

MARY (March 3, 1942)

The First Assistant stated that four life rafts were cut adrift and floated, and one of them "busted up." The two port side lifeboats were damaged when the torpedo struck. The two starboard boats were lowered in a moderately rough sea without any difficulties. They were equipped with plain hooks. Vessel had no way upon her.

Second Mate complained the "Army rations" were too sweet. Spoke well of the milk tablets.

Second Mate recommended lifeboats be carried in the following manner, in order to facilitate their launching, and he also made other recommendations, as follows:

"There is a way like we used to have on the M. & M. where I was brought up. We used to swing one boat with a strongback. They went all the way across two back fenders made around like this. Take our patent davits, if you will take that strongback just at the edge of the patent davit and lower your boat down to that and gripe it. On a Hog Island ship you lower a life boat to the edge of her house and you have your fenders in there and your gripe rail here, you can gripe her in. You can tighten the bottom gripes if you want to. But that is too low, captain, entirely too low. If they compel you to swing that boat, I should say the fenders should be made like that. But if you lower the boat level with the house, there is nothing in the world to keep her from filling up. If you take a life boat and fill her full of water, she ain't going to hold.

"Q. Did that occur in this case?

"A. Yes, sir. No. 2 boat.

"Q. That boat was swung out directly over where the torpedo hit?

"A. Yes, sir. No. 2 and No. 4.

"Q. The water from the splash of the torpedo filled that boat?

"A. To show you what the force of that water is -- the top of my room was stove completely in.

"Q. From the explosion of the torpedo?

"A. If you get that much force, what is it going to do to a lifeboat? That is two things I certainly object to. Putting inboard grab rails on the bottom, and also swinging lifeboats. Take them clear of the davits and have them ready to lower. It don't take but a few seconds to swing one of them boats out.

"Q. In reference to the grab rail, did you find that it is apt to foul the side of the vessel when lowering?

"A. Yes sir. Another thing. It is not what you might call very solid. If that grab would grab over to the side of this gangway, and you continued lowering boat, something is going to give. It is going to put a hole in the side of that boat and she is useless to you.

"Q. What projections were there on this ship's side that the grab rail caught on?

"A. On the ladder and the gangway.

"Q. How did you overcome this? By breasting the boat off?

"A. Sending three sailors down to breast her off, but I had to wait for them sailors to come back from releasing the rafts on the poop."

Master stated that, when the first torpedo hit the vessel, a large column of water went up into the air and smashed the port boats, and carried the falls away.

He stated that two of the life rafts were released by members of the crew and the other two, on the forward deck, by the action of the torpedo. The Master, contrary to the statement of the First Assistant, said that he observed the life rafts in the water afterwards and, so far as he was able to observe, they were not damaged on striking the water. He stated that all of the life-saving equipment functioned properly.

The two lifeboats of the MARY sailed for 6 days and 6 nights, covering about 450 miles, and were picked up by the ALCOA SCOUT about 38 miles NE of Georgetown, British Guiana, and as a result of this experience, the Master suggested that two sails be put on all lifeboats, a jib sail and a main sail. He stated that he could not think of any further requirements and he was of the opinion that boats were amply provisioned. He did state that there is danger of grab rails welded to the bottom of the boats hooking up on the gangways and such projections on the ship's side, and he was of the opinion that one grab rail on the other side would be better.

Second Assistant Engineer claimed he found the provisions very sweet, otherwise satisfactory. He stated that they suffered mostly from sunburn and exposure. Stated that he understood provisions were added to the Captain's boat, No. 3, from one of the damaged port boats. Gave the following additional information in regard to provisions:

"Q. If you had not taken additional provisions, and perhaps you didn't in your boat, was there a sufficient amount without taking some from other boats?

"A. After six days I believe we had --- are they 15 gallon barrels of water, drums of water --- I think on the fifth day we started on the other 15 gallons of water but we had sufficient provisions as far as the can goods and chocolates and vitamins were concerned, those N.R.A. tablets I think it was.

"Q. You mean the N.R.G. milk tablets.

"A. We had sufficient of those. We ran out of crickets. That was the only thing we ran out of.

"Q. Were they the square gret type?

"A. Yes sir.

