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Op-16-B-5  
[REDACTED]

NAVY DEPARTMENT

Office of the Chief of Naval Operations

Washington

June 10, 1942

MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

Subject: Summary of Statements by Survivors SS "OCEAN VENUS", British Freighter, 7174 G.T., owned by John Morrison and Son of Newcastle-on-Tyne, England.

1. The "OCEAN VENUS" was torpedoed without warning, first at 0215 EWT, May 3, 1942, at 28°15' N - 80°20' W, and second at 0245 EWT, while en route from San Pedro, California to the United Kingdom, via the Panama Canal and Halifax, Nova Scotia, with a general cargo including lead, lumber, food, and wood pulp. The freighter settled by the stern and was last reported to be resting on the bottom at 28°20' N - 80°21' W.

2. The freighter was running a course of 345° true at a speed of 11 knots; not zigzagging, lights out, radio not used, three lookouts posted; 2nd Mate and one AB on bridge, and one Naval gunner on after gun deck. The weather was clear, wind ENE, force 2, moonlight with a few clouds, no ships in sight.

3. At 0215 EWT, the first torpedo struck the port side at the engine room. The vessel lost way and made a 180° turn, heading south. The ship's radio transmitter was reported damaged and no distress signals were made. The 3" gun aft was manned by the gun crew and at approximately 0220 EWT a submarine was observed off the port quarter. Fire was opened at a range of 4,000 yards and four near hits were observed with a range elevation of 4,500 yards. The submarine submerged at approximately 0223 EWT after 15 rounds had been fired. After the abandonment of the vessel a second torpedo struck the starboard side at the fuel bunkers at 0245 EWT. Confidential codes were thrown over the side in an iron box.

4. Forty-two out of a total crew of 47, abandoned the vessel about 0235 EWT in three lifeboats, 5 members of crew are missing and believed killed by the explosion in the engine room. The survivors proceeded shoreward and were landed at Cape Canaveral at the Naval Air Station, Banana River.

5. The submarine was described as large, painted black (now), about 1600 gross tons, of German U-27 type.

A. J. Powers  
Ensign, U.S.N.R.

CC: ONI B-8, 16-D-4, F-9 (4 copies), F-10, Cominch, Cominch F-22, F-252, F-353, F-37 (C & R), Op-23-L, Op-28, Op-30, Op-39, BuShips, BuOrdinance (Ensign P. L. Vissat), BuOrdinance, Atlantic Fleet Anti-Submarine Unit.

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CONFIDENTIAL.C.O.  
T.D./139/1330.  
11th June, 1942.SHIPPING CASUALTIES SECTION.. TRADE DIVISION.REPORT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE THIRD MATE, MR. F.W. BEWICK.S.S. OCEAN VENUS.7,174 GROSS TONS.INDEPENDENT.SUNK BY TORPEDOES  
ON 3RD MAY, 1942.MR. BEWICK.

We were bound from Colon to Halifax with a mixed general cargo of 9,450 tons, including 4,000 tons lead, 4,000 tons lumber, 80 tons acetone and 1,000 tons canned herrings and paper pulp. We had a crew of 47, including 4 Naval gunners; 5 members of the crew are missing. We were armed with a 3" American L.A. gun, 1 Twin .5 Browning, 2 Colt Marlins, 4 P.A.Gs. and Kites. All the Confidential books were thrown overboard in a steel box. Degaussing was on.

2. We left Colon on the 27th April, sailing independently and without escort. On the 1st May we heard by W/T signal that the "LA PAZ" had been torpedoed in an area through which we would pass, but we continued steering our course without incident until 0124 on the 3rd May.

