

JOSE NAVARRO

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

8 Feb. 1944

CONFIDENTIALALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS JOSE NAVARRO, American Freighter, 7244 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, chartered by the U. S. Army, operated by the Grace Line.

1. The JOSE NAVARRO was torpedoed without warning at 2312 GMT, 26 December, 1943, in 08.20N - 73.35E, having sailed independently from Aden 19 December for Colombo with approximately 3000 tons of Army materisls distributed throughout the holds, including mules, fodder, landing mats, pipes, gear and 86 U.S. troops; mule stalls on deck covered all hatches except #1, draft 23' forward, 19' aft. Vessel was not seen to sink, but at 1410 27 December, the explosion of a second torpedo was seen and the following morning a considerable amount of wreckage was sighted on the water.
2. Ship was on course 117° true, speed 10 knots in approximately 1290 fathoms, both port and starboard torpedo nets streamed, not zigzagging, radio silent, blacked out, 8 lookouts, 2 Armed Guard and 1 Merchant Marine forward, 2 Armed Guard aft, 1 Armed Guard, 1 Army, 1 Merchant Marine on bridge. The weather was clear, sea smooth, no wind, no moonlight, visibility good, no other ships in sight.
3. At 2312 a torpedo struck on starboard bow just forward of torpedo net, badly rupturing the hull and bulkhead between #1 and #2 holds. Ship rocked violently to port, righted and rapidly settled by the bow. No. 1 hold was full of water, #2 hold 3/4 full, and #3 hold had 25' of water, showing that bulkhead between #1 and #2 holds was ruptured as well as between #2 and #3 holds. All forward deep and double bottom tanks were ruptured as well as pipe lines leading thereto. Starboard net boom was buckled double and all oil lamps aboard were smashed by concussion. Propeller was more than half exposed. Engines were stopped immediately; at 2324 Captain ordered slow ahead; at 2325 slow astern; at 2345 engines were secured, and ship abandoned. Distress signals sent and received by Colombo. Counter offensive was offered; 2 rounds were fired by 3" aft gun at lights on two rafts that had been released from ship, first shell was a near miss and the other shell a hit because it exploded and light went out. Confidential codes were thrown overboard in a weighted box.

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At 0330, 27 December ship was reboarded by 30 volunteers, including the Captain and the Chief Engineer, to attempt salvage. All attempts to raise the bow proved unsuccessful. Engines were started and again secured. Ship was abandoned at 0630 after a plane had signalled that help was coming. At about 1410 a noise similar to air leaving tanks under water was heard and seemed to come from hull of boat. Almost immediately a flash and explosion under water was heard. Only a lot of wreckage was sighted the following morning.

4. Survivors abandoned the ship in 8 lifeboats and 3 rafts upon orders from the Captain, except a F/WT who rushed up on deck and jumped overboard. A plane circled ship until abandonment was completed and informed survivors that help was coming. At 0900, 28 December all hands were picked up by the HMIS RAJPUTANA and landed at Cochin, 29 December. Total complement on board was 166, including 46 merchant crew, 34 Armed Guard and 86 U. S. Army personnel as passengers; all 166 survived, one crew member injured.

5. The sub was not sighted at any time.

6. The Captain made the following comment:

That he protested verbally to the NCSO Aden against independent routing through Arabian Sea area. That double tiering of lifeboats to accommodate extra personnel proved considerable hindrance to rapid lowering of boats. It took 30 minutes to put only 4 boats in the water. That he felt justified in abandoning the ship at 2345, 26 December because ship had settled by the bow and #3 hold was making water.

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