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CONFIDENTIAL

R
TD. 139.1398.
13th August 1942.

SHIPPING CASUALTIES SECTION - TRADE DIVISION

REPORT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE 2nd OFFICER, MR. E. L. WARREN,

S.S. HARDWICKE GRANGE

Independent

9,005 Gross Tons.

Sunk by 2 torpedoes
shot 11 miles from ship
on 12th June, 1942.

MR. E. L. WARREN.

We sailed from Newport News bound for Trinidad with 700 tons of refrigerated cargo. The ship was armed with 1 - 6" gun, 1 corlikon, 2 twin machine guns, 2 hotchkiss, 2 P.A.C. Rockets and 3 depth charges. The crew numbered 30, including 3 Naval and 2 Military Gunners. 3 of the crew, the 3rd Engineer and 2 Greasers are missing. The Confidential Books and Wireless Books were in a locked box in the chart room. I do not know if the Master threw them overboard or not, but the ship was not boarded and sank within one hour of being torpedoed. Degaussing was off.

2. We sailed from Newport News on the 8th June and proceeded as routed by the N.C.S.O. independently for Trinidad. We received no warning of submarines in the vicinity and were not expecting to be attacked. We continued zig zaggling by day, but as the nights were very dark we changed over to a straight course during the hours of darkness.

3. We continued without incident until 11th June when the 1st Officer who was on watch, reported sighting an aircraft shortly after dawn about 3 miles off. This plane was too far off for us to identify it and I made no attempt to challenge us; it was soon out of sight and was not seen again.

4. The weather was fine and visibility good but very dark, the sea was smooth and there were light variable winds. At midnight on the 11th June we were in position 25° 01' N. - 66° 04' W. and making a speed of 14 knots on a course 135° S. We proceeded until 0230 when we were struck by a torpedo on the Starboard side. The explosion sounded like a dull rauding t and there was tremendous concussion wash it. I did not see a flash but noticed a large column of water, smoke and debris which fell all round the Bridge. The Fore Mast came down and the derricks broke adrift. There was a pungent smell from the explosion which I cannot describe. It might have come from the refrigerating plant or from the insulation which consists of powdered cork, there was a lot of burnt cork round the Bridge.

Distribution.

S.B.N.O. West Atlantic
I.M.N.O.
D.O.D.
D.T.H. (D.E.M.S.)
D.A.S.G.
P.T.M.I.
D.F.I. (Cdr. Edwards)
D.F.O. (Cdr. Robertson MacDonald.)
D.I.D. I/P.W.
D.I.D. (Cdr. Winn).
D.W.C. London.
D.F.O. Bath.

A.T.S.D.

Captain Bewick.

Mr. R. Allen, Foreign Office,
Files (2).

5-11111

5. The ship listed about 20°-25° to starboard as a result of this torpedo. When I heard the explosion I rushed into the wheel-house to ring the alarm bells and as I was coming out facing aft a second torpedo struck the ship between No. 4 hold and the engine-rooms. The hatches of No. 4 hold were lifted up and some of them blown off, the lower part of the engine-room was flooded. The firemen on duty could not get up on deck through the engine-room and had to come up through the stockholds; all three missing men were on duty in the engine-room and I think they must have been killed by the explosion. The ship seemed to slowly bring herself upright and the keel down on an even keel very low in the water. As the wireless apparatus had been blown I told the Wireless Operator to send out a distress message on the Emergency set, but I do not know if he succeeded in getting the message away. The Captain then gave orders to abandon ship.

6. We had 6 lifeboats on board 4 large and 2 smaller ones. Nos. 2, 4 and 6 on the port side were lowered and No. 3 on the starboard side. No. 1 lifeboat was badly smashed and No. 1 boat jammed in the davits. I was in charge of No. 3 boat, the crew behaved excellently, everyone knew his job, the boat was lowered perfectly to just above water level because there was still weight on the ship. I then went over to the Captain to see if he had any more orders before we abandoned ship. On returning to the port side I found some one had slipped the releasing gear and the boat was already in the water and clear of the ship. I hurried back to No. 2 boat and went aboard this boat just as the painter was being released. None of the 4 life-boat tanks owing to leaky seams, even though they had been in the water on the last trip. At 0300 we were all clear of the ship.

7. We were no sooner clear of the ship when the submarine surfaced and opened fire. We could not see her as it was too dark but the gun flashes were coming from the starboard bow. The firing was not very good and the first few rounds came right over the ship and landed near the boats in the water and we had to row hard to get out of the line of fire. After about 1 hour the ship caught fire. We could see the ship silhouetted against the sky but I did not actually see her sink and by 0330 she had disappeared. Three of the crew - the 3rd Officer and 2 others - had abandoned ship on a raft, after sinking the ship the submarine went over to the raft and the Commander came out on the conning tower and spoke to the Third Officer. He told the 3rd Officer in very good English that all the boats were astern of the ship and they would no doubt be picked up in the morning, and he gave them some milk tablets of Dutch origin; all the time the Commander was speaking to the survivors they were covered with tommy guns by two marines on either side of the Commander. The submarine then went off on the surface and was not seen again.

