

Op-16-B-5

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

CONFIDENTIAL

26 Mar 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GMT

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS MICHAEL J. STONE, U.S. Freighter, 7176 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, general agents Lykes Brothers, sub agents Isthmian Line.

1. The MICHAEL J. STONE was torpedoed at 0955 GMT, 17 Feb 45, in 35.55N - 05.51W, having sailed from Norfolk 2 Feb in Convoy UGS 72 for Calcutta, loaded with 7705 tons of general cargo in holds and a deck load distributed fore and aft, draft 26' forward, 27' aft. Vessel proceeded under her own power until when 4 miles from Gibraltar tug HMS BEHEST took her under tow to Gibraltar, draft 19' forward, 43' aft. Cargo was discharged, ship will be drydocked, repaired, and returned to operation.
2. Ship was on course 079<sup>0</sup>T, speed 8 knots in 200 fathoms, not zigzagging, degaussing current in the "M" coil set at plus 51, radio silent, 1 crew and 6 Armed Guard lookouts - 2 forward, 2 aft, and 3 on bridge. The weather was clear, small sea, wind NE force 3, daylight, sun about 2 hours from the Meridian, visibility good. Convoy consisted of about 86 ships formed into columns; STONE's position was #43, third ship in 4th column.
3. At 0955 a torpedo struck on the starboard side abreast of bulkhead between #4 and #5 holds. Ship was jarred by a heavy impact accompanied by a loud explosion. Track of torpedo was not seen. Armed Guard manned all guns but no counter offensive possible. Distress signal sent, stating ship torpedoed and requesting assistance; reply received from Radio Gibraltar. Vessel began to settle by the stern, #4 and #5 holds filling up slowly. Steering room took water, but way was maintained. At approximately 1155 bridge steering control failed and then, under great difficulty, hand steering was undertaken until 4 miles off anchorage, when HMS BEHEST took over. Main engines were secured approximately 7 hours after the attack when ship arrived at Gibraltar. After ship arrived at Gibraltar divers made a survey and found that ship was damaged quite extensively on the starboard side with holes and fractures covering an area of approximately 625-650 sq.ft. between 130-140 stations. All frames, plating, bilge and double bottom tanks were pushed inboard many feet. Cargo was visible at wreckage to both holds 6-7-8 strakes. The divers reported that there was no possibility of a quick patching of damage to allow #4 and #5 holds to be pumped to facilitate unloading cargo. Ship will be drydocked, repaired and returned to operation. Confidential publications were retained on board.
4. Ship was not abandoned at any time. Total complement on board was 73, including 42 merchant crew, 27 Armed Guard, and 4 passengers; all 73 survived.
5. The sub was not sighted.
6. Interviewing officer stated that it was commendable of the Master and crew to have brought ship in almost wholly under her own power. Damage is quite extensive and only through great effort and skill could this have been accomplished.

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Lt. (jg) USNR

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