"Q. Do you consider those very good.

"A. Yes sir, they were very good.

"Q. Do you believe the N.R.G. milk tablets are probably better than the chocolate tablets?

"A. That I don't know. All of the food we had, had a tendency to turn the appetite.

"Q. Were they thirst provoking?

"A. I wouldn't say they were thirst provoking. We all survived rather nicely on the provisions of water issued. There wasn't any undue thirst with tongues hanging out. They managed nicely during period of the day when heat was intense when you would be inclined to be thirsty. With provisions given they are sufficient to carry you through night and next morning."

Also stated that none of the frames let go from the cylinder tanks on the rafts when they were released overboard.

The following is taken from the testimony of the Second Assistant:

"Q. Did you get cold at night time?

"A. Yes I did. I had nothing but a rain coat and underclothes. It was fortunate that my rain coat was there, but it was a little chilly occasionally at night when you couldn't see to ride the waves and there would be a little wash you would have to sit there wet.

"Q. What type life preservers did you have?

"A.

"Q. Kapok filled jackets or cork?

"A. That I don't know, I didn't see inside.

"Q. You can tell cork by feeling, it is hard, both Balsa wood and cork are hard. Kapok isn't hard, it is soft, more like cotton.

"A. No, we didn't have that type.

"Q. It wasn't either Balsa wood or cork?

"A. There might have been some of that type on boat deck. I heard they had a new type on board.

"Q. You didn't have that type?

"A. No sir.

"Q. Did you notice at any time in walking around ship or checking on life rafts, which you occasionally did, the type of releasing gear there was for releasing rafts?

"A. Gear? They had something on chain and pin overlapping pin that would grab, lift up, or grab up and it would trip.

"Q. It was probably a Pelican hook with a ring.

"A. Yes sir.

"By Captain Kabernagel: She is a Hog Island ship, she has a Mills

gear with a ball." (Note - Captain Kabernagel is apparently talking about the releasing gear in the lifeboats.)

"By Mr. Carlson:

"Q. Did you notice closely, and you would have to notice closely, to see by what means the corner of rafts were secured, was it by nails or bolts, or both?

"A. With bolts or it was welded. Do you mean the stem?

"Q. I mean wooden crate that incloses the equipment and buoyant tanks. It was a square raft wasn't it? I wonder if this particular raft was bolted. You could see it like you see here (demonstrating on bench).

"A. I couldn't definitely say because I wouldn't say I gave it that close inspection.

"Q. Anyway you had no difficulty with rafts?

"A. None at all as far as letting them loose."

PRUSA (December 19, 1941)

(Additional testimony. See previous memorandum of 21 April 1942, for other testimony on this case.)

Master stated that a heavy swell was running after the ship was abandoned and the sea anchor carried away. On leaving the ship, he stated, the provisions in his lifeboat were about 80 pounds of hardtack, 2 breakers of water (28 gallons), a case of milk and one case of cherries. Expecting a long passage, the daily rations per man were two biscuits, a cup and a half of water, and to each meal a can of milk, divided amongst all hands. Master stated the vessel was bound from Honolulu to Panama, left Honolulu on December 16 and was torpedoed on the morning of December 19 at 5:30 a.m.

The water ration was supplemented on January 4, when heavy rain fell, and water was caught for drinking, and everybody in the boat drank as much as possible. From that time on, it rained heavily nearly every day, but the days were very hot. The Second Mate died on January 16. On January 19, after 31 days in the boat, they made Nikinau Island of the Gilbert group. Part of the Master's statement follows:

"On January 24th Mr. Baker, the Fourth Mate, went in a canoe to the Island of Beru, about 36 miles distance, in order to cable Lykes Brothers. He returned on January 30th and on February 2 took me to Beru. On the third voyage to Nikinau Island the Chief Engineer Knes, Assistant Engineer Bartlett, and Watertender Stewart were taken to Beru. On March 8 at 2:00 a.m. those of us on Beru boarded the Fiji Government vessel "DECKI" which proceeded to Nikinau and picked up the other members of the crew on that island. On March 18 at 8:00 a.m. we arrived at Suva and left Suva on March 31 on the U.S.S. LASSON for San Francisco, where we landed on April 21."