

Op-16-B-5

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

CONFIDENTIAL

29 Nov 44

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

ALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS JOHNS HOPKINS, American Freighter, 7200 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by North Atlantic & Gulf Steamship Co.

1. The JOHNS HOPKINS was mined at 0100 GCT, 2 Oct 44, in 43.16.48N - 05.08.22E, while moving from anchorage off Marseilles, France Harbor with the intention of cruising about until weather moderated. Ship was loaded with U.S. and French Army personnel, vehicles, general cargo, and a deck cargo of half tracks and trucks on all hatches except #3. Vessel did not sink but was towed by the Tug ATR-127 to Marseilles where ship anchored at 0400, 3 Oct.

2. Ship had dragged anchor and was moving out of anchorage on an easterly course in center of swept channel; speed 4-5 knots; engines at slow ahead; degaussing believed not to be on; not zigzagging; completely blacked out; radio silent; 3 or more Armed Guard lookouts, 2 on stern guns, and 1 on bow gun, second mate and possibly an ordinary seaman were on the bridge or in the wheel house. The weather was clear; sea rough; wind northerly and very strong, force unknown; moonlight; visibility good; no ships in sight.

3. At 0100 an explosion which sounded like the firing of a 4" gun occurred well below the waterline on the port side between #3 hold and the engine room. Hull plates on the port side, just forward of the bridge were buckled in and hull plates on the starboard side were buckled out. Rivets on reinforcing band were sheared and bulwark rail cracked on a line with the buckles in the hull. Tween deck in #3 hold buckled. The engines stopped at once and were immediately secured. All auxiliaries were out of commission. Engine room and #3 hold flooded rapidly. The shaft alley was flooded and #4 and #5 holds flooded slowly from the shaft alley. No. 1 hold took a small amount of water. Survivors believed shaft alley door was left open. Both gyro and magnetic compasses were damaged by shock. Electric fans and bunks were loosened. Radio receiver was slightly damaged and was repaired at once. Ship rapidly listed about 35° to port and drifted with the wind. A distress call was sent and was acknowledged by several of the shore stations. Rockets were also fired. The USS HOBSON arrived on the scene at about 0230 in response either to rockets or radio distress message. Attempts of the destroyer to get alongside were unsuccessful and she stood by until Navy tugs arrived at 0600 and the vessel was towed back to Marseilles. Disposition of confidentials unknown but believed retained on board ship. Armed Guard burned their confidential papers.

4. Ship was not abandoned but lifeboats were lowered part way. Two lifeboats and one life raft were carried away by heavy seas. Total complement on board was about 546, including 36 Armed Guard, 42 merchant crew and about 468 U. S. and French Army personnel; all survived. One U. S. Army Major broke his leg when he fell into #3 hold.

5. Mine was not sighted. Survivors stated that the position had been swept the previous day and that they had heard that mines had recently been found in the area.

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File: "Johns Hopkins" report (2)  
X - Navy, Comsec (18)  
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SS JOHNS HOPKINS

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NOTE: The above information was obtained from 24 survivors, members of the Armed Guard, who were repatriated to the U. S. Any additional information obtained from the other survivors will be forwarded.

BARBARA CONARD  
Lt. (jg) (W) USNR

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