

Op-16-B-5

Date: 19 Feb 1944

MM/rb

MEMORANDUM FOR: Comdr. Pollio, U. S. Coast Guard, Rm. 7212

SUBJECT: SS JOSEPH M. MEDALL POSSIBLE SABOTAGE OF COMPASSES ABOARD

Enclosure (s): (A) MEMORANDUM from Hdqtrs., 5ND, NOB, Norfolk, Va., same subj., 27 Jan 1944

1. Enclosure(s) (A) forwarded for information and such attention as may be deemed appropriate.

2. The information forwarded herewith is extremely confidential in character and its security must be preserved, by carefully safeguarding its existence and source, as well as the names of any informants mentioned therein. In no case, if the report covers an investigation of an individual, shall the report be shown to the subject, nor shall copies be made of it, nor shall the Office of Naval Intelligence be mentioned in connection with any such action taken on the basis of such report.

3. Ultimate return of this correspondence to ONI Op-16-B-5 is requested.

XXX This correspondence may be retained or destroyed.

H. A. BURCH

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Lieut. Comdr., U.S.N.R.

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trolled the current in the resistance coils. No person on the ship had authority to adjust the current or connections, and only the Chief Engineer would have authority to open the box for the purpose of inspecting it to see if the current was flowing through the coils. Mr. Flannery further stated that the feeders on the resistance coils on the steering compass could have been reversed without opening the box on that compass, as the current can be reversed by turning the feeder lines on the outside of the binnacle.

3. Subject vessel arrived in Hampton Roads on 17 January 1944 from North Africa. Her crew has been paid off and only the Master and Chief Engineer from the inbound voyage remain aboard, at the present time, and the Master expects to be relieved very soon.

4. The Master stated that on 19 December 1943 while the ship was en-route from Naples to Oran he noticed that the standard compass on the bridge had developed a 9° westerly error. The next day, not being able to find the cause of the error, he compensated for the error by placing an offsetting magnet in the binnacle. From this evidence it would appear that the standard compass had been tampered with during the night of 18 December or early morning of 19 December, since the Master was certain that the compass deviation had not been so great previous to the morning of 19 December. The Master stated that Risberg had been on watch from 0400 to 0800 on 19 December. The men on watch with Risberg were Albert Aherns, A.B., Z-337613, age 18, 5'11", next of kin, mother, Mrs. Anna Aherns, 227 Poland Ave., Struthers, Ohio; and Louis De Maio, A.B., Z-231007, age 21, 5'6", next of kin, mother, Mrs. Elizabeth De Maio, 152 N. 12th St., Newark, N. J. A 9° error in the compass could be very serious if it were not

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To safeguard the security of the information contained herein, please initial and return to Intelligence for filing when it has served its purpose.

Naval Operating Base
Norfolk, Virginia

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27 January 1944

MEMORANDUM

Subj: SS JOSEPH M. MEDILL - POSSIBLE SABOTAGE OF COMPASSES ABOARD.

1. On 25 January 1944 a report was received that the Master of subject vessel had a report of interest to Naval Intelligence. The Master, William Wells Eger, was interviewed upon the ship's arrival at Pier 1, Army Base, Sewells Point. He stated that on the preceeding day the ship's compasses had been examined by V. L. Flannery of the Extra Yard Planning Sub-division of the Naval Operating Base, and that Mr. Flannery had found that the degaussing resistance coils on the standard compass on the bridge had been broken at the soldered connections, and that the feeder lines on the degaussing resistance coils on the steering compass in the wheel house had been reversed. The degaussing resistance coils attached to the compass binnacles are intended to offset the magnetic influence of the current in the main degaussing coils. By breaking the connections in the standard compass a 9° error was caused, and by reversing the feeder lines in the steering compass an 11° error was caused.
2. Mr. Flannery was interviewed and stated that it appeared that the connections in the compass on the bridge had been jerked loose by hand or pulled loose with some instrument, and that in order to do this it had been necessary to open the box on the binnacle which controlled the current in the resistance coils. No person on the ship had authority to adjust the current or connections, and only the Chief Engineer would have authority to open the box for the purpose of inspecting it to see if the current was flowing through the coils. Mr. Flannery further stated that the feeders on the resistance coils on the steering compass could have been reversed without opening the box on that compass, as the current can be reversed by turning the feeder lines on the outside of the binnacle.
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7. The home address of William Wells Eger, the Master, is Box 801, R.R. #4, South Bend, Ind., and of James E. Easton, the Second Mate, is c/o Berger Benson, 412 Midway, San Mateo, Calif. The former Master, Donald Huff, was hospitalized in Bizerte in December, 1942. His U. S. address is 350 W. 55th St., New York, N. Y.

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By [Signature] NARA. Date 6/6/17