

42 Broadway,
New York, N. Y.,
8 April, 1943.

My name is William A. Carter, Lieutenant, U.S.N.R. I was assigned as Armed Guard Officer of the SS IRONCLAD commencing duty in that capacity on January 19, 1942. In reference to the crew difficulties which existed throughout the whole voyage of that vessel, I feel that I was in a particularly good position to observe the events that transpired.

The first real crew difficulties were in Halifax in the middle of February. Several members of the crew were absent from their duties for several days. This was not considered particularly serious at the time. The next event was that on the voyage from Halifax to the United Kingdom, some whisky consigned to the American Embassy in Moscow was broken into and four cases were found missing. The only real evidence of this was that one Allen H. Kramer, Ordinary Seaman, was incapacitated and, due to drunkenness, unable to stand watch at sea. However, the theft was not discovered until the day after it had been committed. Apparently the ship's officers were able to do little about it.

In Iceland the ship had been lying at anchor for 30 days, during which time matters were quiet and uneventful. On the morning of May 19, one day before a convoy sailing, this whisky in the cargo was again broken into. About 15 members of the crew were in a drunken and unruly condition. I shackled two men, namely, B. L. Lambert, Able Seaman, and C. B. Bruton, Able Seaman. I then asked for assistance from the U.S.S. WASHINGTON and a Marine detachment arrived aboard and placed the aforementioned two men and 13 others in confinement in the forepeak. From then on I was not consulted in any of the investigation except to submit a statement of the events of the morning of May 19th. My personal feelings were, at the time, that had anyone taken the trouble to make a thorough investigation, the whole thing could have been solved there. However, the men concerned were merely questioned and asked if they wished to make a statement. None of them did and 4 members of the crew were paid off before the American Consular official and returned to the United States. Again things were quiet and orderly on board the ship until the morning of June 26th which again was the day before a convoy sailing. At that time Frederick P. Miller, Ordinary Seaman, refused duty, swore at the Chief Officer and was placed in confinement in the forepeak. This Miller numbers, among other accomplishments, proficiency as a locksmith, so it was a simple matter for him to release himself from confinement and to steal a small boat which was moored alongside and row ashore. He managed to get clear to Reykjavik. Apparently his plan was to go to the American Consul and, hiding behind the privileges extended to American citizens, protest against the treatment which he was receiving. However, he was apprehended by the Naval authorities and in spite of his insistence to see the American Consul, was returned on board the SS IRONCLAD at approximately 0400, June 27, which was 12 hours before the convoy sailed. Except for a miscarriage of his plans, he would have again delayed the ship from sailing in convoy. I must say at this time that these are merely circumstances and are merely the basis for my opinion that F. P. Miller, Ordinary Seaman, and Kris C. Hurst, Able Seaman, are German agitators who were purposely placed on board the vessel to cause as much trouble and delay as possible. This, of course, I cannot prove. I have heard from other members of the crew that Miller, for example, has a criminal record and was on parole at the time which he signed on board the SS IRONCLAD. These two men are both highly intelligent and in my

opinion were the people who agitated most of the difficulties which we experienced. They merely started the ball rolling, so to speak, then stepped aside and let such mental deficient and dipsomaniacs as Lambert and Durbin carry through the plans which they had formented.

I wish to mention in passing an incident which occurred on board the IRON-CLAD on July 4, 1942. We had just fought off a very concerted attack by German torpedo planes. As the battle slowed I ordered the American flag hoisted. As the colors broke out, Miller made an expression of disgust and said, "Who ran up the old rag?" Had this man been a member of our armed forces, he could have been shot for this display of patriotic fervor.

The next real crew difficulties came about after our arrival in Russia. As soon as the crew became acquainted with the existing economic system, they began to steal provisions and take them ashore for barter. The first evidence of this was that the chocolates and milk were stolen from the lifeboat emergency rations. This continued with the full knowledge of the ship's officers who would do nothing about it until their stealing became so flagrant that I was forced to step in and take a hand in the situation. On the night of August 10, 1942, B. L. Lambert, A.B., started ashore with about 5 pounds of bully beef in his hand. He was stopped by the Russian guard at the gangway and the Chief Officer was called. This officer took the beef away from Lambert and allowed him to go on ashore and no disciplinary action whatsoever was taken. On the strength of this I posted a written notice, which I signed, on the board in the crew's mess room. This notice was, in effect, that anyone found removing provisions or gear from the lifeboats would be shot on sight with no preliminaries, that everyone except ship's officers would be searched before leaving the ship, and that anyone found attempting to remove provisions would be confined in the forepeak on bread and water for a maximum period of ten days, and that anyone attempting to resist search would be confined as if guilty. I gave 12 hours notice before putting this into effect so that the crew would be forewarned of the actions I was contemplating. The plan went into effect at 0800, August 11, 1942. At about 0805, the aforementioned Lambert, who had been ashore all night and returned only for breakfast, started to go down the gangway. He was drunk and refused search. In accordance with my instructions, my petty officer on watch knocked him unconscious and called me. I handcuffed Lambert then went through his pockets and found a pound of sugar and about 8 or 10 pancakes, which we had had for breakfast. In accordance with the notice which I had published, I placed Lambert in confinement in the forepeak. At noon of that day I went forward to take his rations, which consisted of Russian black bread as that was the only bread which we had aboard ship, and water. I found that he had built a fire against the door of the forepeak so I used his ration of water to extinguish the fire and gave him his black bread. That evening I removed Lambert from the forepeak and took him aft to re-bandage a head wound which he had received that morning from my petty officer. As we started forward again, Lambert made a break down the gangway. One of my men and I caught him at the foot of the gangway and as he was fighting and struggling to break away, I drew my .45 pistol and again knocked him unconscious. He recovered in a few seconds and I reconfined him in the forepeak. At that time I pointed out to Lambert that I fully intended to use any means whatsoever at my disposal to stop the stealing of provisions on board the ship. I told him further that he would be treated in whatever way his actions deemed necessary. After this I had no further difficulty with Lambert. He was kept in confinement for 5 days, being given full ration on the third day, in accordance with Naval regulations.