8. We kept together until daylight when we picked up the 3 men from the raft and I transferred to No. 3 lifeboat. I found 23 men in this boat, including the 3 Naval Gunners. I had a rough course of the nearest point of land which I had taken off the chart at midnight the night before and gave this to each of the lifeboats. The lifeboats never entirely sealed and we had to bale the whole time. We left England in August, 1941 and so we had no fuel in the boats and were forced to bale oil hand all the time. The boat was never entirely dry. We found the wreckage before we left the vicinity and found one of the masonry boxes floating on the water with a bottle of whisky and a set of binoculars in it. All the Gunners denied ownership of the whisky so I took charge of it.

9. We decided to sail south-west for the Bahamas and the 3rd Officer said he intended rowing and sailing due South in the hope of getting assistance. The other two boats kept with us for the first two days and then we seemed to fall behind and the Captain's and Chief Officer's boat were soon out of sight. On the 3rd day the 3rd Officer hoove in sight again.

10. We had about 40 gallons of water in the boat in three breakers. We also had all the modern food, such as pemmican, milk tablets, chocolate, biscuits and about 12 lbs. of prunes and 14 lbs. of raisins. We did not have protective suits, but had the new life jackets with red lights. The sails were coloured and the hood forward was painted yellow.

11. The first day I did not give the crew any food or water until the evening, I then gave each man $\frac{1}{2}$ a dipper full of water - about 4 tablespoons full. I then worked out a water ration by means of a dip stick based on a 20 day trip, giving each man about 16 tablespoonfuls a day, we also had 1 oz. of pemmican, 3 biscuits, 8 or 9 milk tablets and 1 oz. of chocolate a day. Some of the men could not eat the milk tablets. We had 3 meals a day, the largest one in the evening. When I opened the water breakers I found that 2 were all right but the third had become contaminated, I could not afford to waste this water and so put a few drops of iodine into it in the hope of disinfecting it, I then used it to soak the prunes and raisins, finally adding about $\frac{1}{4}$ bottle of whisky. The crew enjoyed this drink very much and always looked forward to their fruit drink.

12. We continued for the first 5 days on a south-west course, I had the crew working in 3 watches, each watch rowing for 4 hour, then standing by doing odd jobs such as bailing etc. and then resting in the bow. There was not much room to lie down and it was very difficult to get any sleep. The crew rowed for about 7 hours during the day and 5 hours during the night. It was very hot and everyone suffered from sunburns, I rigged an awning over the boat during the day. The butcher started having swollen feet on the first day but no-one complained of this until after we had been picked up. No-one complained of hunger but we were all very thirsty.

13. On the 5th day I re-rationed the food and water, allowing for a 40 day trip. I decided to try and make the Calicos group and have a rest for 24 hours and then continue to the Bahamas. During the day when it was very hot I managed to persuade the crew to take a bath in the bottom of the boat this seemed to cool them down for a little while. I reckoned we were sailing about 30 miles a day, the wind freshened up during the evening and died down again at nightfall.

14. On the 7th day, 18th June, I noticed a number of the men had sunken eyes and appeared very listless, but during the day we had a severe thunder storm, in about $\frac{1}{2}$ hour we were able to fill the only empty water breaker. We collected the water in the sails and poured it into the breaker. All the men were able to have a really good drink during this storm. There was very severe thunder and lightning and a thunder bolt landed in the boat, I saw a ball of fire run along the ridge wire of the side dodger and earth itself. I was a bit worried in case it should damage the boat, the man on watch was stunned but was otherwise unharmed. (Suggest a sailor's yarn).

15. The crew seemed to freshen up again after this extra water supply. We had 2 Welsh boys on board and during the evenings we had a short singsong, I was afraid of letting them sing too much in case they should become even more thirsty, and I had no extra water to spare.

16. On the 20th June we sighted pieces of drift wood and we saw flots on the boat and gathered we were near land. On 21st June I entered South by day and West by night in case we should sail through one of the channels between the Calicos Islands without seeing it. We were picked up on the 22nd June by the tanker S.S. ATHLETIC, actually the night before we had passed within 1 1/2 miles of some rocks which we had not been able to see. The ATHLETIC took us to Havana where I was landed and interviewed by the British Consul, the rest of the crew were ordered to stay aboard and were taken to Havana.

17. The other 3 boats were all picked up by the 26th June. We were all very weak when we landed and some of the men could not walk. After being taken to hospital a number of the crew suffered from swollen feet, also there were a number of cases of salt water boils. I lost 18 lbs. during the trip and one of the Stokers lost 23 lbs. Everyone has completely recovered and we are all ready and waiting for another ship.