

CONFIDENTIAL

MAY 8, 1944.

FROM: LT. (JG) MERLE JAMES GRAHAM, U.S.N.R.
COMMANDING OFFICER, NAVAL ARMED GUARD.
(C/O ARMED GUARD CENTER, S. BROOKLYN, N.Y.)
S.S. ABEL STEARNS, GROSS TONS 7176

TO: THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS.

VIA: THE PORT DIRECTOR, NAPLES, ITALY.

SUBJECT: REPORT OF VOYAGE, S.S. ABEL STEARNS FROM NEW YORK N.Y. TO
NAPLES, ITALY VIA NORFOLK VA. AND PORT AGUSTA, SICILY.

REFERENCE: (A) GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMMANDING OFFICERS OF NAVAL
ARMED GUARDS ON MERCHANT SHIPS 1943, PARAGRAPHS 4301,
4307.

1. IN ACCORDANCE WITH REFERENCE (A), THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS
SUBMITTED:

(A) TYPE OF VESSEL: FREIGHTER (LIBERTY)
TYPE OF CARGO: ARMY, GENERAL AND AMMUNITION
OWNER OF VESSEL: U.S. WAR SHIPPING ADMINISTRATION
CHARTERED TO: A.H. BULL & CO., OPERATORS

(B) PORT OF DEPARTURE: NEW YORK, N.Y.
DATE: APRIL 10, 1944.
CONVOYED.
SPEED (AVERAGE) : 9 1/2 KNOTS
ARRIVED LYNNEHAVEN VA. APRIL 11, 1944.
LEFT LYNNEHAVEN VA. APRIL 13, 1944.
CONVOYED.
SPEED (AVERAGE) : 9.336 KNOTS
ARRIVED PORT AGUSTA, SICILY. MAY 5, 1944.
LEFT PORT AGUSTA, SICILY. MAY 7, 1944.
CONVOYED
SPEED (AVERAGE) : 8 1/2 KNOTS.
ARRIVED NAPLES, ITALY. MAY 8, 1944.

NUMBER OF SHIPS IN CONVOY: OUT OF NEW YORK * 19
OUT OF LYNNEHAVEN * 98
OUT OF AGUSTA * 24

NUMBER OF ESCORT VESSELS: OUT OF NEW YORK * 4
OUT OF LYNNEHAVEN * 15
OUT OF AGUSTA * 2

INTERMITTENT AIR COVERAGE DURING ENTIRE VOYAGE

RECEIVED S-C FILES

Room 2055

ROUTE TO: 161 MAY 1944

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John

PORT OF ARRIVAL: NAPLES, ITALY. MAY 8, 1944.

- (C) THIS VESSEL HAD NO CONTACT NOR ACTION WITH THE ENEMY.
- (D) THE VOYAGE WAS ROUTINE THROUGHOUT.
- (E) THIS VESSEL ANCHORED IN PORT AGUSTA HARBOR 1100 MAY 5, 1944. THE MASTER ENDEAVORED BY BLINKER B AND FLAG HOIST TO INFORM THE PORT AUTHORITIES THAT THE ENGINES REQUIRED 48 HOURS REPAIRS AND REQUESTED PERMISSION TO PROCEED WITH SAME. SEVERAL HARBOR PATROL BOATS PASSED BY AND ACKNOWLEDGED SIGNALS BUT NO ANSWER WAS RECEIVED AND IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE FOLLOWING DAY MAY 6, 1944. AFTER THE MASTER HAD OBTAINED PERMISSION FROM A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE U.S. NAVAL LIASION OFFICER TO GO ASHORE, THAT INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED FROM THE BRITISH THAT REPAIRS WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE AS THE CONVOY WAS TO LEAVE AT 0530 THE FOLLOWING MORNING. ACCORDING TO THE MASTER THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES ADVISED THEY WERE TOO BUSY TO PAY ATTENTION TO HIS SIGNALS. HAD THE SIGNALS BEEN ANSWERED PROMPTLY THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN SUFFICIENT TIME TO EFFECT THE NEEDED REPAIRS.
- (F) THE MERCHANT RADIO OPERATORS APPEARED TO CARRY OUT WARTIME RADIO INSTRUCTIONS PARTICULARLY IN REGARD TO KEEPING INTERCEPTED MESSAGES CONFIDENTIAL.

