

Department of State

BUREAU }
DIVISION }

SD

ENCLOSURE

TO

Letter drafted 5/8/44

ADDRESSED TO

Mr. James E. O'Brien
c/o Standard Oil Company
San Francisco, California



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

May 11, 1944

Return to
J. E. O'Brien

In reply refer to
SD 195.7 H.D. Collier/7

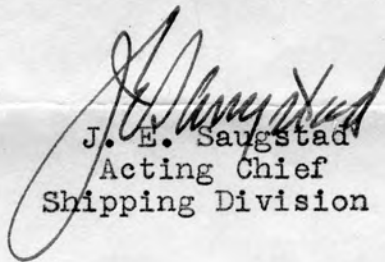
SECRET

My dear Mr. O'Brien:

In accordance with your request made to the American Consul at Bombay, India, there is attached a copy of affidavit executed by you on April 1, 1944 with regard to the loss of the American Tanker H. D. Collier.

Sincerely yours,

For the Secretary of State:


J. E. Saugstad
Acting Chief
Shipping Division

Enclosure:

From American Consulate Bombay, India
copy of affidavit
executed by Mr. James E.
O'Brien, Chief Officer,
American Tanker H.D. Collier.



Mr. James E. O'Brien,
Care of Standard Oil Company,
225 Bush Street,
San Francisco, California.

SECRET

telegraphs were still on full speed and I went to starboard side to pull it up to stop, but the Captain told me not to bother with it as it was broken. I noticed the man at the wheel was Fowler (Walter S., Jr. Second Mate) left the bridge and saw that both No. 1 and No. 2 boats which already had about 10 SS. I cannot recall the names of the men who were in the boat and I was working with the rudder when it got away from me, and then I tried to stop the ship by using the painter although the ship had made considerable way on her with the bow of the boat passing

Before me, Charles O. Thompson, Vice Consul of the United States of America in and for the consular district of Bombay, India, duly commissioned and qualified, personally came James E. O'Brien, who, being duly sworn, deposes and says that:

My name is JAMES E. O'BRIEN. At the time of its torpedoing on March 13, 1944, I was Chief Officer on the American tanker H. D. Collier.

We left Abadan on March 9, 1944, at 6:30 a.m., dropped the pilot at 12:30 p.m. and then proceeded down the Persian Gulf unescorted, arriving off Jask on Saturday, March 11th, about noon. We then proceeded on a route prescribed by the Naval Control, zigzagging all the time. The weather was clear with a continuous westerly breeze, not over force 4 at any time.

On March 13th all hands went to evening meal between 4:30 and 5:30, after which, aside from the regular watches, the men were in or about their quarters, aft and midship. The sun was still up and there was a light westerly wind and light swell (force 2 or 3). At about 6:20 p.m. (Lat. 21° 30' N, Long. 66° 11' E), the time of the torpedoing, I was in the gunnery officers' room, on the afterport side of midship house. We heard a terrific crash and clatter. I did not notice any lurch or shock, but others did. I knew at once what had happened when I looked aft and saw a great sheet of flame all over the after part. I stepped into my room, got my life jacket and papers and went to the Captain's deck. I saw some men assembling at No. 1 lifeboat, trying to get it clear and ready to lower it. We got an additional painter out. Something was wrong with the painter and Hartnett (George F., Chief Engineer) was on deck running another one out. I went on the portside to No. 2 lifeboat, and Wilkie (Varell L. A.B.), was there and we proceeded to cast lashings adrift, getting ready to lower the boat. I went to the bridge and called the Captain's attention to the fact that she was making considerable way and should be stopped. The

dark by this time and we whistled and shouted for them to come, and we waved our red lights, but they telegraphs could

