

I.O.F.

Op-16-B-5
CONFIDENTIALNAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON

1943 JAN 21 AM 10 45

January 15, 1943.

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

SUBJECT:

Summary of Statements by Survivors SS JOHN H.B. LATROBE, American Cargo Ship, 7191, G.T., U.S. Maritime Commission, operated by Kalmar S.S. Co., on Government Service.

1. The SS JOHN H.B. LATROBE was attacked by aerial torpedoes with ten minutes warning through the approach of the planes at 0945 on November 5, 1942, at 74° 37' N, 02° 00' E, while enroute from Reykjavik to Archangel with 6714 tons of tanks, planes, heavy machinery and food stuffs, draft forward 24', aft 24' 3". The ship did not sink, but turned around and returned to Reykjavik.
2. The ship was on course 065° True, speed 10½ knots not zigzagging, radio silent, 11 lookouts: 3 on bow, 3 on stern, 3 on bridge (U.S.N.) and 2 Merchant Seamen on wings of bridge. The weather was clear, moderate sea, wind SE, force #2, visibility fair. There were no other ships in sight.
3. At 0935 GCT eight or nine enemy planes were sighted approaching the ship. The enemy released 7 or 8 torpedoes but none of them hit the ship and no damaged was caused. Torpedoes released 20-40 feet above surface: 1) 2 points abaft port beam - 900 yards; 2) 315° - 1000 yards; 3) 45° - under 1000 yards; 4) also one on port bow 5) one on starboard bow. During the attack the ship maneuvered successfully on various courses to avoid the torpedoes. One message was sent out on the radio at 0940 GCT giving the location of the enemy aircraft attack. The ship was armed with 1) 15" 51 Cal. single purpose on the stern (not used), 2) 3" 50 Cal. dual purpose on the bow, 3) 8 - 20 mm. Oerlikons, 2 on bow, 2 forward on bridge, 2 aft on bridge and 2 on the stern, 4) 2 - 30 Cal. Browning M.G. Approximately 32 rounds were fired on the 3" gun, 2900 rounds on the 20 mm. and 18 rounds on the 30 Cal. M.G. All of the enemy planes were hit and two were possibly damaged. The confidential codes are all intact as the ship returned to port.
4. The enemy aircraft were identified as Hell5.
5. The Armed Guard Officer stated that the only way to save the ship and cargo was to return to Iceland. No spare firing pins were given and their lack would have knocked one gun out, if some had not been available in the cargo. On returning to Iceland from the point of attack, there was danger of running into mine fields as no information was available on their location. 200 rounds is the minimum ammunition required for a 3" gun, on such a trip.

H. V. STEBBINS
Lieut., USNR

CC: ONI-B-8, 16-C (Ensign Judd), 16-Z (4 copies), F-10, Cominch, Cominch F-21-22, F-252, F-353, F-37 (C&R), Op-20-G-M, Op-23-L, Op-30, Op-39, BuShips, BuOrd (re-6-B), BuOrd, Atlantic Fleet Anti-Sub Unit, BuPers-222-23322, CG, DIO 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 (3 copies), 8, 10 (4 copies), 11 (3 copies), 12, 13, 14 (4 copies), 15 ND'S, BuAero-PL-7.

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