(G) THE 3/50 GUN FORWARD IS NOW EQUIPPED WITH MODIFIED CARTWHEEL SIGHTS MADE FROM FENCE SIGHTS. MARK IV CARTWHEEL SIGHTS SHOULD BE INSTALLED AND STEEL SIGHT GUARDS CONSTRUCTED.

A GENERAL ALARM BELL SHOULD BE INSTALLED IN OR NEAR THE 3/50 FORWARD GUN TUB AS THE ALARM IS NOT NOW AUDIBLE TO MEN WORKING IN THIS SECTOR.

BATTLE PHONE CONNECTIONS SHOULD BE INSTALLED IN #1 AND #2 20MM GUN TUBS. AT THE PRESENT TIME THERE IS NO METHOD OF COMMUNICATION WITH THESE GUNS.

THE SHIP HAS NEITHER ROCKETS NOR A VERY PISTOL. BOTH SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE. THE VERY PISTOL IS PARTICULARLY DESIRABLE.

THE ARMED GUARD COMMANDERS QUARTERS ARE ENTIRELY TOO SMALL FOR LIVING QUARTERS AS WELL AS FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE BUSINESS WHICH A CREW OF TWENTY SIX MEN ENTAILS. HIS CABIN IS AS SMALL AS THE SMALLEST CABIN OCCUPIED BY A LICENSED MERCHANT MARINE OFFICER ABOARD AND IS LOCATED ON THE BOAT DECK. IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT HIS QUARTERS BE MOVED TO THE BRIDGE DECK TO THE CABIN NORMALLY OCCUPIED BY GUNNERY OFFICERS ON LIBERTY SHIPS.

(H) THE MASTER AND OFFICERS OF THE SHIP WERE DILIGENT ABOUT CARRYING OUT " WARTIME INSTRUCTIONS FOR U.S. MERCHANT SHIPS ".

(I) IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ALL SIGNALMEN HAVE SEA EXPERIENCE AS STRIKERS BEFORE THEY ARE RATED. BOTH THE SIGNALMAN 3/C AND THE SIGNALMAN STRIKER ASSIGNED TO THE ARMED GUARD CREW WERE INEXPERIENCED AND THIS INEXPERIENCE WAS A SOURCE OF CONSTANT FRICTION BETWEEN THE MASTER AND THE ARMED GUARD COMMANDER AND A CAUSE FOR WORRY TO ALL CONCERNED.

IT IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED THAT ALL SHIPS SENT INTO THE MEDITERRANEAN OR OTHER AIRCRAFT AREAS BE EQUIPPED WITH DUAL PURPOSE GUNS BOTH FORE AND AFT OR AT LEAST FUSED AMMUNITION SHOULD BE ISSUED FOR ALL BROADSIDE GUNS.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE ARMED GUARD PERSONNEL SITUATION BE INVESTIGATED. THE ARMED GUARD COMMANDER REPORTED A SHORTAGE OF TWO S1/C TO THE PORT DIRECTOR NEW YORK N.Y. 24 HOURS BEFORE SAILING AND WAS UNABLE TO OBTAIN REPLACEMENTS ON THE GROUNDS THAT MEN WERE NOT AVAILABLE AND THAT REPLACEMENTS COULD BE OBTAINED IN NORFOLK VA. ON ARRIVAL IN NORFOLK THE SHORTAGE WAS AGAIN REPORTED AND REPLACEMENTS REFUSED. CONSEQUENTLY THE SHIP WAS FORCED TO SAIL WITH A TOTAL GUN CREW AND COMMUNICATIONS GROUP OF TWENTY FOUR MEN.

(J) NO IMPROPER PROCEDURE ON THE PART OF FRIENDLY AIRCRAFT APPROACHING THIS VESSEL WAS NOTED.

Merle J. Graham

MERLE J. GRAHAM,
LT. (JG) U.S.N.R.
ARMED GUARD COMMANDER