

End-1

13 June 1944.

CONFIDENTIAL

From: The U.S. Naval Port Officer, Southampton, England.
To : The Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department,
Washington, D.C.

Via : The Commander, U.S. Naval Forces in Europe. 7176

1. Forwarded. GT

2. Armed Guard Officer and Royal Observer Corps members from the S.S. ABIEL FOSTER and Armed Guard Officer of S.S. ENOCH TRAIN were interviewed by Staff Officer DEMS and U.S. Naval Port Officer on June 12, 1944 because of their believed presence in area adjacent to S.S. JOSHUA LIPPINCOTT at time of occurrence of incident when U. S. aircraft was shot down. It was the opinion of the DEMS officer and the undersigned that this interview produced no information additional to that indicated in basic letter beyond fact that small landing craft in immediate vicinity - which have no Royal Observer Corps men aboard - were more prone to fire an aircraft quickly.

D. J. Harkins
D. J. HARKINS.

End--2

UNITED STATES
U.S. NAVAL FORCES IN EUROPE
20 GROSVENOR SQUARE
LONDON, W.1.

Serial 03514

CONFIDENTIAL

JUN 16 1944

From: Commander, U.S. Naval Forces in Europe,
To : Chief of Naval Operations.

1. Forwarded.

RECEIVED S-C FILES

23 Room 2055

ROUTE TO: 19 JUN 1944

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Pkg. No.

44-3/53 ABIEL FOSTER

L. W. Cantrell
L. W. CANTRELL,
By direction.

JUN 20 1944

RECEIVED

NAVY DEPARTMENT

DOWN IN FLAMES 6000 YARDS OFF PORT QUARTER.
A FAT 0115 HEAVY TRACER BARRAGE 5000 YARDS ASTERN TOGETHER WITH
NUMEROUS FLARES WERE OBSERVED FOR 30 MINUTES. THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT
HEAVY GUN FIRE WAS EVIDENT BY SOUND AND FLARE ON SHORE.

AT 2025 SEVENTEEN STICKS WERE DROPPED BY PATTERN BOMBING
THROUGH A THICK OVERCAST ONTO THE BEACH AND THE REPERCUSSIONS WERE
TEETH RATTLING. IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THE U
WHO WERE IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER HEARD TO BE HEADING
OVER THE HARBOR

FROM: OFFICER-IN-CHARGE, ARMED GUARD UNIT ABOARD S/S ABIEL FOSTER
 TO: CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
 VIA: (1) U.S. NAVAL PORT OFFICE -- SOUTHAMPTON
 (2) THE COMMANDER, U.S. NAVAL FORCES IN EUROPE
 SUBJECT: (A) REPORT OF TURNCO VOYAGE OF SS ABIEL FOSTER (GB-UTAH & RETURN)
 REFERENCE: (A) GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMMANDING OFFICERS OF NAVAL
 ARMED GUARDS ON MERCHANT SHIPS. 1943 PAR. 4301

(1) IN ACCORDANCE WITH REFERENCE (A) THE FOLLOWING REPORT IS
 RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED.

(A) NAME: SS ABIEL FOSTER - TYPE: LIBERTY -- GROSS TONNAGE: 7176
 TYPE OF CARGO: ARMY EQUIPMENT AND PERSONNEL -- OWNER: W.S.A.
 OPERATED BY MATSON NAVIGATION LINES.
 (B) PORT DEPARTURE: NEWPORT, ENGLAND AND BARRY ROADS.
 TIME: 6/6/44 (0715) DOUBLE BRITISH SUMMER TIME.
 CONVOY: YES -- NO. 1 PORT COLUMN. NO. OF SHIPS: APPROXIMATELY 38
 (LATER JOINED BY COASTERS AND LANDING CRAFT OF UNDETERMINED NUMBER.)
 ESCORTS: 5 TO 7 OBSERVED AT ALL TIMES -- SPEED OF CONVOY * VARIED,
 8.5 KNOTS AVERAGE.

