 20 mm guns on conning tower; bow slightly rounded; no net cutter visible. Sub seemed in good condition and flew Italian flag, and was of the "MICCA" or "MARCELLO" class. It was last seen circling area where ship sank at 1200 GCT.

6. Sub Commander asked for Captain of ship. The master of another ship, who was among the survivors, went aboard the submarine, but was pushed back into lifeboat when Commander saw a blonde passenger, former Chief Officer of EXCELLO, and told him he was Captain and to come aboard. Chief Officer stated he didn't want to board the sub and consequently stumbled from stern to bow of lifeboat and finally stumbled so much trying to get aboard sub, that Commander became impatient and ordered lifeboat away without him. However, the 2 men mentioned in above paragraph of report went aboard sub, but none of survivors remember why, how, or when.

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Special mention was made of the action of the Armed Guard, praising their valor and promptness in getting gun in action. It was stated they stood their gun positions until ordered off ship by the Captain.

Torpedo believed by survivors to have gyro.

NOTE: Nine additional survivors were landed at Recife, Brazil on Jan. 17, 1943 by the USS HUMBOLDT. Total is now 62 rescued, 2 prisoners aboard the sub and 7 missing presumed dead.

H.V. STEBBINS,
Lieut., USNR

CC: ONI-B-8, 16-C(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-28, Op-30, Op-39, BuShips, BuOrd(Re-6-a), 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, Coord Res & Dev(Lt. Parker, Rm 0142).

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