

CONFIDENTIAL

Memorandum to Admiral Chalker  
 CG-MIN-PUERTO RICAN (OMI)  
 6 November 1943  
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MEMORANDUM TO ADMIRAL CHALKER:

Subj: PUERTO RICAN, complaint of widow of Chief Engineer

1. On 9 March, 1943, at 2200 during heavy weather, the PUERTO RICAN, fitted with 4 lifeboats, 4 life rafts and 2 floats, was torpedoed and sank within 15 minutes about 285 miles north of Iceland. Three lifeboats with launching apparatus were frozen and sank with the ship. The remaining lifeboat could not be released from its after fall due to ice conditions and was capsized by the sinking vessel and its 18 occupants were thrown into the freezing rough sea. Eight of these occupants found refuge on a float and after 15 minutes 6 of this group boarded a raft. Ten persons were seen hanging on to the bottom of the capsized lifeboat and a second raft was seen floating by in the vicinity.
2. On 12 March, 1943, in the late afternoon, 5 of the 6 occupants of the above raft had already perished. The 6th occupant was rescued by a British destroyer. This survivor, Fireman August N. Wallenhaupt, was hospitalized and both feet, 4 fingers on his right hand and 3 fingers on his left hand, were amputated. This survivor stated that he owed his life to the U. S. Coast Guard approved rubber lifesaving suit he was wearing and that the others who abandoned ship froze almost immediately and perished.
3. On 14 April, 1943, as no word concerning any additional survivors had been received, the next of kin of the crew of the PUERTO RICAN were notified by means of the usual telegram that the crew members were missing. Among this group a telegram was sent to Mrs. Wm. Jones of Brooklyn, New York, informing her that her Husband, Wm. Jones, Chief Engineer of the PUERTO RICAN, was missing and that she would be furnished further information promptly when received.
4. On 20 April, 1943, Mrs. Jones requested information concerning details of the loss of the PUERTO RICAN and its crew, also inquiring how long she would have to wait before she received the additional information impliedly referred to in Headquarters' telegram of 14 April, 1943.
5. On 7 May, 1943, Mrs. Jones was informed that there was only one survivor from the PUERTO RICAN and that due to the elapsed time and circumstances of the attack the remainder of the crew, including her Husband, was presumed lost. Mrs. Jones was also informed that no detailed information concerning the attack and sinking of the PUERTO RICAN could be divulged to her.

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6. On 19 May, 1943, Mrs. Jones stated that the details of the attack and sinking of the PUERTO RICAN were common knowledge. She complained of Headquarters' delay in informing her of the loss of her Husband and the fact that she had to get her information from sources other than the Coast Guard. Because of allegations that the lifeboats of the PUERTO RICAN were shelled, etc., and due to the vagueness of Headquarters' letter of 7 May, she again requested the details of the attack and sinking of the PUERTO RICAN.
7. On 26 May, 1943, Mrs. Jones was informed that no further information was received of her Husband and that the records did not show that the lifeboats of the PUERTO RICAN had been shelled. She was assured that if any further reports were received, she would be notified promptly.
8. On 29 May, 1943, the sole survivor, August N. Wallenhaupt, was repatriated to and hospitalized in New York. Shortly after this date Mrs. Jones received the full details of the attack and sinking of the PUERTO RICAN and the loss of its crew from this survivor and his mother.
9. On 12 August, 1943, Navy and Headquarters records indicated that upward of 100 vessels involved in war-action casualties were not reported to or investigated by the Coast Guard for evaluation of better-security-of-life-at-sea equipments and provisions and institution of corrective wartime safety measures, as required by statutes and regulations. The PUERTO RICAN was in this group. The DCGO, 12th N.D. was instructed to obtain from the American-Hawaiian SS Co., operator of the PUERTO RICAN, the execution of form 924d-1 (War-action casualty report) and to submit this report to Headquarters and, in addition, secure the necessary form and statement of the senior survivor, if obtainable.
10. On 30 August, 1943, DCGO, 12th N.D., informed Headquarters that the senior survivors of the PUERTO RICAN were Capt. R. A. Oliver of Philadelphia and Chief Engineer, Wm. Jones of Brooklyn, and that according to the American-Hawaiian SS Co., these two survivors were not available in the 12th N.D. The DCGO, 12th N.D. requested that the jurisdiction of this war-action casualty be transferred to the district where the survivors were to be found.
11. On 10 September, 1943, the information received from the DCGO, 12th N.D. that Wm. Jones was a survivor from the PUERTO RICAN was forwarded and jurisdiction of the case was transferred to the DCGO, 3rd N.D.
12. On 17 September, 1943, in an effort to contact Wm. Jones, the DCGO, 3rd N.D. (examining officer) contacted his wife and permitted her to read Headquarters' confidential letter containing the information that Wm. Jones, Chief Engineer, was a survivor of the PUERTO RICAN.

