

THURSOBANK

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(Name)	(Armed)	Mat	Type	Tonnage	Date	Location	Lights	Damage
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What happened: Torpedoed

Description of Sub:

Survivors: <sup>34</sup> Picked up 1440Z 25 Mar in 37-58N 65-05W from one Motor lifeboat, 2 boats not accounted for. Landed in Halifax. from HAVSTAN.

Additional Remarks:



## DISPATCHES

Nor., HAVSTAN arrived Halifax with 34 survivors of Br. THURSOBANK torpedoed and sunk Friday 20 March in 38-05 N., 68-30 W. Survivors picked up 1400Z. 25th. March in 37-58 N., 65-05 W., from 1 motor lifeboat. 2 lifeboats not accounted for. COAC S 290330Z.

THURSOBANK torpedoed and sunk at 0240 GMT March 22 in position 38-05 N., 68-30 W. COAC S 011355Z.

## REMARKS

CONFIDENTIAL

FD-139/1326. C.O.  
8th June, 1942.

SHIPPING CASUALTIES SECTION - TRADE DIVISION

S.S. THUNDERBOLT

5,575 G.T. as tons.

REPORT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE TRUED MATE, MR. R. JOHNSON

DATE OF DEPT.

SIGNED BY TORPEDOES AND  
VIC. MAROR, 1942.

MR. JOHNSON:

We were bound from New York to Cape Town with a general cargo of 8,000 tons; 4 aeroplanes in canvas were stowed on deck. We were armed with 1 4", 1 15pdr., 2 Hotchkiss, 2 Marlines, 4 P.A.C. rockets and rifles. We had a crew of 51, including 12 gunners - 5 Naval and 7 Army. Of these 27 are missing, (including 3 Naval and 4 Army gunners).

2. We left New York on the 20th March, sailing independently and without escort. I had no information about submarines being in the area, although I had heard that 2 ships had recently been sunk in that area. At 2000 the position of the ship was 39° 05' N, 98° 30' W, and the course 141° true. The sky was cloudy and overcast but visibility was good; the sea was very rough and the wind south-westerly, Force 7. We had just finished zig-zagging and were making about 10 knots; I had taken over the watch on the bridge at 2000.

3. About 40 minutes later I noticed what appeared to be the wake of a torpedo crossing the bow from starboard to port about 20 yards from the ship. I called the Master, who immediately came up to the bridge and ordered course to be altered 30° to 102° true. As nothing further was seen we resumed our course of 141° at 2100, and at 2200 the Master went below. We proceeded without incident until 2300 when a gunner on the look-out saw a torpedo approaching from the port beam.

4. Simultaneously there was a violent explosion on the port side of the ship abreast the engine-room. The ship shook and took a slight list to port. It was pitch dark, and I could not see what the damage actually was, but I could see that the after port lifeboat had been blown to pieces on the boat deck. The Master ordered the boats to be lowered, and all the crew assembled on the boat deck. The engines were stopped by the emergency stop valve from the look deck.

5. Two starboard lifeboats and the port forward life-boat were all lowered, and the crew scrambled into them quickly and got clear of the ship. The Trued Mate was in charge of one of the starboard boats, but I did not see him at all after the incident. I believe two men launched a raft and got away with it.

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I was in charge of the Captain's starboard lifeboat; the Captain insisted on remaining on the ship and seeing that all the crew were clear. He ordered me to get the boat away. I do not know what became of him - when I last saw him he was shining his torch into my boat.

6. When my boat was 20 yards from the ship I heard a second and much more violent explosion which appeared to be in the same position as the first one, and I did not see the ship again.

7. The wind was blowing a moderate gale, so I thought the best thing to do would be to put the sea anchor out and heave to. I burned four red flares in order to attract any survivors who might be swimming about in the vicinity but nothing happened. At dawn I saw the two men on the raft, but was unable to reach them owing to the gale and high sea. There was a lot of wreckage floating about which must have come from my ship. I decided to remain at anchor until the weather moderated and commenced rationing the food and water.

8. Fortunately we had a good supply of drinking water and I was able to allow a dipper full to each man every day. I would here like to comment on the excellence of the new concentrated food, which sustained us very well during the time we were in the boat. I had 33 of the crew in my boat including the 3rd Engineer, an apprentice, 5 gunners (2 Navy and 3 Army) and 25 Chinese ratings. The 3rd Engineer reported that the Morris motor in the lifeboat was out of order, as the magnets was wet and too near the bottom of the boat, where the water was a foot deep.