3. There was a brilliant moon with the wind easterly, force 2, slight sea and a moderate swell. We were about 12 miles E.S.E. from Cape Canaveral; I was resting in my cabin when suddenly I was disturbed by a sharp crack and immediately I hurried on deck where I was informed that the ship had been struck by a torpedo on the bulkhead between the boiler and engine-rooms, both places flooding immediately. The force of this torpedo caused the ship to turn completely round 180° as if she were on a pivot, and we were heading south instead of north. The ship shuddered violently and a huge column of water was thrown up, but there was no flame or smell. The engineer's quarters were completely shattered on both the port and starboard sides; the three engineers who were killed were asleep in their quarters at the time. All the radio equipment was smashed and put out of action.

4. I realized that there was no time to waste, so I ordered 2 A.Bs. to get the two steel boats away from the bridge deck. Meanwhile I waded through the water along to the boat deck and found that the forward end of the port lifeboat had been blown clean off. The boats were kept swung "inboard" under Wallin davits. The two midship boats were manned and lowered....

Distribution:C.-in-C. America and  
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J.M.N.G.

D.T.D.

D.T.D. (D.E.M.S.)

D.A/S.W.

D.T.S.D.

D.T.M.1.

D.P.D. (Cdr. Edwards)

D.P.D. (Cdr. Robertson)

N.I.D. I/P.W.

N.I.D. (Cdr. Winn)

D.C.D.

D.N.O. (London)

D.N.C. (Bath)

Captain Bewick.

Files.

lowered, and as this operation was being carried out one of the gunners - Sydney Webber - sighted the conning tower of a submarine, and immediately asked the Captain for permission to open fire. In company with two of the other gunners - McLoughlin and Pritchard - he went off and fired 15 rounds with the 3" gun at a range of 3,000 yards, and although none of the shots hit the submarine I'm sure they were effective in delaying the firing of the second torpedo.

5. The three Wireless Operators - H.O. Wilson, F. Mather and Kerry - meanwhile tried to rig up some sort of a wireless set from the pieces in the radio room, but in spite of their efforts they were unsuccessful. The Captain - J. Park - stood by the whole time to see if anything further could be done.

6. Finally the 3 gunners, three Wireless Operators, the Captain and myself got into the starboard lifeboat and pulled clear of the ship. When only 150 feet away from the ship we distinctly saw 2 red lights a couple of degrees apart horizontally shown from the shore. A minute and a half later at 0155 a second torpedo struck the ship somewhere about the same place as the first one, but on the starboard side. This was a terrific explosion and a huge column of water shot up to about 150 feet.

7. We pulled a little further away from the ship and stood by to watch events. At 0200 we heard a loud report, probably a bulkhead collapsing. A few minutes later another loud explosion occurred which was probably another bulkhead bursting, and about 0230 the funnel collapsed, and finally, about 0245, with her back broken, the ship rapidly disappeared from our sight.

8. About 0355 we distinctly saw a green and a white light horizontally on the shore, and simultaneously a vessel loomed up on the horizon, and two minutes later there was a tremendous explosion. In the brilliant moonlight we saw flames shooting up about 150 feet high from this vessel. Four minutes afterwards a second torpedo struck this vessel and she sank almost immediately. We learnt later that she was the Dutch LAETUS.

9. I sighted an Italian type of submarine after our second attack, but I do not know if it was the same submarine which had torpedoed us. Gunner Webber asserted that the submarine he saw was of the D.44 type, so there is no similarity between Webber's identification and mine.

10. Two life-boats full of survivors from the LAETUS joined our two boats and together we hove to until daylight, when 50 or 60 aircraft circled round, and at 1030 a motor fishing boat in charge of an American ensign took all 4 boats in tow. On landing I learned that our motor-boat had reached the shore unaided. Our two lifeboats could also have easily reached the shore, but some of the crew were keen to be towed ashore in case the submarine retaliated on them for opening fire.

11. We were landed at the Canaveral Lighthouse at 1100 and then there proceeded to the American Naval Base.

12. The Lighthouse Keeper at Canaveral denied either hearing or seeing anything of the explosions or gunfire, and yet the authorities at the Naval Base had heard and were quite aware.....



