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CONFIDENTIAL.

C.O.
T.D./139/1456.
11th September, 1942.

SHIPPING CASUALTIES SECTION... TRADE DIVISION.

REPORT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE MASTER, CAPTAIN R.O. JONES.

B.S. UMTATA.

8,141 GROSS TONS.

IN TOW.

SUNK BY TWO TORPEDOES ON
7TH JULY, 1942.

CAPTAIN JONES.

On March 9th we were lying alongside the quay at St. Lucia with a cargo of ore, asbestos, bark extract and wool. We were armed with a 6", 3" H.A., 2 Hotchkiss, 2 Lewis, 4 P.A.Cs. and kites. We had a crew of 147 including 4 Naval gunners and in addition had 37 passengers on board. Degaussing was on at the time.

2. Whilst lying alongside the wharf at St. Lucia at 2257 (local time) we were struck by a torpedo on the port side amidships between the bunker and stokehold. I was in bed at the time and had been awakened a few minutes earlier by the torpedoing of the LADY NELSON which was lying at the pier a little ahead of us. When my ship was torpedoed there was a terrific explosion and I immediately got up and went round the ship with the 4th Officer in order to see the extent of the damage.

3. The lights were extinguished, the engine-room was flooded as far as the cylinder tops, the stokehold and bunkers were flooded, the bulhead between the stokehold and No. 3 hold was carried away and water was pouring into No. 3 hold. The ship took a slight list and settled on the bottom in 29 feet of water, the centre of the explosion being well below the water-line. I put hand pumps into No. 3 hold until a salvage tug arrived. I then lashed the ship to the pier to prevent her capsizing.

4. In due course repairs were carried out and as a temporary measure a wooden patch 35 feet by 18 feet was constructed over the hole on the outside of the ship. The hole in the ship's side was 30 feet by 14 feet. The top portion of the cargo was discharged, so that repairs could be carried out, and the ore was left at the bottom. The Salvage authorities also built a second patch inside the ship which was filled with reinforced concrete. All the guns and ammunition with the exception of the 6" were landed, together with the 4 Naval gunners. Four Lascars were killed in the stokehold by the explosion, some of the remaining natives were sent back to India and the passengers were transferred into other vessels to complete their homeward voyage.

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Distribution:-

- S. N. O. Western Atlantic.
- I. M. N. G.
- D. T. D.
- D. T. D. (D. E. M. S.)
- D. A. S. V.
- D. T. S. D.
- D. T. M. I.
- P. O. (Cdr. Edwards)
- M. I. B. (Cdr. Robertson)
- MacDonald
- N. T. D. I/P. W.
- N. T. D. (Cdr. Winn)

- D. N. O. (London)
- D. N. O. (Bath)
- Captain Beswick.
- Mr. R. Allen, Foreign Office.
- Files.

5. The rest of the crew were put into various hotels for the time being. I maintained a constant watch on the ship and went aboard every day accompanied by the senior officers and members of the crew. The Salvage authorities also kept continuous watch on the ship whilst under repairs.
6. After some 15 weeks the ship was temporarily repaired and refloated and left St. Lucia on 21st June, being towed by the Tug KILLERIG and escorted by H.M.S. CLARKIA - a corvette. We sailed with a depleted crew of 91, no gunners and no passengers. Our armament consisted of only 1 - 6" gun and kites and we now had only the cargo of 2,000 tons of mineral ore. The degaussing was not on because the dynamo had been destroyed in the explosion.
7. We proceeded uneventfully to San Juan in Porto Rico, where the KILLERIG left us and we were joined by the American tug EDMUND J. MORAN. Escorted by H.M.S. CLARKIA we eventually reached Key West where the CLARKIA left us and the THETIS, an American patrol vessel, joined us as escort. Accompanied by the THETIS and towed by the EDMUND J. MORAN we left Key West at 1230 on July 6th for Port Everglades.
8. Nothing further occurred until 0350 (local time) on 7th July, when we were struck by a torpedo in the fore part of No. 2 hold on the starboard side. The weather was fine but cloudy, visibility was good and there was a moderate swell with an easterly wind, force 3. We had been proceeding on a northerly course (true) at a speed of 10 knots assisted by a strong current and had reached a position $095^{\circ} 6'$ from Povey Rocks, Florida.
9. A huge column of water was thrown up but there was no flame. When this column of water subsided I saw the deck was submerged but I could not see the actual damage. The ship began to settle by the head, so I gave orders for the crew to abandon ship. The Second Officer rang the alarm bells and the crew went to their boat stations.
10. The Confidential books were thrown overboard in a weighted box, three lifeboats were lowered successfully and the entire crew abandoned ship. At 0500 we were picked up by the tug EDMUND J. MORAN and shortly afterwards a U.S. coast-guard vessel came alongside, took all the survivors including myself on board and landed us at Miami, which was only a few miles away.
11. I asked the American Naval authorities if arrangements could be made to take me back to my ship, so an American Captain collected a party of sailors for reboarding the ship when a radio message was received saying that the UMTATA had sunk at 0800, about 4 hours after the ship was torpedoed.
12. I am glad to report that in this second incident none of the crew were injured.
13. I would like to mention the gallant action of 4th Engineer S.A. Read, who went down into the bunker tween deck after the explosion in order to rescue a native fireman. He heard someone groaning on this bunker space and without hesitation he went into the bunker and found a dazed fireman who would have undoubtedly lost his life had it not been for the 4th Engineer's prompt action and presence of mind.