

6 Nov 44

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

ALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements of Survivors of the SS FORT LAC LA RONGE, British Freighter, 7131 G.T., Ministry of War Transport.

1. The FORT LAC LA RONGE was torpedoed at 0420 GMT, 30 Aug 44, while at anchor off Sword Beach, in 49.21.24N - 00.21W, having sailed from Southend, England 27 July in convoy, loaded with 5000 tons of military stores. Vessel did not sink but was taken in tow and grounded off Juno Beach at 1037. Vessel returned to England for repairs.

2. Ship was at anchor heading approximately ENE, in 6 fathoms, gun crew at antion stations, degaussing on, cargo being discharged. There was a slight haze, sea smooth, NE wind force 1-2, dawn breaking, visibility 2-3 miles.

3. During the night of 2 Aug, during an air raid, enemy aircraft dropped mines in the vicinity. At 0200, 3 Aug an E-Boat alarm sounded and crew went to action stations. Nothing further occurred until 0420 when a torpedo struck on the starboard side in #5 hold 50' from the stern. Explosion was loud, bright red flash seen, and a column of water was thrown up to deck height. One survivor stated he saw a distinct torpedo track. Ship shook violently but Captain did not feel any definite lurch. All beams and hatches from #5 hold were blown overboard, and there was a hole 40' square in the starboard side, mostly below the waterline, but as ship settled immediately by the stern it was impossible to judge the damage accurately. Plating surrounding the hole was set in for a distance of 6 frames. Tunnel in #5 hold collapsed, the propeller shaft was bent and twisted, and there was a large bulge in the bulkhead between #4 and #5 holds, but it was not pierced. This bulkhead was shored up with baulks of timber. Four lifeboats were already swung out, and as they were undamaged, Captain ordered them lowered. The dead and wounded were then taken ashore. Water was pouring into the engine room through the damaged tunnel. Pumps were immediately put into operation, while the engineers plugged the holes and flattened the ends of the broken pipes. The inflow of water into the engine room was controlled but water still found its way into the ship. It was discovered that the bilges were making water, but it was impossibly to ascertain further bottom damage. Ship was in no immediate danger of sinking. At 0835 a salv officer came aboard and Captain made a full report of the attack. At 0903 a tug, W-153, prepared to take ship in tow, and by 0923 ship was under tow, making for Juno Beach. At 1025 the SEA SALVER arrived to assist with the towing. At 1037 ship grounded off Juno, Gooseberry in 4 1/2 fathoms. Discharging cargo commenced and on 14 Aug it was completed. At 0235, 16 Aug the tug NICHOLAS took ship in tow, arriving at St. Helen's Roads at 0850, 17 Aug. Ship was taken in tow to Queen's Dock, Cardiff where repairs were made. Confidential codes were retained on board.

4. Ship was not abandoned but the dead and wounded were taken ashore. Total complement on board was 146, including 66 crew and approximately 80 Pioneer Corps who were discharging cargo; 3 killed, approximately 8 missing (all from the Pioneer Corps), 135 survived.

5. The attacking craft was not sighted. Just before the attack activity had decreased considerably, apart from occasional bursts of machine-gun fire, and although there was no cargo machinery working at the time, nothing unusual was heard.

*Pls. Index  
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x - Navy, corresp (18)  
Survivors (12)*

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Op-16-B-5

SS FORT LAC LA RONGE

CONFIDENTIAL

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6. ComNavEu reported that ship was damaged by a human torpedo. The Captain does not think ship was struck by a human torpedo, judging from the extent of the damage.

BARBARA CONARD  
Lieut. (jg) W-V(S)

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