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(OMP)

CG-628-COMP

10 March, 1944

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CREW DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE,
WAR SHIPPING ADMINISTRATION

The Coast Guard has received from a reliable source information concerning violations of security regulations by the following merchant crew members.

File

It is reported that Robert Owen Datson, an officer serving aboard the SS FORT ERIE, divulged the name of his ship and its probable sailing time over a public telephone on 17 November, 1943 while he was on shore leave in the Fiji Islands.

It is also reported that Erwin Weidel, a clerk, serving on a recent voyage of the WM. H. ASPINWALD, wrote a letter in October 1943 from the Persian Gulf, in which he divulged his intention to violate security regulations in his next letter. He stated that he was going to use a "Code of Agents" in his next letter to notify the recipient of his ship's next port of loading.

The Coast Guard will instigate whatever disciplinary action may be warranted in these cases.

K. K. COWART
Chief, Merchant Marine
Personnel Division

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Authority 26 83 11
By *A* NARA. Date 4/11/7

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HEADQUARTERS II ISLAND COMMAND
APO 915

23 November 1943
6 December 1943

MEMORANDUM FOR THE OFFICER IN CHARGE:

Subject: ROBERT OWEN DATSON
Merchant Marine Officer,
S. S. Fort Erie

Re: Covering Memorandum

I
On November 29, 1943, this Agent began a preliminary investigation of subject, as requested by A C of S, G-2, II Island Command, APO 915. DATSON, a Merchant Marine Officer on the S. S. Fort Erie, was reported by Cpl. Billy B. Baker Military Police Platoon, Lautoka, Fiji, to have given the name of his ship (S. S. Fort Erie) and its probable sailing time over a public telephone.

II
Instant investigation disclosed the DATSON, on about 2100 Hours 17th November 1943, did mention the name of his ship (S. S. Fort Erie) several times as well as its probable sailing time over a public telephone. (Memo- A)

DATSON, by his own admission, is a deserter from the British Navy and has also received a D. C. D. from the United States Navy at which time he lost his citizenship. Subject admitted that he was intoxicated at the time he made the statements concerning the probable sailing time of his ship. (Memo- B)

III
In the opinion of this Agent, DATSON in view of his unfavorable Military History and his violation of security regulations at this base, should be fully investigated. This Agent recommends that a copy of this report be made available to the Office of Naval Intelligence, Washington, D. C. for appropriate action.

HERMAN RITTER
SPECIAL AGENT, CIC

MI Dist:
Coast Guard (via Capt. Hadley)
FBI
TC
File

HEADQUARTERS II ISLAND COMMAND

A.O. 913

29 November 1943

MEMORANDUM FOR THE OFFICER IN CHARGE:

Subject: ROBERT OREN DATSON
Merchant Marine Officer,
S. S. Fort Erie

Re: Interview with Cpl., Billy B. Baker

On November 25, 1943, this Agent interviewed Cpl., Billy B. Baker, Military Police Platoon, Lautoka, Fiji, regarding Subject. DATSON had been reported by Cpl. Baker to have freely discussed the name of his ship (S.S. Fort Erie) which was anchored at Vunda Point and its probable sailing time over a public telephone.

Baker stated that on about 2100 Hours, 17 November 1943, Subject appeared at the Military Police Headquarters, Lautoka, Fiji and asked if he might use the telephone to make a personal call. Cpl. Baker who was engaged in a conversation with Pvt. Medeiros gave DATSON permission and continued his discussion with Medeiros.

According to Baker, DATSON in his discussion over the telephone, mentioned the name of his ship two or three times and was cautioned by Baker to refrain from doing so. Baker commented that shortly after this DATSON again mentioned the name of his ship (S. S. Fort Erie) and also stated that the ship would leave Vunda Point within the next few hours. He added that at this time he asked DATSON to present his identification papers and also informed him that he would be detained for a short while.

Baker stated that Subject's identification papers disclosed that Subject's name was ROBERT OREN DATSON and that he was a Merchant Marine Officer from the S. S. Fort Erie. He added that soon afterward a group of sailors from the S. S. Fort Erie, evidently in the same party as Subject, identified DATSON as being and Officer on the S. S. Fort Erie.

Informant said that Subject was quite talkative and appeared to be under the influence of liquor. He added that Subject was wearing a Merchant Marine Officers cap and that he appeared to be about 27 years old. Baker described DATSON as being 5ft 7" height, 170 weight and having a ruddy complexion.