PORT OF ARRIVAL: UTAH BEACH, FRANCE -- TIME: 6/8/44 (0659) DOUBLE
 BRITISH SUMMERTIME.

(C) CONTACTS AND ACTION WITH ENEMY: FROM 2400 JUNE 7, TO 0600 JUNE 8,
 1944, THE FOLLOWING ACTION WAS EXPERIENCED AND OBSERVED. ENEMY
 PLANES WERE OVERHEAD AND E. BOATS HAD INFILTRATED INTO SMALL LANDING
 CRAFT FORMATIONS IN DARK. AT 0100 OPENED FIRE ON ENEMY PLANES
 CROSSING SHIP FROM PORT TO STARBOARD, ELEVATION 900 FEET. AT 0213
 OBSERVED ESCORT GETTING TRACER HITS ON E. BOATS 1500 YARDS ON PORT
 QUARTER. AT 0305 OBSERVED WHAT APPEARED TO BE FRIENDLY DESTROYER
 CROSS PATROLLING CONVOY DEAD AHEAD 4000 YARDS TO SUSTAIN DAMAGE OF
 UNDETERMINED ORIGIN AND BURST INTO GREAT BALL OF FIRE (UNCONFIRMED
 REPORTS CLAIMED LOSS OF SHIP AND 200 LIVES). FLARES WERE SEEN AND
 DEPTH CHARGES WERE HEARD AND FELT THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT.

AT 0603, JUNE 8, FRIENDLY CRUISERS AND BATTLESHIPS WERE SEEN
 TO OPEN FIRE ON TARGETS ON SHORE AND CONTINUE BOMBARDMENT FOR
 17 1/2 HOURS WITHOUT LETUP.

AT 1400 A COASTER HIT A MINE 100 YARDS OFF THE STARBOARD BEAM
 AND SANK IN 1 1/2 MINUTES. SWEEPERS EXPLODED 3 MORE MINES IN THE
 SAME VICINITY SHORTLY THEREAFTER. (4 SURVIVORS WERE TAKEN OUT OF
 THE WATER.)

AT 3 VARIED TIMES DURING THE DAY 3 ALLIED PLANES WERE OBSERVED
 TO FALL OUT OF FLYING FORMATIONS AND PLUNGE SEAWARD (NO GUNFIRE (AA)
 WAS SEEN OR HEARD. OPINION IS: MECHANICAL BREAKDOWN AT HIGH SPEED
 WAS CAUSE).

AT 2400 LOW FLYING ENEMY CRAFT SWEEPED OVER PORT QUARTER AT
 APPROXIMATELY 500 FEET AFTER BOMB DROPPED 100 YARDS OFF PORT QUAR-
 TER; OPENED FIRE WITH 20 MM. GUNS.

AT 0100 JUNE 9, PLANE OF UNDETERMINED IDENTITY SEEN TO GO
 DOWN IN FLAMES 6000 YARDS OFF PORT QUARTER.

AT 0115 HEAVY TRACER BARRAGE 5000 YARDS ASTERN TOGETHER WITH
 NUMEROUS FLARES WERE OBSERVED FOR 30 MINUTES. THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT
 HEAVY GUN FIRE WAS EVIDENT BY SOUND AND FLARE ON SHORE.

AT 2025 SEVENTEEN STICKS WERE DROPPED BY PATTERN BOMBING
 THROUGH A THICK OVERCAST ONTO THE BEACH AND THE REPERCUSSIONS WERE
 TEETH RATTLING. IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THE UNSEEN PLANES
 WHO WERE IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER HEARD TO BE HEADING
 OVER THE HARBOR.

SUDDENLY A SINGLE PLANE EMERGED AT 500 FEET ON THE PORT BEAM AND 20 MM. FIRE WAS OPENED. THE PLANE BANKED SHARPLY AND DIS-APPEARED IN THE MIST. IN THE FLEETING MOMENT OF OBSERVATION THE PLANE SPOTTER ON BOARD DECLARED THE CRAFT TO BE FRIENDLY BUT TOO LATE TO HALT GUN FIRE.

