

CONFIDENTIAL

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

19 August 1944

Op-16-B-5

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by ^{File}Survivors of the SS EMPIRE HALBERD, British Vessel, 7177 G.T.; Ministry of War Transport.

1. The EMPIRE HALBERD was mined at 1513 GMT, 6 July 1944, in position Longships bearing 006°, 3.8 miles, having sailed from Southampton, England, on 4 July in a special convoy for Clyde, loaded with 18 LCA's (Landing Craft Assault) and 128 naval and Marine ratings. Vessel did not sink, but proceeded under her own power arriving at Falmouth 2210, 6 July.
2. Ship was altering course 285° to 330°, speed 14 knots in 34 fathoms, degaussing on, weather was fine, sea slight, light airs, visibility very good. Ship sailed from Southampton and arrived at the Needles at 0100, 5 July, to join up with the convoy. After 2100 convoy eventually formed and after passing the Needles speed was eased down to 12 knots so that the SS EMPIRE ARQUEBUS could catch up. Convoy was first formed into 2 columns and in order to proceed round the Longships it formed into one column; the EMPIRE HALBERD was second in line following the HMS BULOLO. Convoy consisted of 11 ships.
3. At 1513 a mine exploded 30 yards away on the starboard quarter. There was a violent explosion which gave off a strong smell, similar to that produced by the explosion of a torpedo. A high column of water was thrown up and washed over the stern, but there was no flash or flame. Ship lurched to port and stern lifted. Engines and all auxiliaries stopped immediately as explosion released the contact breakers; ship was all electric. Rudder jammed and ship swung to starboard. Compasses, gyro, etc., on the bridge were damaged. After an examination it was found that one plate in hull in vicinity of the waterline was cracked resulting in a slight leak in tunnel recess. Main shaft bearings were fractured, and there was extensive minor damage in the engine room. Ship stopped temporarily and remainder of convoy proceeded, leaving the HMS SERAPIS to stand by. After steering gear was tested and found satisfactory captain ordered "slow ahead" and at 1603 ship proceeded at half speed to Falmouth, escorted by the SERAPIS. After arrival hull was examined by a diver and it was found that plates were corrugated for about 30', and although explosion was on starboard side, the rippling was deeper on port side. The plating around the boxed rudder was also damaged. Ship has been drydocked for repairs at Liverpool. Confidential codes were retained on board.
4. Ship was not abandoned. Total complement on board was approximately 271, including 35 gunners, 1 gunnery officer, 1 S.N.O.T., 1 naval surgeon, 5 S.B.A.s, 8 signal ratings, 128 naval and Marine ratings for LCA's, and 92 crew; all survived.
5. The mine was not sighted.
6. Captain stated that he was only 2 or 3 cables astern of HMS BULOLO, but the fact that this ship was drawing about 25' as compared with his ship's 20', may have accounted for her not setting off the mine, as her propeller was not so likely to come out of water in a swell. The EMPIRE HALBERD is also shorter than the BULOLO, and is more inclined to pitch in a swell.

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After the EMPIRE HALBERD was temporarily stopped the HMS MIDDLETON made a sweep out to seaward in case the explosion was caused by a magnetic torpedo going off in the wake, but after hunting for one hour she rejoined convoy, having nothing to report. The Senior Officer of the HMS HAWTHORN, who was in the vicinity, signalled that the explosion was caused by a moored magnetic mine, for which he had been hunting 3 days.

B. A. CONARD,
Lt. (jg) W-V(S), USNR.

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