9. We succeeded in pumping out the water with the semi-rotary pump, which was in the boat, but by that time our feet were wet, and as it was freezing during the night, and we had no dry sea-boots we suffered from the extreme cold. I'm sorry to report that one Chinese member of the crew had to have both feet amputated. Most of the crew also suffered from sea-sickness.

10. I had trouble with the Chinese ratings, who seemed to be under the impression that the white men were going to claim all the food, and they announced their intention of throwing overboard all the white men in the boat. The situation became dangerous for a time; although the Chinese did not appear to have arms concealed anywhere we were considerably outnumbered. However, with diplomacy I managed to restore order, although there remained an undercurrent of dissatisfaction amongst the Chinese during the whole time we were in the boat. I reported their behaviour to the Naval authorities at Halifax, but I do not think that any kind of disciplinary action was taken against them.

11. On the 24th March, after having laid to the sea anchor for 24 days the weather moderated so I set sail and steered to the westwards, hoping that I could reach the American coast in spite of the northerly set of the current. The peak of the lug was well topped up and the boat made good headway through the water.

12. About 2300 on the 25th March I sighted a ship on the port bow about 3/4 mile distant and burned the remaining two flares, flashed my torch and ordered every man to switch on his life-jacket light. The ship altered course and steamed towards us. She turned out to be the Norwegian tanker M.V. HAV-TEN. I steered the boat alongside her starboard side, where two pilot ladders were put out. I managed to climb up the ladder, but to my surprise, on reaching the ship's deck, I could not stand up because my feet were frostbitten.

13. We were treated with every consideration on board the HAVSTEN and were landed in Halifax on March 28th, where most of the crew had to be treated for frostbite. Only 10 Chinese members of the boat's complement escaped the effects of exposure. I had distributed the message oil amongst the crew but this was not produced until 3 days had elapsed and I regret not having used it earlier. I was also suffering from the effects of exposure and was admitted to the hospital at Halifax. All members of the boat's crew with the exception of myself and the 3rd Engineer wore protective suits. My suit had been stolen shortly after I got into the boat. The apprentice had on only a pair of trousers under his protective suit.

14. I do not know what became of the other two life-boats or the raft and can only conclude that they must have capsized during the gale.

15. Finally, I would like to suggest that there should be a bigger clearance space for the propellor - there was only one-eighth of an inch between the propellor and the stern-post and the propellor became badly jammed against it.

24

C.O.  
T.D./139/1326.  
8th June, 1942.

CONFIDENTIAL.

SHIPPING CASUALTY SECTION...TRADE DIVISION.

REPORT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE THIRD MATE, MR. R. JOHNSON.

S.S. THURSOBANK. 5,575 GROSS TONS.

INDEPENDENT. SUNK BY TORPEDOES ON 21ST MARCH, 1942.

Please note that paragraphs 2 and 3 of the above report should read:-

"2. We left New York on the 21st March, sailing independently and without escort. I had no information about submarines being in the area, although I had heard that 2 ships had recently been sunk in that area. The sky was cloudy and overcast but visibility was good; the sea was very rough and the wind south-westerly, force 7. We had just finished zig-zagging and were making about 10 knots, our course being 141° true. I took over the watch on the bridge at 2000.

3. About 40 minutes later I noticed what appeared to be the wake of a torpedo crossing the bow from starboard to port about 20 yards from the ship. I called the Master, who immediately came on to the bridge and ordered course to be altered 39° to 102° true. As nothing further was seen we resumed our course of 141° at 2130, and at 2200 the Master went below. We proceeded without incident until 2240, and had reached position 38° 05' N. 68° 30' W., when a gunner on the look-out saw a torpedo approaching from the port beam."

The Master ordered the deck to be lowered, and all crew assembled on the deck. The engines were stopped by the emergency stop valve from the look-out.

5. The starboard lifeboats and the port forward lifeboats were all lowered, and the crew scrambled into them quickly and got clear of the ship. The Second Mate was in charge of one of the starboard boats, but I did not see him at all after the incident. I believe the boat launched a port and got away to sea.

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