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S.S. OCEAN VENUS.

aware of what was happening. In view of the fact that 6 ships have been sunk in this vicinity in 7 days and that routing officers had not altered the routes of ships leaving after such losses I consider that operations off the Florida coast are rather sinister. I gave a full report about the lights we had seen when I went ashore and suggested that someone had been signalling to the submarines in that area, but the American authorities did not appear to be very interested.

13. I would particularly like to mention the splendid work of the Leading Gunner - Sydney Webber. Apart from his prompt action in sighting the submarine and in getting his gun into immediate action he is an efficient and thorough seaman and is worthy of promotion. The other two gunners who assisted him to fire the gun - McLoughlin and Pritchard - showed courage and initiative and the three Radio Officers all stood by until they were certain that nothing further could be done. The Captain was a very fine seaman and leader and stood by superintending until the last minute; his morale was an inspiration to all.

14. There are a few suggestions I would like to make. I consider the standard compass should have been raised at least a foot and a half from its position. It was secured to the steel deck and owing to the position of the concrete gun emplacements in the wings we could not take bearings over them. The steering engine is aft and there is a horizontal steering wheel fitted to the top of the engine. It is quite impossible for a man steering from this position to see anything outside and it would be impracticable for use in a convoy. I consider the steering gear should be carried up to the upper deck in order to enable the Officer to see what is taking place. There is a compass fitted to the steel bulkhead inside this engine-house from which it is quite impossible to take bearings. This particular steering compass was totally unreliable on northerly and southerly courses; whilst on East and West courses deviations were anything from 25 to 30 degrees East and West. The chronometer which was supplied to this vessel was of little use; it was nothing more than a service deck watch which had an error of anything between 5 and 11 seconds in a single hour. The derrick lift arrangements are also unsatisfactory in this type of ship. The cleats and eye-bolts should be secured on to the deck instead of being welded to the side of the mast-house as is the present practice.

## EFFORT TO RAISE SUNKEN ORE SET

### Salvage Concern to Begin Attempt in February

A marine salvage venture to retrieve 46,000 tons of Chilean iron ore from the ocean floor near Cape Hatteras, N. C., is scheduled to begin in February.

The ore is estimated to be worth \$700,000 at current prices if still usable. It is in the holds of two 550-ore carriers of the Bethlehem Steel Company.

The vessels, the Venore and the Marore, were sent to the bottom, fifty-two feet below, early in 1942 by German submarines.

A contract to salvage the ore has been signed by the steel company and the Stefanich Shipping Company of Miami. Stefanich is headed by Capt. Robert J. Stefanich, an Austrian-born former shipmaster.

It is planned to pump the ore, which will be mixed with water, into a large barge. Captain Stefanich expects that between 300 and 500 tons of ore can be recovered each working day and that the entire operation can be completed in four to five months.

He said yesterday that he was about to engage a tug, the barge and divers for the operation. The divers, he explained, will be needed to put suction piping in place below the surface. Morehead City, N. C., will be the base of operations and the landing place of the ore, he said.

Under terms of the contract, the steel company would either buy the ore after it was cleaned or would receive a share of the profits from the sale of the ore to someone else.

The ore has probably become heavily encrusted with salt and would therefore have to be cleaned before it could be useful again.

Captain Stefanich said he was interested only in salvaging the ore. He said the hulls of the two vessels would be left alone.

In the late Nineteen Forties, Captain Stefanich recovered cargo from two vessels torpedoed off the Florida coast. From one vessel, sunk near Cape Canaveral, some 4,000 tons of lead ingots were recovered. The other ship, sunk near Jacksonville, yielded general cargo.

Since then the captain has studied records of the Allied cargo ships sunk by the Axis in Western Hemisphere waters in World War II. There were about 1,900 such ships. They carried some \$3,000,000,000 in cargo.

Until a year ago Captain Stefanich was associated with the Isthmus Steamship and Salvage Company, Inc., of Miami. That company once held a contract with Bethlehem for the recovery of the ore, but the arrangement lapsed.

The captain left Isthmus to found the Stefanich salvage concern.

OCEAN VENUS

