

Op-16-B-5

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

CONFIDENTIAL

9 July 45

MEMORANDUM FOR FILEALL TIMES GCT

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SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors of the SS MORGANTOWN VICTORY, U.S. Freighter, 7607 G.T., owned by War Shipping Administration, operated by the States Marine Corporation.

1. The MORGANTOWN VICTORY was damaged by an underwater explosion at 0100 GCT, 11 Apr 45, approximately 11 miles west of Le Havre, France, just 1/2 mile to starboard of buoy HD-1, having sailed independently from Rouen 10 April to La Havre anchorage for convoy instructions to Southampton. Vessel carried 386 tons of mail for the U.S., draft 13'4" forward, 16' aft, 14'7" mean. Ship did not sink but was towed to Le Havre, arriving alongside the dock at 1030, 11 April, draft 9' 6" forward, 26'3" aft.
2. Ship changed course to 020°T, when passing buoy HV3, speed 12 knots - 80 R.P.M., not zigzagging, degaussing on, radio silent, blacked out, Navy lookouts - 2 in aft 5" gun tub, others in the forward gun tub and on both wings of the bridge; captain in the chart room and 3rd mate on watch. The weather was clear, sea calm, very dark night, visibility limited, no other ships in sight.
3. At 0110 an explosion occurred on the port side in #5 hold at the waterline. Explosion was loud, but no smoke or column of water was seen. Ship rocked momentarily and did not list. No flash, flame or odor were noted. Lifeboats were swung out and a sounding of the ship revealed 4' of water in #5 hold with water level increasing. The shaft alley was flooded and 3' of water later was sounded in the engine room. The main damage was a large hole in hull opposite #5 hold, port side, with a large crack appearing below and aft of this opening. Various plates buckled, and other cracks appeared in the hull. Full extent of damage in the engine room was not known, but all generators were damaged to such an extent that new ones were installed at Le Havre. Engines had to be realigned and bearings for shaft alley replaced. The 2 aft life rafts were blown off. Steering engine was wrecked. Shock damage occurred internally throughout the ship. At time of the explosion, the telegraph was instantly put to "stop" but the apparatus failed to work. All valves and engines were secured by the engine room watch. Main radio transmitter was smashed and the emergency life boat transmitter was used. Distress signal was sent and acknowledged by a Le Havre station. A tug and a salvage boat were immediately dispatched from Le Havre, and ship was towed to that port, arriving alongside dock at 1030. Confidential publications were secured on board.
4. Ship was not abandoned. Two armed Guard and one merchant crew were injured by the explosion. Entire complement aboard survived.
5. The mine was not sighted. One piece of aluminum metal was found on deck following the explosion.
6. Dispatches received by Op-16-B-5 state that ship was outside of the swept channel and mined. Unlicensed survivors interviewed in New York did not know whether ship was mined or torpedoed.

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E. H. HARRIS
Lt. USNR

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