

3 June 44

MEMORANDUM FOR FILESALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS FORT CAMOSUN, British Freighter, 7126 G.T., Ministry of War Transport.

1. The FORT CAMOSUN was torpedoed at 2015 GMT, 3 December 1943, in 11.23N - 46.03E, having sailed independently from Vizagapatam, India, 22 November for Aden, with 7900 tons of Indian produce. Vessel did not sink but proceeded under her own power and arrived at Aden 1200, 4 December.
2. Ship was on course 350°, speed 11 knots, degaussing off, on second leg of zigzag #12. The weather was fine, sea moderate, wind ENE, force 4, very dark but visibility good. No diversion orders had been received but master knew subs were operating in the vicinity of their route as several SSSS messages were intercepted and ship passed through an area littered with bales of cotton and jute.
3. At 2015 a torpedo struck on the port side in #4 hold, just forward of bulkhead between #4 and #5 holds. Track was not seen. There was a violent explosion, a bright flash, and a column of water mixed with debris and cargo was thrown up. No. 4 lower hold which was loaded with jute, gunny, peanuts and sandbags, flooded immediately, while the 'tween deck caught fire. No. 6 boat, which was directly over the explosion, blown away, #4 hatch covers blown off, those on #5 hatch remained intact. Ship heeled to starboard, shuddered violently for a few seconds, then gradually righted herself. Master ordered action stations and swung vessel 4 points to starboard. Engines were inadvertently stopped but vessel still had way on and within 20 minutes was going full speed. Fire parties were mustered to fight fire in #4 'tween deck. At 2300 fire extinguished but broke out again at 0300, 4 December and again while discharging cargo at Aden. At 0730 #5 bulkhead was examined. Water was seeping through several rivets and seams and, although there was a 6" clearance between cargo and bulkhead, Master was afraid that when cargo became saturated it would swell (jute swells to 4 or 5 times its size when wet) and bulkhead would give way under the pressure. At 2300, 3 December an escort vessel, detached from a convoy outward bound from Aden, came to ship's assistance, inquired if o.k. and Master replied ship could proceed unaided and reported 2 lifeboats a few miles astern. Escort vessel made a sweep and dropped depth charges. On reaching Aden at 1200, 4 December, draft was 30' aft, bow being well up and there was 17' of water in #5 hold. distress signal was sent, no counter offensive possible. All confidential codes were thrown overboard in weighted box, except wireless codes which were retained on board.
4. Shortly after the explosion 2 lifeboats with 23 men were launched without orders. Ship proceeded on without picking them up. The 23 survivors were picked up by the HMS BANN at 1100, 4 December, later transferred to the HMS CARNATIC and landed at Aden 6 December. Remainder of crew stayed on board the FORT CAMOSUN. Total complement on board was 89, including 4 Army and 5 Navy gunners; all 89 survived.
5. The sub was not sighted.
6. Master stated ship was torpedoed in position "E" of his routing instructions, and it looked as if sub was waiting for the ship.

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Dissemination: Op-16-E-2, 16-P-1, 16-Z(5 copies), Op-20G-M, Op-23-L, Op-30-M, Op-39-P-3(2 cop), Cominch F-20, F-21, F-41, FX-37(C&R), FX-43, FX-45, AFASU, BuOrd, BuShips, CG(4 cop), Coord Res & Dev, JAF, DIO 1,3,4,5(2 cop),6,7(3 cop),8(2 cop), 10(4 cop),11(3 cop),12,13,14(4 cop),15NDS, BuOrd RE-6-A.

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