William E. Durbin, Oiler, is a dipsomaniac of the worst sort. At the time of the whisky stealing in Iceland, I had to confine Durbin to the forepeak about a week after the whisky had been stolen. There had been no opportunity for him to get whisky from any source, except the ship's cargo so it is obvious that he was drinking some of the same whisky which he still had hidden away. At the time he swore at the Captain and the Chief Engineer and I had to order him into the forepeak at the point of a loaded pistol. In

Russia I treated personally this same Durbin no less than three times for delerium tremens. On one occasion Durbin attacked the Master of the vessel ashore and, as the Master is an elderly man, would probably have done him serious injury had he not been so very drunk. I think it highly probable that Hurst and Miller established contacts with German operatives in Archangel, Russia. On one occasion I overheard them in conversation in German with one of the Russian winch operators. As soon as I came by their conversation ceased abruptly. I took no notice of them at the time but informed my man on gangway watch that this particular Russian was to be searched when he left the ship. The search revealed only a cake of soap in his pocket, so we released him and let him go ashore. Hurst came to me and was white with either anger or fear, or possibly both. He said that he was perfectly free to give soap to anyone he chose. I agreed that this was true but merely reminded him that I was also free to search anyone whom I might choose, including himself. This again is merely a suspicion and as I was working entirely alone and could get no cooperation from local authorities, I could go no further than giving the basis for my suspicions. During all of the time that we were in Russia, prior to the sailing of the first convoy after our arrival, the Master of the SS IRONCLAD was trying to have these above-mentioned 4 men removed from the ship by our naval and diplomatic representative there. For reasons beyond my knowledge this was not done prior to the sailing of a convoy in the middle of September. At the time our steering gear had been tested at the dock. We proceeded 20 miles down the river to an anchorage, during which time the steering gear functioned perfectly. We anchored over night and the next morning got underway and proceeded about 2 miles. Without having been subjected to any undue strain, the steering engine broke, causing us to narrowly avoid a collision and to anchor in the middle of a narrow channel. As there were still 8 ships astern of us, they were unable to cross this bar until the next high water. Consequently we missed the convoy and the whole convoy's sailing was delayed for a matter of 8 hours. I immediately investigated the damage with the Chief Engineer and in both our opinions the damage could very well have been the result of willful sabotage. Anyone on the ship could have access to this steering engine. If necessary I will be glad to furnish a sketch of this steering engine and the manner in which it was damaged, which I think would indicate the probability of its having been the result of sabotage. When we returned to the port of Archangel whatever difficulties had prevented the removal of the above mentioned 4 men, were miraculously evaporated and they were immediately removed from the ship and ultimately placed in confinement ashore. This was the last of my contacts with them.

Unfortunately this statement is mostly a chain of circumstantial evidence substantiated by a few facts. Had the Master of the vessel been given any cooperation in investigating his original charges at the time the crew stole whisky from the cargo, it is highly probable that the whole thing could

have been broken down then. Many months have transpired since that event, consequently, it is now practically beyond solution. However, in my opinion, B. L. Lambert, A.P., is both mentally and physically incapable of carrying out the duties of an Able Seaman. I understand that he has served a prison sentence for manslaughter and also at one time was confined in a mental institution.

William E. Durbin, Oiler, is a chronic alcoholic and whenever whisky is available to him, regardless of the source, he is incapable of performing the duties of an Oiler.

Kris C. Hurst, Able Seaman, and Frederick P. Miller, Ordinary Seaman, I include in the general category of having exercised all of their capabilities to hamper and delay our war effort. Whereas I do not know that it was they who sabotaged our steering engine, I am quite convinced that they have done much to sabotage morale, spirit, and man hours on board the SS IRONCLAD.

In my opinion none of these 4 should be allowed to go to sea, at least during war time.

William A. Carter

WILLIAM A CARTER,
Lieut., U.S.N.R.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 8th day of April, 1943

JAMES S. WRIGHT,
Lieut., U.S.C.G.R.