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12 March 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE  
ALL TIMES GCT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS JUAN DE FUCA, US, Freighter, 7176 GT, owned by WSA, operated by the Weyerhaeuser Steamship Co.

1. The JUAN DE FUCA was damaged by enemy aircraft at 0920 GCT, 21 December and at 1910 GCT, 30 December 1944. The position at the time of the first attack has not been ascertained, but ship was enroute from Leyte to Mindoro, P.I.; at time of second attack ship was cruising about 2 miles off the beach of Amboloni Island, P.I. Ship sailed from Leyte, P.I., 19 December in convoy arriving at Maragin Bay, Mindoro morning of 22 December. At first attack ship was carrying lumber, cement, portable huts and piling as well as 27 U.S. Army personnel. At second attack cargo had been partially discharged. Draft 22' forward, 17' aft. At about 2200 30 December ship ran on a reef off Pabugan Point, Amboloni Island; refloated about 24 February 1945; and salvage operations are proceeding under direction of the U.S. Navy.

2. At time of first attack ship was enroute to Mindoro in convoy, speed about 9 knots, all hands at general quarters, air alert had been sounded at 0900. The weather was clear, no clouds, sea smooth, small wind, visibility good, other ships of convoy in sight. At time of second attack ship was cruising around, course and speed were changed every 30 minutes during the night but speed had not been changed for 45 minutes previous to the attack.

3. At 0920, 21 December a group of 10-12 Jap planes appeared over the convoy. One of the planes approached from port stern altitude about 1500' and proceeded on a course obviously intended for a crash dive upon the amidships section. All guns that could be trained on plane were fixed, plane was hit many times causing it to change its course and plane crashed into #2 hold. Plane carried one bomb which exploded on contact when plane hit. Bomb estimated to be either a 250 or 500 lb. type. Fires immediately broke out in the #2 hold, which, carried lumber and piling as well as Army personnel who were housed in the 'tween deck area of the hold. Fires were brought under control within 45 minutes and no substantial damage was caused to the vessel and she was able to continue under way. A hole about 6" long and 3" wide was found in the port side of the hull at the waterline abreast of #2 hold, presumably caused by the explosion. A 5° starboard list was purposely put on the ship to prevent water from entering this hole. Survivors stated that the piling undoubtedly absorbed a great deal of the shock in #2 hold. Survivors disagreed whether plane strafed ship or not.

At approximately 0930, 2 Jap bombers approached at an approximate altitude of 500' and dropped bombs intended for the ship. Two bombs landed about 25 yards off the port and starboard side of #1 and #2 holds and several small bombs fell close off the port and starboard stern of the ship. No hits scored by either of the planes. Survivors stated both planes were shot down by the AG.

At 1910, 30 December, a plane flew over ship, circled and then dove in on the port side and released a torpedo. Torpedo struck on the port side abreast of #2 hatch and caused a large spray of water and oil to cover the entire ship. Vessel first listed to port and then righted herself to almost an even keel. Third mate stated that hole on port side was large enough to drive 2 trucks through. Draft 27' forward, 16' aft. No fires broke out and engines were not secured at the time. Vessel continued on her way and attempted to seek cover in one of the coves

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SS JUAN DE FUCA, US, Cont.

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adjacent to Amboloni Island. Compasses were badly damaged and were of no help in navigating the vessel. At about 2200 ship went aground on a reef at a point off Pabugan Point, Amboloni Island, and could not be moved. When survivors last saw vessel on 19 January 1945, she was still on the reef and #1, #2, and #3 holds were flooded. Ship was splitting at the water lines abreast #4 hold, small cracks appearing in the welding seams, but at that time no flooding had started in the #4 and #5 holds. Vessel refloated about 24 February 45 and salvage operations are proceeding.

Confidential publications were retained on board and removed by the Master when ship went aground.

4. Ship was not abandoned subsequent to first attack. The resulting casualties were 2 U.S. Army personnel killed and 1 injured; one merchant crew injured; and 3 Armed Guard injured. At second attack entire personnel aboard survived. At 2130 30 December after ship had been grounded the master ordered abandon ship. All of the merchant crew except the Master and 1 merchant seaman and all the Armed Guard except the Armed Guard officer and 2 petty officers left the ship in lifeboats and rowed to Amboloni Island, about 4 miles away. By 0330 31 December the remaining members of the merchant crew and Armed Guard had gone ashore.

5. On 21 December planes identified as Jap "Betty's" and "Zekes", plane that made the attack was a "Zeke". Two Jap "Betty" bombers dropped the bombs on 21 December. Plane on 30 December could not be identified.

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