SHORTLY THEREAFTER ALL SHIPS WERE ADVISED BY NAVAL CONTROL SHIP THAT PLANES THEN IN AREA WERE FRIENDLY. FIRE WAS WITHHELD ON TWO MORE GROUPS OF CRAFT PASSING OVER THIS SHIP. HOWEVER, THE MAJORITY OF SURFACE CRAFT OPENED UP WITH HIGH ANGLE AND 20 MM. GUNS AT LOW FLYING PLANES AT A JUDGED ELEVATION OF 800 FEET. DURING THESE 3 INCIDENTS A BOMB FELL IN THE SEA 1000 YARDS OFF THE PORT BEAM. IT IS JUDGMENT OF UNDERSIGNED THAT THIS BOMB WAS DROPPED FROM ENEMY PLANE AT A MUCH HIGHER ELEVATION THAN THAT OF THE PLANES HERETOFOREMENTIONED AS OBSERVED.

FROM 0345, JUNE 10, UNTIL 0645 EXCHANGE OF NAVAL GUN FIRE WAS OBSERVED ON STARBOARD BEAM AT 10000 YARDS; 2 PLANES WERE SEEN TO COME DOWN IN FLAMES 6000 YARDS ASTERN AND GREAT FIRES ON PORT BEAM WERE OBSERVED ON SHORE. NONE OF THIS LATTER ACTION RESULTED IN ANY HAZARD TO THIS SHIP.

THE RETURN VOYAGE WAS UNEVENTFUL EXCEPT FOR BAD CONVOY PROCEDURE ON THE PART OF SOME SHIPS.

COMMENTS:

(A) THE COMMAND TO OPEN FIRE WAS GIVEN BY THE UNDERSIGNED IN THREE INSTANCES ONLY AS HEREINBEFORE RELATED. IN SAID THREE INSTANCES THE SAFETY OF THE SHIP WAS IMPERILED AND IDENTIFICATION OF PLANES WAS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. EVEN THEN ONLY 20 MM. GUNS WERE FIRED.

(B) IT IS THE SUGGESTION OF THE UNDERSIGNED THAT SHIPS ANCHORED IN THE UNLOADING AREA OF THE BEACHES BE ADVISED A FEW MINUTES IN ADVANCE OF ANY FRIENDLY AREAL OPERATION IN MUCH THE SAME MANNER AS WARNINGS ARE GIVEN OF THE APPROACH OF ENEMY CRAFT, SUCH AS LIGHTS, FLAGHOIST AND SIRENS, INASMUCH AS THE OPERATION IS SO VAST IT IS IMPOSSIBLE IN MANY CASES TO TELL AN ENEMY ATTACK FROM A FRIENDLY ONE.

(C) TARDY UNLOADING WAS NOT DUE TO WEATHER CONDITIONS AS RELATED BY RADIO, BUT RATHER TO POOR ORGANIZATION IN GETTING LANDING CRAFT TO THE SHIPS AS NEEDED.

(D) ACCORDING TO NAVAL CONTROL SEVERAL FRIENDLY AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN SHOT DOWN AND SHIPS HAVE BEEN REPRIMANDED FOR IGNORANCE AND BAD JUDGMENT.

ON THE OTHER HAND EACH ARMED GUARD OFFICER IS CHARGED WITH THE DEFENSE OF HIS OWN PARTICULAR VESSEL AND IS WITHIN HIS RIGHTS, UNDER THE OPERATION, TO OPEN FIRE ON CRAFT FLYING AT LESS THAN 1000 FEET IF DETERMINED TO BE ENEMY AND IF THEY COMMIT A HOSTILE ACT. BOMBS DROPPING IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY DURING A FRIENDLY AIR OPERATION BECOME SOMETHING OF A PARADOX AND PLACE ONE'S IGNORANCE AND GOOD JUDGMENT ON A PAR.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

Lt. (JG) Louis T. Griffith
LT. (JG) LOUIS T. GRIFFITH, US
ARMED GUARD OFFICER, S/S ABIE

DECLASSIFIED
Authority *WNO 750161*

