

Op-16-B-5

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

CONFIDENTIAL

24 Feb 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS JOHN M. CLAYTON, U.S. Freighter, 7176 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by the American Hawaiian Steamship Co.

1. The JOHN M. CLAYTON was bombed by enemy aircraft at 1540 GCT, 1 Jan 45, while at anchor off White Beach, Mangarin Bay, Mindoro Island, P.I., having sailed from Leyte Gulf 19 Dec 44 in convoy arriving at Mangarin Bay, Mindoro Island, 22 Dec, carrying 401 U.S. Army troops as passengers and a cargo of 1300 tons of vehicles. All troops had been disembarked prior to 26 Dec and all cargo, with the exception of 75 tons in #5 hold, was discharged before 1 Jan. Vessel was beached on Blue Beach, Mindoro Island; salvage operations are proceeding.
2. Ship was at anchor 2,000 yards off White Beach on a northerly heading, in about 20 fathoms of water, crew at general quarters. Time of attack was at night.
3. At 1540 a plane was heard approaching from the West. Plane was never clearly seen but the sound of engines was heard when it was about 10 seconds distant. Survivors believed plane approached with her motors cut as she was not heard until 10 seconds before the attack, and almost immediately after being heard she commenced strafing, the bullets striking the deck house, riddling three lifeboats, demolishing one, and also piercing the decks and bulkheads in numerous places about the boat and bridge decks on the port side. Plane was believed to have dropped only one bomb which skipped on the water and struck on the port side of #3 hold, entering at the waterline and exploding when inside the hold. Hole made by the bomb in the hull was approximately 14" in diameter but the explosion blasted the double bottom tanks and blew a hole about 10' in diameter in ship's bottom. Hole was on port side of keel, aft side of #3 hold. Several transverse bottom frames were knocked out, both sides of vessel at #3 hold were bulged outward, and numerous small holes were pierced in the hull by flying fragments. Tanks were filled with fuel oil which was ignited by the bomb and, as the explosion blew off the hatch covers in the 'tween decks and the main deck, the flaming oil showered thickly over the bridge, deckhouse, gun tubs, and as far aft as #5 hatch. Flooding was confined to #3 hold, ship did not settle noticeably and the fire from the fuel oil was extinguished within 10 minutes. After fire was extinguished efforts were made to contact shore authorities with flashlights (blinker lights were out of operation) to summon aid for the dying and injured men. These efforts were unsuccessful and another ship was contacted by flashlight and they relayed ship's message to shore also with negative results. Commencing at 1800, SOS was sounded on the steam whistle every 15 minutes until 2000 when an Army boat came out to assist. On the morning of 2 Jan vessel was beached on Blue Beach. Vessel was refloated 12 Jan to test its seaworthiness but after the trial run engine room bulkhead was found to be buckling athwartships and a small leak had developed in the bulkhead amidships at top of the bottom tanks in the engine room. On 13 Jan ship was again beached on Blue Beach. Confidential and secret publications were removed by the Master and surrendered to the Commanding General of the area at Mangarin Bay for delivery to Naval authorities at the PT base there.
4. At 2000 1 Jan, an Army boat came alongside, took off the dead and wounded and carried them ashore. When vessel was beached the remaining personnel were put ashore. Casualties: merchant crew - 2 died from burns, 2 were injured; Armed

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*PP Index  
file to  
x Summary  
+ Summary  
index*

CONFIDENTIAL

Op-16-B-5

SS JOHN M. CLAYTON, Contd.

24 Feb 45

Guard - 4 died from burns, 6 were injured. The remainder of both crews survived.

5. Plane was believed to have been a low flying two-engine bomber.

6. At 1530, 26 Dec 44 while ship was anchored off White Beach, a force of Jap vessels, later determined to consist of one BB, one cruiser and several DD's, commenced shelling the area from below the horizon to westward. There was a waxing full moon, smooth sea, slight breeze, visibility good. Ship was gotten under way and proceeded toward Ilin Strait to seek a more protected anchorage. Splashes from shells were seen in the immediate vicinity and bursts on shore were observed. At 1555, after entering Ilin Strait and while proceeding southward at full speed, with shells still landing in the vicinity, a porpoising torpedo was sighted off the starboard bow, 250' away headed on an intercepting course. Fire was immediately opened with the 4 starboard 20 mm guns, but the firing had no effect on the torpedo although hits were made. The torpedo struck the starboard side abreast #2 hold at the waterline but did not explode. Torpedo then proceeded under the vessel and was sighted to port where firing was commenced with port 20 mm guns, but the torpedo did not explode although it was hit again. Torpedo then described an arc, passing ahead of vessel, and was lost to sight to starboard. No damage was suffered by the attack. Master stated that he was advised by Army authorities that a beached torpedo was found the following day on Ilin Island in the vicinity where attack occurred and that the torpedo was 30' long and 30" in diameter. Master corroborated the extreme size of the torpedo and stated that when seen in the water it appeared so large that it was at first believed to be a one-man sub. The officers were mystified as to the origin of the torpedo attack and as to how the torpedo could be approaching at right angles to the ship's course as Ilin Island was less than 500 yards in that direction.

At 1355, 30 Dec, when anchored 1500 yards off Blue Beach, lying on a northerly heading, a plane was heard approaching from the West. It was a full moonlight night, sea smooth and visibility good, but the plane was not sighted until approximately 500' off the port beam, flying at 50' altitude. Firing was immediately commenced with 4 - 20 mm guns, both 3" guns and by 2 other ships lying at anchor in the immediate vicinity. Plane swerved upward and astern, passing over the aft 3" gun at mast height. Plane was seen to be hit several times by 20 mm shells, but was believed to have escaped. As plane passed astern, what was believed to be a torpedo struck on the port quarter about 3' below the water line but did not explode. Track of the approaching torpedo was not seen. After striking ship, torpedo evidently reversed its course as a few seconds after the jar was felt an explosion occurred about 100' off the port quarter, causing a small column of water about 15' high which emanated green smoke and lights. Explosion shook the entire ship but caused no damage.

BARBARA CONARD  
Lt. (jg) USNR

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