

CONFIDENTIAL

15 November 1943

CREW

Contact B, formerly chief engineer of the SS WILLIAM W. GERHARD, offered the following information concerning a crew member of the GERHARD.

Contact charged that Sidney Jones ALFORD, oiler, exhibited cowardice and deserted his post during an alarm at sea. About 7 P.M., while ALFORD was standing the 4-8 P.M. watch, the telamotor gear went out of order and put the ship out of control temporarily. The danger signal was sounded on the whistle. ALFORD went to the upper engine room, grabbed a lifejacket, and went to a lifeboat. He was out of the engine room five minutes and went back below. During his absence the 1st Ass't Engineer was alone answering steering bells and handling the engines to avoid collision with several Navy minelayers.

ALFORD was brought before the Master, Olaf Jackson, the following morning and admitted he was scared, that this was his first trip at sea. Informant stated the Master was soft-hearted and left him off with a warning.

At Casablanca ALFORD got drunk and went berserk in his quarters aboard ship; an ambulance was called and took him to the hospital. ALFORD, however, was refused admittance and word was sent back by a doctor that they were treating only sick persons. As the result of that incident, his pass was lifted and he was confined to the ship for the remainder of the stay at Casablanca.

Contact, described ALFORD as incompetent and arrogant and requiring constant supervision. While serving as union delegate for a time during the early part of the voyage he caused "considerable friction" among the crew. In the latter connection Contact stated he was not prejudiced against ALFORD; that he himself believed in unions and at one time had joined a strike. Contact said ALFORD brought on trouble for himself even before ship left Norfolk Army Base by taking a day off just before sailing.

Contact stated he had written a letter against ALFORD and intended to file charges against him, even though the Master indicated he was not going to act, but the papers were lost when ship was sunk at Salerno.

SOURCE: Army Service Forces, Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation, Intelligence Boarding Report, Norfolk, Va. 28 October 1943, SS ALEXANDER MARTIN, forwarded with ltr. 11 Nov. 1943; H-44909.

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