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CONFIDENTIAL.

C.O./J.M.K.
T.D./139/1403.
12th August, 1942.

SHIPPING CASUALTIES SECTION - TRADE DIVISION.

REPORT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE MASTER, CAPTAIN A. SHAW.

M.V. PEISANDER. 6,225 GROSS TONS.

INDEPENDENT. SUNK BY TORPEDOES ON 17th MAY, 1942.

CAPTAIN SHAW.

We were bound from Cristobal to Halifax with a cargo of 6,500 tons of wheat. We were armed with 1 - 4", 2 Lewis guns, 2 Hotchkiss, 4 P.A.Cs., 3 depth charges and kites. We had a crew of 61, including 5 Naval gunners; none of the crew were killed, injured or missing. The Confidential books, including the wireless, were thrown overboard in weighted boxes. Degaussing was on.

2. We left Cristobal, sailing independently and zig-zagging according to instructions. I knew that several ships had been sunk while they were proceeding on the same route, but our journey was uneventful until we reached Bermuda on the 16th May, when planes were sighted patrolling in the vicinity. After we passed through the Mona Channel we saw one patrol vessel and several planes, but nothing of any real importance occurred until the 17th May.

3. The weather was fine and clear, the sea was moderately rough with a heavy swell, and there was a south-easterly wind, force 5. We had been zig-zagging at a speed of 12 knots on a course N. 14 E. and had reached position 37° 24' N 65° 38' W. when suddenly we were struck by a torpedo between Nos. 2 and 3 holds on the starboard side. The noise was jarring as if the vessel had grounded on a hard rock, there was no flash but a column of water shot up mast-high. I was having lunch down below at the time and immediately rushed on to the bridge in order to survey the damage.

4. Nos. 1 and 3 lifeboats, which were swung out on the starboard side, were completely destroyed by the explosion, and the after deck was flooded and littered with lifeboat debris and concrete blocks from the starboard wing of the bridge. The engineers on duty reported that the water was up to the platform plates in the engine-room; this was caused by the engine-room skylight being broken by the explosion. The wireless and emergency aerials were tangled, wireless set was damaged so we were unable to get out a message. Nos. 2 and 3 holds were flooded and I noticed th water on Nos. 2 and 3 'tween decks. The engines stopped immediately and the weigh soon came off the ship. As I could not get any reply to the engine-room telegraph, the ship was listing 5 to 10 degrees to starboard and the situation appeared hopeless, I put the wheel hard to port and decided to abandon ship.

5. /

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with my false teeth, my gums became so tender, that I finally had to pound them into powder before I could masticate them at all. With regard to these biscuits I might mention that when I eventually arrived home I gave one of the biscuits to my Scottie dog, who promptly took it away and buried it ! The pemmican tasted somewhat like Stockholm tar and sawdust and I found that my throat contracted and simply refused to swallow it.

13. At 2300 I lost touch with the other two lifeboats during heavy rain squalls.

14. The following day - the 18th May the wind moderated and the rain stopped. With the exception of myself, all the boat's crew were wet and uncomfortable. I was prepared for the weather with my oilskin, a sweater and an extra pair of trousers, but the rest of the crew were thinly clad, so when the sun rose they dried their clothes and seemed more cheerful. I devised a sort of platform from odds and ends in order that the men could lie in the middle of the boat in relays.

15. On the 19th May the wind dropped to light south to south-west airs. I lowered myself over the side and had a dip in the water, holding on to a grab line. Several others followed my example and felt refreshed by it. In the evening there was a light easterly wind, but the following day - the 20th May - the wind changed again to a light variable southerly wind. However, in spite of the changeable winds we made good progress.

16. At 2100 on the 20th May the wireless receiver was erected and I received a time signal and was able to keep a check on the time.

17. On the 21st May the wind changed again and there were light variable easterly to south-eastly winds. At 0730 I sighted a steamer 4 miles away, so we tried to send out a message on the wireless but we were unsuccessful. We attempted to row nearer this steamer and at 0800 we were just 2 miles away, when the steamer altered course away from us and sent out a signal that she was being chased by a German submarine ! We were using our sail as an awning at the time and must have given a wrong impression, which was fortunate for us as the steamer was torpedoed 4 hours later !

18. The position given by this ship was a great help as it confirmed our position by observation. As our chart did not show the shoals, I decided to keep north of Nantucket Shoals and make for Cape Cod , bearing north-west about 120 miles. Nantucket Island was nearer but there are many dangerous shoals round the island and I expected that it would be foggy after we left the Gulf Stream.

19. In the evening of the 21st May we broadcast our position again, but there was still no reply. There was then a moderate to fresh wind with heavy showers. As the wind became stronger and there was a turbulent sea we rode to the sea anchor throughout the night.

