

Op-16-B-5

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

CONFIDENTIAL

15 Nov 44

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS FORT DREW, British Freighter, 7134 G.T., Ministry of War Transport.

1. The SS FORT DREW was mined at 0430 GMT, 6 Sep 43, in 35.52.30N - 14.47E (off Hurd Bank 10 miles SE from entrance of the swept channel), having sailed from Syracuse, Sicily 1600, 5 Sep in a convoy for Malta, in ballast. Vessel did not sink and arrived at Malta under her own power.
2. Ship was on course 300°, speed 5 knots in 47 fathoms, degaussing on, dawn was breaking, clouds and misty showers, sea moderate, fresh Southeasterly wind force 5-6, visibility moderate. At 0300, 6 Sep convoy formed in 2 columns; FORT DREW position was second ship in starboard column.
3. At 0430 a dull explosion occurred on the port side in #2 hold. There was no flash but there was a strong smell of burnt cordite and a small column of water 40' high was thrown up. Engines were stopped immediately, ship moved out of line and reformed at stern of convoy. Hole in hull on the port side was 16' x 20' with the center slightly below the waterline and about 100' from the stem. Beams and hatches collapsed into #2 hold, which flooded immediately. The fore and aft bulkhead in #2 hold was pierced and the tween decks were set up by the blast. Damage to the ship's side extended down to the turn of the bilge, where it stopped. Captain thought that because #2 ballast tank was full of water, it acted as a cushion. No boats were lowered as ship was in no immediate danger of sinking. Escort was informed of incident and ship was instructed to anchor in "B" anchorage, which was done at 0730. Ship lay at anchor all day and was eventually ordered to proceed to Mellieha Bay, where ship anchored at midnight. Confidential codes, except the wireless books which were thrown overboard, were retained on board.
4. Ship was not abandoned at any time. Total complement on board was 55, including 6 Naval and 4 Army gunners; all survived.
5. During the inspection of the damage, several fragments of metal were found in the tween deck of #2 hold. The fragments were considered to be parts of a mine and were taken to the Mining Authorities at Malta. They stated that the fragments were pieces of a German mine which had been laid by Italian E-Boats.

NOTE: See Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS SELLINGE, British, mined in the same convoy.

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