telegraphs were still on full speed and I went to starboard side to pull it up to stop, but the Captain told me not to bother with it as it was broken. I noticed the man at the wheel was Fowler (Walter M., Jr. Second Mate). I left the bridge and saw that both No. 1 and No. 2 boats were in the water. I climbed down on the foredeck to get into No. 2 boat which already had about a dozen men in it at the time. I cannot recall the names of the men in the boat. I climbed aft in the boat and tried to ship the rudder. I was working with the rudder when it got away from me, and then I tried to ship the steering gear. In the meantime, I noticed somebody was trying to let go of the painter although the ship had considerable way on her with the bow of the boat pressing hard against the ship's side. About that time I realized that if they should let go of the painter, the boat would drift back into the flames and I, therefore, seized the lifeline in order to hold the boat from drifting aft, and shouted not to let go of it. The Captain was in the boat at that time. After it became obvious that I could do nothing, I tried to get a hold of the painter and about that time the boat was swamped with water. How this happened I do not know. This was probably due to the heavy swell as we were on the weatherside and as the vessel was making a turn the seas were increased thereby. I was thrown into the water and swam to the shipside a few strokes where some one helped me climb aboard. I saw the Captain clinging to the ladder which was hanging over the side. The Captain had a heaving line around him but one foot was fouled in the ladder and could not get up readily owing to the fact that the ship was moving and prevented him from disentangling himself from the ladder. We finally pulled the Captain aboard by pulling the ladder together with him. All of us then went across to the other side and saw that No. 1 lifeboat was gone. I realized then that we had to do something quickly. On the forward cargo hatch there was a doughnut raft and we went forward to put it overboard. We proceeded to lift this float off the hatch and over the side, putting a line around so that it would not drift away. I saw that none of the men seemed to know what to do, so I went down to the float and told them all to follow me, by which time we had lines over the side and they slid down very quickly. The vessel was, about this time, dead in the water. Before we went over the side, we saw the motor boat about 100 yards away on the starboard side, abreast of the bridge. The Captain called to them to come over and pick us up, but they apparently did not hear him. We then got into the doughnut raft, thirteen in all, with nobody left on the ship. I cut loose the paddles, and by means of our hands and the two paddles, we pulled ahead, and finally away from the oil slick which surrounded the ship. We then thought of the motor boat, and as soon as we were clear of the slick, saw the people there trying to pull the boat with oars. It was getting dark by this time and we whistled and shouted for them to come, and we waved our red lights, but they obviously could

not come or did not hear us. While we were in this raft, before we cleared away, we noticed the splash of shells on the water, which was the first knowledge I had that the submarine had surfaced, and I assumed that they were shelling the ship or possibly the motor boat. After getting away out of the oil slick, we paddled about half a mile from the ship, being well clear of it, and by this time the whole of the afterend of the ship was ablaze, the flames reaching a height of approximately 50 feet, and the water area immediately around the vessel was on fire as well.

Several hours later and about half a mile away from the ship, we found a raft badly damaged by fire, with all the air tanks already detached due to the fire. However, we found somewhat damaged food on board but the water tank was burst open. I and another man got on the raft in order to ease the congested situation on the doughnut, tying the two together, and taking the food container we tied that on to the raft, letting it float by itself. Two of us remained on the raft and stayed there all night watching the ship. There was nothing further we could do and so we remained together until daylight, watching the ship and awaiting rescue. The Captain later climbed on the raft in order to further ease the congested doughnut. Sometime after daylight, about nine in the morning, our hopes were raised considerably. We saw around the ship, in the neighbourhood of the stern of the ship, what appeared to be sails. I climbed up on the raft and stood up to take a good look and saw what I think were the conning towers of two submarines. I quickly climbed down and ceased trying to attract attention. Our hopes were once again raised later in the morning, when we saw what appeared to be a smoke stack which approached the stern of the ship, and then left. At or about noon, on the 14th, we saw at some distance away what looked like a lifeboat, so we tried to paddle both the raft and the doughnut to the lifeboat. After some time of paddling, it became apparent that we could never reach it. The wind was now blowing this lifeboat away from us. I told the Captain that we obviously could never reach it. After a while, the Captain told me to take the doughnut raft and try to get to the boat, leaving him behind together with Ordinary Seaman Walter Truax and William Dennis, member of the Armed Guard. Dennis left the doughnut and took my place on the raft. He was the most injured of all. The Captain told us to try to come back and I assured him that we would do our utmost to do so. I called his attention to the fact that the boat might be in a very bad condition. We then proceeded and after about six hours of paddling, we finally got to the boat, but before getting to it we discovered there was somebody in it. We called to the person to come to us. The man in the boat beckoned and waved but we could not hear anything. When we finally got there we found Jeantrout (Richard F., Ordinary Seaman) alone in the boat. The boat was badly damaged by fire.

We all got into the boat and made the doughnut raft fast to keep it with us. By this time we were all exhausted and it was necessary for us to rest, which we did till about 10 o'clock at night, before attempting to go back for the Captain. At that time I aroused the crew and we went off in the direction we had come from, using the ship as a bearing. After about four hours of searching, we had to rest, being unable to locate the raft. We blew whistles and with red lights tried to attract their attention, but to no avail. We knew that they had a good electric water light and whistles on the raft but we could not see or hear any trace of them. At about four in the morning, March 15th, we rested for several hours and at daylight searched again. Finally we did locate a raft with a man on it. We approached the raft and the man on it turned out to be Warner (Ward L., wiper). At this point we salvaged all the good material off Warner's raft (water tank, food, first-aid kit, etc.). The food was partially damaged by fire and water.

