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L.O.F.  
Colombo, Ceylon, November 26, 1943.

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Discipline on board the s.s. Furnifold M. Simmons

25.

With reference to this Consulate's despatch no. 208 of October 18, 1943, in regard to the demotion of Byron J. KEYHAN, a member of the crew of the s.s. Furnifold M. Simmons, and to previous correspondence reporting personnel difficulties on board this vessel, which left Colombo for the United States on November 25, 1943, I have the honor to report that there were no serious incidents involving members of the crew or the officers on this vessel during the last six weeks of its stay at this port.

In order to help the Master to maintain his authority which was being challenged by several ring-leaders in his crew, I have supported him in his disciplinary measures when I felt they were warranted, but on a number of occasions I have persuaded him to ignore comparatively small incidents of misconduct and dissuaded him from making log-entries carrying fines. In assuming this attitude I have given the impression to the crew that I have been unsympathetic to their grievances, real or alleged, and they have regarded me as distinctly biased and unfair. Vice Consul Usher and I are convinced, however, that to have pursued any other course would have been detrimental to discipline and encouraged further acts of misconduct or obstruction because the crew were extremely hostile to the Master when the vessel reached port and determined to obtain the support of the Consulate in their desire to have him reprimanded and, if possible, removed from his command. The subsidence of hostility and the gradual disappearance of continued acts of misconduct confirms, I believe, that the policy pursued was sound and efficacious.

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To safeguard the security of the information contained herein, please

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During the period of nearly three months that this vessel was at Colombo undergoing repairs, there has been further opportunity to become acquainted with the Master and to form an appreciation of his character and ability. Since the United States Coast Guard will undoubtedly wish to conduct a thorough investigation, upon the arrival of the vessel in the United States, of the difficulties between certain members of the crew and the Master, I believe that it may be helpful, because of the charges and counter-charges that will be brought, to have a report on the considered opinion of this Consulate in regard to the character and personality of the Master.

Captain VON PFLUGK has impressed me and Vice Consul Usher as being an extremely conscientious person who endeavors to maintain a fair and reasonable attitude towards his crew. I have approved of the entries which he has made in the Log Book since the date of the vessel's departure from Calcutta, although approval of the entries made prior to the vessel's arrival in Colombo has been based on the sworn statement of the Master as to their truthfulness, as attested on form no. 75, inserted in folio 1 of the Log Book, because I had no personal knowledge of the incidents recorded.

The recalcitrant or uncooperative attitude of the members of his crew, against whom entries have been made, has on repeated occasions sorely tried the patience of the Master, who, when thoroughly provoked, may have been rather stern and, in the opinion of those concerned, arbitrary, but I feel that the log entries have all been justifiable. Captain Von Pflugk, however, does not have a personality which appeals to the average American seaman. He impresses one as being rather austere and aloof. He is not a good mixer and does not readily make friends with persons whom he does not consider his equal or superior in educational attainments or social standing.

It is possible that a different type of Master, who knew better how to win the confidence and friendship of his crew, and who had a more democratic nature, would have had less difficulties with the same crew than has Captain Von Pflugk. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the aforementioned characteristics of the Master should not be allowed to carry undue weight in an investigation, nor be used as an argument for exonerating several members of the crew for continued and gross misconduct, because I believe that under any Master most of the members of the crew mentioned repeatedly in the Log Book would prove to be detrimental to the morale and efficient operation of any American vessel on which they might serve.

Respectfully yours,

Robert L. Buell  
American Consul

File no. 886.3  
RLB/nbp

Copy to: Legal Representative, U.S.A.,  
Bombay, India.