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13. On 18 September, 1943, Mrs. Jones requested verification from Headquarters that her Husband was a survivor of the PUERTO RICAN <sup>parts rewards for</sup> ~~parts rewards for~~ <sup>the service made by certain warlike personnel;</sup> ~~the service made by certain warlike personnel;~~

14. On 20 September, 1943, Mrs. Jones was informed by Headquarters' telegram that her Husband was presumed lost and that he was not a survivor of the PUERTO RICAN <sup>the consideration due to them; and,</sup> ~~the consideration due to them; and,~~

15. On 20 September, 1943, Mrs. Jones recounted the conflicting information received from the Coast Guard with regard to the loss and survivorship of her Husband and requested a full explanation for such a serious mistake.

16. On 23 September, 1943, Mrs. Jones was informed that the Headquarters confidential letter to the DCGO, 3rd N.D. indicating that her Husband was a survivor of the PUERTO RICAN was based on what was considered to be authentic information, but on subsequent investigation proved to be groundless. Mrs. Jones was again informed that no information concerning the survival of her Husband was received; that in fact, her Husband was presumed lost; and that he was not a survivor of the PUERTO RICAN. <sup>that her husband survived, particularly in the letter, could not be believed by her, or at all events as</sup> ~~that her husband survived, particularly in the letter, could not be believed by her, or at all events as~~

17. In September, 1943, Mrs. Jones personally called at Headquarters. After discussing the case with her she was again informed that her Husband was presumably lost and was not a survivor from the PUERTO RICAN. <sup>that the subject case has been confused and rather badly managed and the facts and</sup> ~~that the subject case has been confused and rather badly managed and the facts and~~

18. On 21 October, 1943, Mrs. Jones in a letter to the President, complained that: <sup>Personal. are not sustained by the foregoing facts or other circumstances of this case. The unaligned memorandum is based on a past error</sup> ~~Personal. are not sustained by the foregoing facts or other circumstances of this case. The unaligned memorandum is based on a past error~~

(a) The elapsed time between the sinking of the PUERTO RICAN and the notification that her Husband was presumably lost was an unreasonably long period of time;

(b) That she was not informed by the Government of the details of the attack and sinking of the PUERTO RICAN and the loss of its crew, but had to rely on private sources for such information; <sup>should be seriously guarded against in the future. Every possible administrative check should be in-</sup> ~~should be seriously guarded against in the future. Every possible administrative check should be in-~~

(c) That she did not receive the further information which she alleges was impliedly promised her in the original telegram notifying her of the loss of her Husband;

(d) That she was not accorded any of the benefits accorded to a widow of a Naval officer who lost his life in line of duty while in active service;

(e) That an apology is owable to her for the misleading information concerning the survival of her Husband as a result of Headquarters' letter to DCGO, 3rd N.D. of 10 September, 1943.

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(f) That there is a lack of appreciation of and inadequate rewards for the sacrifice made by merchant marine personnel;

(g) That the next of kin of merchant marine personnel who are lost at sea are not accorded the consideration due to them; and,

(h) Other matters of similar import.

19. From the foregoing, it is evident that due to the loss of her Husband at sea, Mrs. Jones has been and is in a somewhat emotionally disturbed condition. She apparently feels that she was not given the consideration and rewards due to a widow of a merchant seaman who lost his life at sea as a result of enemy action. As she received the full details of the attack and sinking of the PUERTO RICAN from the sole survivor and apparently from other private sources, which detailed circumstances precluded any and all hope for the survival of any of the members of the crew of the PUERTO RICAN, it logically follows that any subsequent word that her Husband survived, particularly months later, could not be believed by her, or at all events accepted without verification.

20. The unsigned memorandum addressed to Admiral Chalker stating that the subject case "has been confused and rather badly managed" and the facts and implications contained in said memorandum with respect to the incompetence of Headquarters Personnel, are not sustained by the foregoing facts or other circumstances of this case. The unsigned memorandum is based on a most superficial acquaintance with the case. It is suggested, therefore, that said unsigned memorandum be withdrawn from the files.

21. The erroneous information submitted to Headquarters by DCGO, 12th N.D. that Mrs. Jones' Husband was a survivor of the PUERTO RICAN disaster which information was forwarded to the DCGO, 3rd N.D. and came to the attention of Mrs. Jones is most unfortunate and should be seriously guarded against in the future. Every possible administrative check should be instituted in order to prevent, as far as possible, a recurrence of a similar error.

PAUL E. SAVONIS