

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

27 July 1944

## MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

ALL TIMES GCT

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*No vessel jacket*  
*x-havy. concept*  
*x-haraldr. office*  
*x-survivors.*

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the ~~SS~~ KITTANNING, American Tanker, 10,195 G.T., owned by Paco Tankers, Inc., operating agent Keystone Shipping Co., under Bareboat Charter to W.S.A.

1. The KITTANNING was torpedoed at 1430 GCT, 4 July 44, in 09.50N - 79.40W, having sailed from Cristobal, C.Z., 1128, 4 July for Aruba, in water ballast, draft 19' forward, 25' aft. Tanker did not sink but was taken in tow by the Navy Tug USS WOODCOCK, arriving at Cristobal 6 July, draft 30' forward 32' aft. Ship is in drydock at Balboa, C.Z.

2. Ship was on course 69° true, speed 14 knots in 1100 fathoms, zigzagging regular pattern, 41° - 111°, but when first torpedo struck an order had been given to turn 180° to starboard in order to return a seriously injured crew member to Cristobal; turn had just been started, degaussing on, radio silent, 6 lookouts - 2 crew on bridge, 2 Armed Guard on forward gun, 2 Armed Guard on aft gun. The weather was hazy, sea rolling with a heavy swell, wind NE force 3, daylight, sun not visible, visibility fair, no ships in sight.

3. At 1430 the first torpedo struck in #6 tank and the second torpedo struck at 1447 in #7 tank, both on starboard side, abaft the midship housing. Tanker took a starboard list of 35° or more and master gave order to abandon at about 1500. At 1510, after ship had been abandoned, a third torpedo struck on the port side in #4 tank, directly under the midship housing, and caused tanker to right itself and float on an even keel. The explosions were of a dull, muffled or jarring sound and were not considered loud. Tracks of the torpedoes were not seen. There was no flash, fire, or smoke seen. A sour smell of a fermented nature was observed on board after the first two explosions. Ship turned right after first explosion. The Electro-Torpedo Detector which was in working order was not set off until after the second explosion, just prior to the abandoning of the ship. Engines secured just prior to second explosion. On starboard side there is a hole in #7 and #8 tanks 65' from first strake below sheer to and including "D" strake possibly caused by two torpedoes. On port side there is a hole in #6 and #7 tanks 60' in length from first strake below sheer to and including "A" strake and a second hole in #4 tank 20' from 4th strake below sheer to "D" strake. Keel is broken and set off center line about 2' under all of #4 tank. At about 1500 Master and 5 officers returned aboard ship and remained there to effect salvage operations. Distress signal sent, no reply received, but message had been picked up. At 1430 guns were manned and both 3" and 5" guns were fired blindly in general direction of the attack. Ten rounds from each gun, and about 60 round from 20 mm, were fired. Confidential recoding tables 30 and 31, one ship pad #1927 were thrown overboard in a weighted bag. Ship's logs and articles were returned on board the tanker.

4. Tanker was abandoned at about 1500 by survivors in 4 lifeboats and 2 rafts. At 1600 survivors were picked up by the USCGC MARION W-145 and by 1656 all were aboard. At 2145 the MARION docked at Cristobal and landed survivors. Master and 5 officers arrived at Cristobal aboard the KITTANNING. Total complement on board was 75, including 49 crew and 26 Armed Guard; all 75 survived, one Armed Guard injured.

5. The periscope of the sub was observed by survivors from a life raft for about 15 minutes, distance about 100'. Three to four feet of the upper part of the periscope looked like glass and was a dull blue. Over one foot of the lower

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SS KITTANNING

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part was shiny and looked like brass. At the time the third torpedo was discharged the survivors on the raft heard the sound of its discharge. It was described as resembling the sound of a .38 cal. revolver, two pieces of iron striking each other, a "ping", a sharp metallic noise. All aboard the raft stated they could hear a "swishing" noise as torpedo passed through the water close to their raft and just prior to the third explosion. No wake of this torpedo was seen. Periscope submerged as the USCIB approached to pick up survivors.

6. The interviewing officers made the following remarks. It appeared that the enemy believed the tanker to be loaded and fired his torpedoes at such a depth as to strike the lower part of the hull and tanks only. It was the opinion of the survivors that, if no further attack had been made after the first two torpedoes, which were fired into the starboard side, tanker would have possibly rolled over and sunk, due to the increasing starboard list. It would further appear that the enemy, in firing the third torpedo, attempted to break the vessel in two, but in so doing saved the ship by causing port side to flood and righting the tanker to an even keel.

Survivors stated that a plane, believed to be a PBY, was flying nearby overhead at time of attack, and that a similar plane appeared in the distance after ship was abandoned, but no recognition on the part of this plane was apparent.

BARBARA CONARD  
Lieut. (jg), W-V(S)

DISSEMINATION: Op-16-E-2, 16-P-1, 16-Z(5 copies), Op-20G-M, Op-23-L, Op-30-M, Op-39-P-3(2 copies), Cominch F-20, F-21, FX-37(C&R), FX-43, FX-45, AFASU, BuOrd, BuShips, CG(4 copies), Coord Res & Dev, JAG, DIO 1, 3, 4, 5(2 copies), 6, 7(3 cop), 8(2 copies), 10(4 copies), 11(3 copies), 12, 13, 14(4 copies), 15NDs, 16-P-2, Cominch F-42, BuOrd RE-6-A, BuPers-535.

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