20. The following morning the 22nd May, the crew complained of being soaked to the skin. The Chief Steward produced a bottle of rum so I gave each man a small quantity of rum with his ration of water. At 0800 the wind moderated, so we hoisted the sail and proceeded. At 0900, the wireless transmitter was again used to send out a distress message, but there was still no reply. I was of the opinion by this time that I could have shouted ashore with a

megaphone /

5. Originally we had 8 lifeboats with accommodation for 400 people, the reason for this being that we sometimes carried a large number of Chinese passengers. As mentioned previously, 2 of these boats, whichwere swung out on the starboar side, were completely destroyed, but the lifeboat which was swung in on the starboard side was undamaged. Three lifeboats, however, were adequate to take the crew away from the ship, so I instructed the crew to lower the three lifeboats which were swung out on the port side. I then destroyed the Confidential books, collected the log books and a suit-case from my cabin, threw them into one of the boats and pulled away from the ship at 1300 to a distance of 200 yards. I counted my crew and discovered that the entire ship's complement of 61 were present. I had 18 men in my boat and the other two boats held 23 and 20 men respectively.

6. The Look-out man who was in the Crow's nest at the time of this incident reported later that another torpedo passed the bows a few feet away from the ship almost simultaneously as the ship was struck between Nos. 2 and 3 Holds.

7. I could see the hole in the ship's side, and would estimate that its dimensions were 20 feet vertically and 10 feet horizontally. Suddenly the ship straightened up and appeared as if she would remain afloat. I was just planning to return in order to collect some warm clothing and the chronometer, when the ship was struck by a second torpedo in the engine-room on the starboard side.

8. Five minutes later - at 1320 - I watched my ship sink by the head and the two poop boats floated off her as she sank. Immediately afterwards I observed the conning tower of the submarine breaking the water; it seemed to remain there for a few minutes and then disappeared. One member of the crew stated later that this conning tower followed us for about an hour.

9. I then called the other two boats in order to decide which course would be the best to take. The nearest land was Nantucket Island, which was about 340 miles to the north-west, but as the Gulf Stream flowed to the north-east and would therefore divert the boats to the north, I calculated that we had better steer a westerly course.

10. At 1400 we set the sails and steered west. Conditions were not altogether favourable, there being a moderate south-easterly wind and a heavy swell, but we managed to keep going. At 1600, when it was reasonably safe to assume that the submarine was not still in the vicinity, we erected the boat's wireless transmitter and sent out distress messages, but there was no reply to these messages.

11. I rationed out our supply of water to 3 ounces a day for the first few days, but as we had 35 gallons altogether, I allowed the men a much more liberal ration after passing out of the Gulf Stream.

12. We had all the modern food in the boat, including pemmican, chocolate, biscuits and Horlick's milk tablets, and had in addition raisins, prunes and peanuts to vary the diet. None of the crew were hungry, however, several of them were suffering from sea-sickness and certainly did not want to eat the biscuits and pemmican which were very unpalatable. The biscuits were as hard as bell metal and after 3 or 4 days of trying to chew them

with /

megaphone more successfully.

21. We proceeded throughout the night and the following day on a N.N.W. course. The weather was very bad, fog had set in and the crew were beginning to feel the effects of the experience, as they were constantly being wet through. I kept giving them as much of the boat's rations as they could eat and consoled them again with a small quantity of rum.

22. On the 24th May at 0900 I observed breakers on our port bow. I decided that we must have drifted southwards when we were hove to and were in the vicinity of Nantucket Shoals, so we sailed about 8 miles N.N.E. to get clear of the shoals.

23. At 1700 on the 24th May I sighted two planes which circled round us until dark, but as the rescue vessel was unable to come out on account of the fog, we anchored. At daylight the following day several planes returned and signalled us to remain at anchor for the time being. One of these planes dropped two packages close to the boat; these packages contained a first-aid outfit, tins of pemmican, chocolate and 8 tins of tomato juice. We found the tomato juice excellent and the American pemmican a considerable improvement on our own.

24. The Second Steward by this time was in a bad condition owing to the fact that his teeth were bad, and he was therefore not able to eat much, but the rest of the crew were quite cheerful.

25. At 1100 on the 25th the fog cleared and the crew were taken on board a U.S. coastguard vessel GENERAL GREENE about 20 miles E.N.E. of Nantucket Island. We were treated very well on board the coastguard vessel and those who required medical treatment were attended to.

26. We proceeded to Nantucket to embark the crew from the other two boats, which had been towed in there on the 24th. The GENERAL GREENE then sailed to Newport, Rhode Island, towing the three lifeboats.

27. After arriving ashore I heard that the crew of the other two boats, which had kept together, could have been rescued much earlier by the BARON SEMPLE, which was going to South Africa. They decided, however, that it would be much more unpleasant being landed in South Africa than having an adventure in a lifeboat in the open sea with the hope of ultimately landing on the American Coast.