

3 May 1944

MEMORANDUM FOR FILESALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors SS FORT BUCKINGHAM, British Freighter, 7122, G.T., Ministry of War Transport.

1. The FORT BUCKINGHAM was torpedoed at 1942 GMT on 20 Jan 44 in approximately 08.50N - 66.25E, having sailed from Bombay 17 Jan enroute to Durban in ballast. Ship broke in half and sank at 1948.
2. The ship was on course 190° true, speed 10.7 knots, zigzagging, degaussing off. Weather was fine, sea calm, light airs, visibility good, although it was dark.
3. At 1942 a torpedo struck on port side in #4 hold abaft the engine room, the track having been sighted by a gunner a second before. There was a violent explosion. Hatches were blown off #4 hold which flooded immediately. The port lifeboat was blown away, the port accommodation around the engine casing was damaged and the boat deck severely buckled. No cracks were visible down the ship's side. The ship immediately listed slightly to starboard and all lights were extinguished. The engines were stopped. At 1947 the vessel listed further to starboard and began sinking rapidly by the stern. The stern then broke off and sank, while the forward end tipped up and sank vertically at 1948. No distress messages were sent. No counter offensive possible. Confidential codes were thrown overboard in a weighted box.
4. All lifeboats were dragged under with the ship. Some survivors abandoned ship by jumping overboard and others were carried down with the ship. Six rafts floated free and survivors got aboard them. At daybreak 21 Jan survivors were distributed on 5 rafts, one being damaged and left in vicinity. Rafts drifted in a Southwesterly direction. On 29 Jan six survivors on one raft were picked up by the SS MOORBY, on 31 Jan eight survivors on a second raft were picked up by the SS KONGSDAL. On 3 Feb planes located the remaining rafts. At 1315, 5 Feb survivors from the third raft, one-half hour later survivors from the fourth raft, and at 1415 survivors from the fifth raft were all picked up by the MV ORA. One plane tried to land on the water but was unsuccessful due to a heavy swell. Survivors from the ORA were transferred to the HMS REDOUBT and landed at Bombay 9 Feb. Total complement on board was 89, including 62 crew and 27 Army and Naval gunners; 38 missing, 5 known dead, and 46 survived.
5. The sub was not seen.
6. The chief engineer suggested that fishing bait should be part of life rafts' equipment, since the survivors had great difficulty in catching the fish around the rafts without suitable bait although they had fishing line and hooks. He also stated that the English chocolate was excellent and did not create thirst. The Canadian chocolate was not nearly so good in this respect.

BARBARA CONARD,
Ensign, W-V(S)

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