

NAVY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

22 September, 1943

SUBJECT: Summary of Statements by Survivors SS TIMOTHY PICKERING,
U. S. Cargo ship, 7181 G.T., owners American President
Lines.

1. The TIMOTHY PICKERING was attacked by aircraft without warning at 1040 GMT 13 July 1943, while at anchor 1 mile off Avola Sicily. Ship sailed from Alexandria 6 July enroute to Avola in invasion convoy carrying British troops and miscellaneous Army cargo, draft forward $16\frac{1}{2}'$, aft $18\frac{1}{2}'$. Ship sank by the stern after explosions aboard and shelling by Allied warships between 1040 and 1100 GMT. Bow remained in sight owing to the shallow water.
2. Ship was in convoy station #23 but at time of attack was at anchor about 1 mile from shore with bow in and starboard side closest to shore, making an angle of 45° with shoreline, radio silent, 10 Armed Guard lookouts, 2 at 3" 50 gun forward, 2 on forward 20 MM gun, 2 on forward bridge 20 MM guns, 2 on after bridge 20 MM guns; 1 merchant crew at wheel. Weather clear, sea choppy, wind SW force #3, sun almost overhead, visibility good, other ships of convoy at anchor nearby.
3. Convoy first attacked at 0330 GMT 13 July by 1 German observation plane, type unknown, which flew over on opposite course and dropped 2 bombs landing harmlessly on mid-convoy. Ship anchored off Avola at 0800 GMT. At 1040 GMT ship attacked by dive bombers. One 500 lb. bomb struck ship at #4 hold, penetrated the deck and exploded in engine room and #4 deep tank. Violent explosion followed immediately as cargo blew up. Fire broke out amidship. There was hole 20' x 20' on starboard side at #4 hold, deck blown up at #4 hold. All machinery damaged except anchor. Ship began to settle aft immediately. No distress signals sent. Gun crew manned guns but only about 6 rounds fired from 1-20 MM gun. Unknown whether or not hits were scored. Confidential codes believed left aboard ship but as midships section was afire and bridge was seen to disintegrate it is presumed codes were destroyed by fire.
4. Abandonment of ship began immediately after hit without direct order from Captain. No lifeboats or liferafts launched. Some survivors jumped into water. Others climbed down ropes and anchor chain. Five survivors picked up by invasion barge, transferred to SS O'HENRY and put ashore at Avola. Further survivors picked up by various vessels, transferred to HMS ANRA and landed at Tripoli. Total ships complement 192 including 43 merchant crew, 23 Armed Guard and 126 troops. There are 23 known survivors to date- 1 merchant crew and 1 Armed Guard known dead. Number of casualties among the troops unknown but presumed to be high.
5. Attack made by 2 planes believed to be German but type unidentified. Some survivors believed them to be JU-88s; others ME-110s.

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6. At 0930 GMT, 9 planes flew over mountains in single file, flying at 6,000' and appeared about to attack. Two Spitfires approached from seaward and the 9 planes turned around, dropped their bombs harmlessly, many landing in the mountain, and flew off.

Survivors stated that attacking planes approached from the land at 1040 GMT flying low so as to be well behind the mountains on the coast. They then flew over the mountains, cut their motors and attacked. This method made their approach difficult to detect. One plane dropped its bomb on the beach head. The other approached ship on 90° bearing, dived on an angle of 45° and released bomb at 1000'. Observers on nearby ship are reported to have stated that 1 attacking plane was destroyed by the explosion.

Survivors complained of difficulty experienced in launching liferafts believed due to rusting of release mechanism.

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