*Mr. O'Brien advised:
 After picking up Ward Warner we searched until the Captain & the man after we were unable to find any trace of them.
 H.B. - 5/31/43*

At about ten in the morning, we looked over the float situation which was holding us back and rigged up a little shelter. Our next move was to try to get back to the ship, which was about a mile away, and it took us all day to get to it. By this time it was getting dark. Our intention was to try to reach the ship and get on board, getting the mast, canvas, etc. from the 'midship square and also paddles, fresh water, blankets, and various other gear, but it was too dark when we finally got there, and so did not risk going on board, as we were afraid to bring our burned-out boat too close to the shipside. We pulled about a quarter mile away from the ship with the idea in mind of returning the next morning and trying again, and stayed in that position all night. After daylight, March 16th, we returned to the ship, paddling alongside of the starboard bow. The after end of the ship was very low in the water with the forward end higher than the previous night. The port holes aft were now one or two feet above water. At about ten in the morning, while we were standing by, she commenced to settle very rapidly and by 10:30 a.m. she sank to almost a vertical position and at about 10:45 a.m. she disappeared in a cloud of fire and smoke. After a few moments the bow reappeared again for a short time and then disappeared completely. That was the end of the H. D. Collier.

A few moments later, no more fire was left on the surface of the sea but there was a big oil slick all around. During this time we observed that one good raft was thrown clear of the vessel. We paddled over to this raft, secured it to the boat, inspected the gear and opened the doors and pulled the gear box, water breaker and food box, setting them up clear of the water. We pulled out a sea anchor and placed it in use at once, tying the lifeboat to the raft. The balance of the day we spent in recuperating and rearranging the lifeboat.

On March 17th, we were still in the oil slick, at which time we rigged sails and headed eastward. Friday evening, we sighted a plane at dusk, at which time we tried to make signals to attract attention. The parachute flares were defective and did not work. Planes were again seen about 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Saturday. We

again

again endeavoured to attract their attention but evidently failed. Following are the survivors picked up by the

We were finally sighted by Captain J. C. Hornor of the British s.s. Karagola and taken on board at about 4 p.m. on March 23rd, in Lat. 20° 21' N., Long. 70° 19' E.

To Captain J. C. Hornor I expressed my gratitude for having risked his ship to rescue us in face of known dangers and for the hospitality extended to us by him and his officers and crew.

On March 24, 1944 at 1:00 p.m. the ship docked at Bombay, where we were placed under the care of the United States Consul.

LIST OF SURVIVORS (ARMY GUARD)

		The following
Grochan	Damon	3/1/0
Drew	James H.	3/1/0
Blardell	Josef W.	G.M. 3/0
Given	Sherman K.	G.M. 3/0
Johnston	Richard E.	G.M. 3/0
Aspeniello	Anthony P.	3/1/0
Juris	John J.	3/1/0
Grubb	Jack C.	3/1/0
Reel	Benjamin P.	3/1/0

and further deposited such net.

James E. O'Brien
James E. O'Brien
Chief Officer

subscribed and sworn to before me this first day

Charles H. Thompson
Charles H. Thompson

Vice Consul of the United States of America

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The following are the survivors picked up by the s.s. Karagola:

U. S. MERCHANT CREW

O'Brien	James E.	Chief Officer
Jeantrout	Richard	Ordinary Seaman
Warner	Ward L.	Wiper

U. S. NAVY (ARMED GUARD)

Crochon	Damon	S/1/C
Drum	James H.	S/1/C
Blundell	James W.	G.M. 3/C
Given	Sherman K.	S.M. 3/C
Johnston	Richard E.	G.M. 3/C
Antonielle	Anthony P.	S/1/C
Juris	John J.	S/1/C
Grubb	Jack C.	S/1/C
Neel	Benjamin F.	S/1/C

And further deponent saith not.

James E. O'Brien
James E. O'Brien
 Chief Officer

Subscribed and sworn to before me this first day

Charles O. Thompson
Charles O. Thompson
 Vice Consul of the United States of America

Vice Consul of the United States of America

Item no. 38

Serial 399.....