In conclusion, Baker stated that a telephone call was made to Commander Peckenbaugh, Port Director, Vunda Point, Fiji, as to the disposition of Subject. He added that Commander Peckenbaugh advised the Military Police Office that DATSON should be turned over to the shore patrol for delivery to him and that he would interview Subject at his office. Baker added that he made a full report to his superior Officer, Lt. Edward J. Flynn, CMP, who is the acting Provost Marshall.

HERMAN RITTER
SPECIAL AGENT, CIC

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AFO 913

1 December 1943

MEMORANDUM FOR THE OFFICER IN CHARGE:

Subject: ROBERT OREN DATSON
Merchant Marine Officer,
S. S. Fort Erie

Re: Interview with Lieut. Comdr. J. Peckenpaugh

On December 1, 1943, this Agent interviewed Lieut. Comdr. J. Peckenpaugh, Port Director, Vunda Point, Fiji, in his office, regarding Subject. DATSON had been reported by Cpl. Billy B. Baker, Military Police Platoon, Lautoka, Fiji, to have freely discussed the name of his ship (S. S. Fort Erie) which was anchored at Vunda Point and its probable sailing time.

(Peckenpaugh stated that on November 17, 1943, he received a telephone call from the Military Police, Lautoka, Fiji, stating that they had in their custody a Merchant Marine Officer, from the S. S. Fort Erie, who had violated certain security regulations. He added that he advised the Military Police to turn DATSON over to the shore patrol for delivery to him for questioning.

According to Informant, Subject was brought into his office by the shore patrol and appeared to be under the influence of liquor. He commented that he interviewed Subject relative to his violation of local security regulations and obtained the following information. Quote;

The following is a brief summary of a statement given by ROBERT OREN DATSON to Lieut. Comdr. Peckenpaugh on or about 2130, 17 November 1943.

" I had liberty until four o'clock. I had someone stand my watch. I can understand being picked up for being drunk but I don't get all this hokus-pokus. It doesn't seem right, and I know you are trying to find out something; and if you think I am deserting, well, go ahead. I don't give a damn. I wouldn't stay in the British Navy for all ---, I have my orders. I don't know what you are getting at and I don't give a damn, for my conscience is clear. I have all my papers. There they are. (Miscellaneous papers are handed to Mr. Peckenpaugh). My father is a British subject. In 1940, took out British passport. I deserted the British Navy and then came back on. (Pause) Something must be wrong for this kind of stuff don't go on for everybody. Oh, a guy can get tight and thrown in jail and that's all there is to it.

(When questioned relative to giving out information pertaining to movement of his ship, thereby endangering the lives of his mates):

" I did not give anyone any information that wasn't already known. It was the M. P.'S fault. They wanted to know all the information. I was in the police station when I asked for the ship. They told me to shut up but I told them I wouldn't shut up for I wanted to know when the ship was leaving. "

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(When asked if certain papers were his American Naval Discharge):

Yes, Sir, they are. Do you have to see it? I am ashamed of it, Sir. I have a D. C.D. Oh, you'll probably find out anyway. (Papers are thrown on the desk). Excuse me, Sir, I didn't mean to throw it at you, Sir. They took my citizenship away."

(Mention was made by Mr. Peckenpaugh that he was trying to find out who he, DATSON was talking to since the ship had no phone, yet he, DATSON, talked to someone over phone relative to movement of vessel. DATSON appeared confused, claiming he placed the call in the police station and was under the impression he was connected with the ship).

" What I said never endangered the ship in any way. When I was in the bar I never said one single word. The cops brought that on. The cops asked if I was a merchant shipman. I said yes, and they asked what ship I was on and I told them."

(Mr. Peckenpaugh informed DATSON he was going to send him back to his ship. DATSON apologized several times for any trouble he may have caused.)

Note: In the opening conversation, DATSON admitted being drunk and insisted that he talked over phone to someone aboard ship.

Home address of DATSON: 5918 McCall Street
Oakland, California.

Next of kin: Mrs Mary Datson
5918 McCall Street
Oakland, California.

End of quote.

Peckenpaugh said that Subject's ship did not sail on the 17th November 1943, as reported by Subject, but left Vunda Point on 20th November 1943. He added that after he had interviewed Subject he had the shore patrol take DATSON to his ship and leave instructions that Subject was not to have any shore liberty while at this base.

DATSON, was described by Peckenpaugh, as being; 5 ft 6" height, 150 weight, stocky build, light hair, light eyes, light complexion and appearing to be about 30 years of age. He added that during the interview, Subject was nervous, appeared confused, and was easily excited. He concluded by saying that he did not believe Subject's ship to be still at this base.

HERMAN RITTER
SPECIAL AGENT, CIG

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