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NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON

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Op-16-B-5

July 2, 1942

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MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

Subject: Summary of Statements by Survivors SS "MERRIMACK", U. S. Army
Transport, 2606 G.T.

1. The "MERRIMACK" was torpedoed without warning at 2000 EWT on June 9, 1942, at 19°47' N, 85°55' W, while enroute from New Orleans to a U.S. Army outpost via the Yucatan Channel with a cargo of military supplies. The transport sank in approximately 35 minutes, bow first, after engineroom bulkhead gave away.

2. She was on course 180° true, speed 11½ knots in more than 2000 fathoms, zigzagging 15° to 20° alternating 8 to 10 min. intervals—the entire voyage; completely blacked out, unknown whether radio silent, but files of USS "BARIE", rescuing vessel, contain plain language report of attack from Cominch at 0331 GCT, June 10; 4 lookouts—3rd Mate, AB on forecastle head, 2 gunners aft gun platform. Sea choppy, heavy ground swells, easterly wind, force #3, visibility fair, no moon, starlight, no ships in sight.

3. A torpedo from a submerged submarine struck the "MERRIMACK" on starboard side at about the forward edge of the bridge, #2 hatch, below waterline. Track observed by gunner on aft platform; almost immediately ship developed a 20° list to starboard, rudder put hard to starboard, engines continued turning at full speed until ship sank. The explosion blew the #1 starboard lifeboat from its davits but apparently did little damage to heavily reinforced bridge structure. The ship was abandoned at once, the Navy gun crew not employing the one 4" gun, the four 50 cal. machine guns, the two 30 cal. machine guns. Captain believed to have ordered 3rd Mate to jettison iron box containing confidential documents.

4. The crew, numbering 58 to 60 hands - including 9 Navy gun crew members left the ship in liferafts and port lifeboat. Some confusion accompanied abandonment because probably third of crew had never before been to sea. Captain unable to stop engines: oiler half way up ladder to make regular check when torpedo struck, continued on up to deck, 3rd Ass't. engineer believed in repair shop, 2nd Ass't. engineer volunteered to go below if could get assistance but was persuaded not to. All officers, except Captain, and some 30 others crowded into one lifeboat. Those unable to get in were left to their own devices with resultant confusions. The loaded lifeboat struck the whirling propeller and was demolished, all aboard are believed to have perished; 8 men jumped overboard and found 2 rafts, which they tied together; one man boarded another raft, but later

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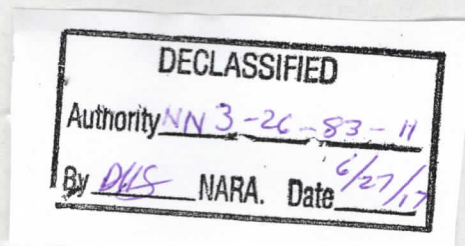
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joined those on the two rafts, flares were seen from a 4th raft. Ten days later the USS "BARIE" arrived Cristobal, C.Z., at 1330 EWT, with 9 survivors, including 1 gun crew member. They were picked up at 1542 EWT, June 15, at 20°48' N, 85°30' W, aboard the two rafts, and had been spotted by a PBY patrol bomber. Six days after the sinking, one AB of the "MERRIMACK" was picked up by the USAT "ARGENTINA", at 0530 EWT, on westward side of Yucatan Channel, and on June 20 was landed in New York. He left the "MERRIMACK" alone on a raft, and for six days held a button in his mouth to allay thirst, since salt got into raft's drinking water upon launching. The one 48 other crew members remain unreported.

5. According to the seaman in New York, the sub surfaced about five minutes after the attack, at approximately 200 yds. off the starboard beam. (The 9 other survivors did not see the sub.) She was large, probably 1000 to 1200 tons; bow appeared to be 10 or 15 feet above waterline, very large flooding ports, carried white masthead light, which appeared to be some 25 feet above water line, large conning tower sloped aft.

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CCF ONI B-8, 16-A-4-d, F-9(4 copies), F-10, Cominch, Cominch F-21-22, F-252, F-353, F-37 (C&R), Op-23-L, Op-28, Op-30, Op-39, BuShips, BuOrdnance (Ensign P.L.Vissat), BuOrdnance, Atlantic Fleet Anti-Submarine Unit., BuPers-6.



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