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25 September 44

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

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Authority NN3-26-83-11

By *gmm* NARA. Date 9/05

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS GEORGE ADE, U.S. Cargo Ship, 7200 G.T., owners War Shipping Administration, operated by American West African Lines.

1. The GEORGE ADE was torpedoed at 0420 GCT, 12 Sep 44, in 33.30N - 75.40W, having sailed from Key West, 10 Sep, enroute independently to New York with approximately 6500 tons general Lend Lease cargo, draft before damage 27' forward, 29'5" aft; after damage 29' forward, 32' aft. Ship did not sink but was towed by various U.S.N. tugs to Hampton Roads for repair, arriving 16 Sep.

2. Ship was on a course 054° T, speed 15 knots in 1500 fathoms (3 knot current in Gulf Street), not zigzagging, blacked out (see paragraph 6); radio silent, 7 lookouts - 1 merchant crew on bow, 1 Armed Guard on 3" gun forward, 2 in forward 20 mm gun tubs, 1 on bridge, 1 aft, petty officer roaming. The weather was clear, sea moderate swells, wind SW force 1, dark night, no moon but stars shining, visibility good, no other ships in sight.

3. At 0420 torpedo struck ship starboard side aft near the rudder. Explosion described as dull thud and survivors reported a sheet of water 25' high was thrown upward and forward on both sides of stern accompanied by a blue flash of light. There was an odor of burning powder. Deck buckled across #4 hatch. Plates buckled on both sides above waterline amidships. Stern plating aft buckled extensively. After peak tank holed and flooded, shaft alley flooded, shaft driven ahead and Kingsbury thrust telescoped. Steering engine destroyed immediately and rudder damaged and inoperative. Deck winches aft lifted from foundations and steam lines broken. Bulwarks port side forward of main deck housing cracked. Rudder stock driven up through deck, carrying parts of deck up 2'. Berths and lockers in Armed Guard quarters aft knocked down. Main engines probably knocked out of line and were secured immediately as ship was out of control. They were used subsequently at slow speed ahead but pounded badly. Full extent of damage undeterminable until ship is drydocked. General quarters were sounded immediately after explosion and 2 or 3 minutes later a torpedo wake was seen passing under the counter from starboard to port. At approximately 0430 the Armed Guard officer, Master and several others believed they saw the sub surfaced and fire was opened. Two rounds of the 5"38 were fired, range 1200 yards bearing 080° relative from the gun tub, 270° True. Shots were thought to be over but muzzle flash blinded crew. Sub was not seen again and is thought to have crash dived. Distress signal sent and acknowledged by W.S.L.

Ship remained afloat out of control and drifting eastward. The damaged rudder, stern and thrust made it impossible to use ship's power. All aft compartments were flooded although engine room was kept free. The main deck was well above water. An attempt was made to rig a jury rudder.

At 1650 ship was contacted by U.S.S. BARTON and at 1800 was taken in tow by U.S.S. ESCAPE (ART-6). Course was set for Cape Henry at 4 knots. Difficulty was experienced with towline in rising seas in advance of hurricane reported approaching. By night of 13 Sep tug and tow were off Wimble Shoals making 1 knot. About 1200, 14 Sep, towline parted and ship drifted out of control 12 miles from Bodie Island, North Carolina. Ship attempted to anchor in 13 fathoms; one hook carried away but the second with 60 fathoms of chain held while engines were run slow ahead. Wind velocity over 100 knots and seas 50' high were reported. During the storm #2 and #3 lifeboats and 4 liferafts were washed overboard. By 1900 weather began to moderate, and contact was sought with tugs. During the morning of 15 Sep, towline was

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SS GEORGE ADE

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again put on board and towing was resumed. At 1355, 16 Sep, the screw dropped off. Ship entered Chesapeake Bay about 2200, 16 Sep, and was taken to the anchorage for survey. Confidential codes in weighted boxes thrown over the side.

4. Ship was not abandoned at any time. Total ship's complement 67 including 40 merchant crew and 27 Armed Guard. All survived - 4 Armed Guard and 1 merchant crew slightly injured.

5. No description of the sub is available since it was not clearly seen by any of the survivors. However, many of the survivors stated that they distinctly heard the sound of Diesel engines and one survivor thought he smelled Diesel exhaust. At 0430, 12 Sep, several officers on the bridge as well as the men at the 5"38 gun stated that they saw on the starboard quarter the dark mass of the conning tower with a "wash" ahead and behind the conning tower and believed it to be the sub with decks awash. The Armed Guard at the 5"38 stated that this object seemed to be investigating a raft which had been blown adrift by the explosion and which could be seen because of its automatic carbide light. They expressed the opinion that the sub thought the crew of the GEORGE ADE had abandoned ship in this raft and had surfaced to interrogate the survivors; that the sub was caught unexpectedly by the 2 shots from the 5"38 and immediately crash dived. About 1 hour after the explosion it was believed that Diesel engines were again heard. No further contact was had with the sub until about 1500, 12 Sep, when a periscope was observed briefly by the Armed Guard officer, chief mate and a signalman on watch, off the port side several hundred yards distant. It appeared to be moving on course parallel to the ship and submerged after about 5 seconds. It was described as thin, straight, several inches in diameter and protruding about 1' out of the water, with feather visible. The sea was smooth. The chief mate claimed to have sighted a German periscope at the time of a previous torpedoing and while he was convinced this was a periscope he stated it differed from the previous sighting in the absence of a globular knob on top. A few rounds of 20 mm were fired in the general direction of the sighting to attract the attention of an escort. Escort made three attacks - 2 depth charge and 1 mouse trap, but no apparent results were obtained.

6. At 0245, 12 Sep, one of the Armed Guard crew saw someone with a flashlight on deck aft, apparently checking on cargo lashings. The light remained visible for a couple of minutes. The incident was reported to the bridge but no further action was taken.

About 2 minutes before the explosion the Second Mate on watch heard a loud humming noise, and thought it was from the gyrocompass. However, it was caused by the tripping of the automatic S.O.S. radio receiver which the radio operator had put on a very sensitive setting and which he believed had been tripped by static and was purely coincidental. Master suggested the possibility that the sub or torpedo may have caused the alarm to sound but was unable to give any explanation to substantiate his belief.

The possibility of an internal explosion was precluded since the cargo contained no explosives and the after magazine was subsequently examined and found intact.

BARBARA CONARD

Lieut. (jg) W-V(S)

Dissemination: Op-16-E-2, 16-P-1, 16-Z(5 copies), Op-20-G-M, Op-23-L, Op-30-M, Op-39-P-3(2 copies), Cominch F-20, F-21, F-41, FX-37(C&R), FX-43, FX-45, AFASU, BuOrd, BuShips, CG(4 copies), Coord Res & Dev, JAG, DIO 1,3,4,5(2 copies),6,7(3 cop), 8(2 copies), 10(4 copies),11(3 copies),12,13,14(4 copies),15NDs, 16-P-2, BuOrd RE-6A, BuPers-535.

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