

Op-16-B-5

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

CONFIDENTIAL

1 Mar 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS JOHN EVANS, U.S. Freighter, 7176 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by the General Steamship Corp.

1. The JOHN EVANS was damaged by enemy aircraft at 0710 GCT, 5 Dec 44 in general area 09.34N - 127.35E, having sailed from Hollandia 29 Nov 44 in convoy for Leyte Gulf, P.I. Vessel carried approximately 3190 tons of cargo stowed in all holds and a deck cargo of 22 alligators. Three U.S. Army personnel were carried as passengers. Crew members were able to go fore and aft by the use of a catwalk over the alligators. Vessel did not sink but proceeded under her own power and arrived Leyte Gulf 6 Dec 44.

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2. Ship was in convoy, position #22. Convoy/formed in 6 columns and consisted of 34 vessels plus escort with 700 yards between columns and 500 yards between ships. Crew at general quarters. The weather was hazy, scattered white clouds at about 3,000', sea smooth, NE wind force 2, sun bearing SW angle 45°, visibility good, about 5 miles, other ships of convoy in sight.

3. Convoy underwent 7 air attacks 5 Dec. At 0710 an enemy plane was sighted approaching from 20° abaft the port beam, speed 250 knots, altitude about 1,500'. As soon as plane was sighted it went into a 20° dive and started strafing ship when about 1,000 yards away; however, its aim was low and the bullets struck the water. Later the aim of the pilot improved and the bridge received numerous hits. Plane was observed to be carrying a bomb under the fuselage, estimated to be about 500 pounds, and as plane dropped down near the water it appeared to be making a skip-bombing run. All guns opened fire as plane came into range and many direct hits were scored. Apparently plane's engine had been stalled by ship's fire and pilot was killed when fire broke out in the cockpit. Plane seemed to go out of control and strafing stopped. Momentum of the plane carried it forward and plane crashed between the top mast at #3 hatch and the funnel atop the deck house. Plane fell into the water 15' off the starboard beam. Bomb detonated as plane crashed into the sea, causing water and smoke to cover the ship. Concussion from the explosion was felt throughout the vessel. The top mast of the main mast was completely carried away together with radio antenna, signal jack stay and range light. Both cargo booms of the #3 were badly damaged. One was rendered useless and replaced with steel boom at Tacloban and the other boom was cracked. Fragments from exploding plane and bomb showered entire ship but no damage was inflicted by the fragments. There was no damage to machinery during the attack and vessel proceeded in convoy. Confidential publications were retained on board.

4. Ship was not abandoned at any time. Two merchant crew and 2 Armed Guard were injured by shrapnel. Entire complement on board survived.

5. Plane was described as a Jap "Zeke".

6. Survivors recommended that all ships in a convoy be equipped with a TBY set in order that alerts might be transmitted more rapidly than by blinker or flag hoist.

CONFIDENTIAL

Op-16-B-5

SS JOHN EVANS, Contd.

1 Mar 45

Survivors thought that the routing of the convoy was too close to Mindanao and that attacking planes apparently came from Mindanao for most of the attacks originated on the port side of the convoy. At one time during the voyage the island of Mindanao was sighted.

NOTE: See Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS ANTOINE SAUGPAINÉ, SS IARCUS DALY and the SS WILLIAM S. LADD.

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Lieut, USNR

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