

THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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1944 JAN 6 6 PM 3 02

AMERICAN CONSULATE
Nuevitas, Cuba, December 27, 1943

Air Mail

SUBJECT: Knife wounds received by seaman George Clarke
from seaman Robert F. Williams.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,
WASHINGTON.

SIR:

I have the honor to report that the Master of the American SS. Lake Pleasant reported to the Consulate at 11 P. M. on December 24, 1943, that ordinary seaman George Clarke had been seriously wounded by knife cuts which had been inflicted by able bodied seaman Robert F. Williams, both members of the crew of his vessel.

The writer immediately went aboard ship to investigate and there follows a report of the information obtained.

Robert F. Williams, A. B., was interviewed and stated as follows:

"I came into the crew's mess hall at about 9:30 p.m. to get a cup of coffee and George Clarke was all ready in the mess hall with a pitcher of chocolate milk in his hand and he asked me to taste it to see if it was sweet enough and I said I did not want to taste it. Thereupon Clarke said, well taste it anyway you "son of a bitch" and see if it is sweet enough, and then he reached for the bread knife on the table. I then took out my pocket knife and cut him several times with it. I did this only in self defense as would any other man have done under the circumstances." He also stated that there was no one else in the mess hall other than he and Clarke.

Clarke, the wounded man had already been taken ashore to be treated by a doctor.

Therefore, after questioning Williams I proceeded to question the ship's officers. However, none of them were present when the attack took place. Their explanation of what happened was that Williams is a very quiet fellow, while Clarke had been a trouble maker since the time he came aboard at Mobile. Also that Clarke was a heavy drinker and had fist fights with one or two, other members of the crew. He had continued to molest Williams during the entire trip using very insulting language. The officers stated that it was the result of this constant nagging by Clarke of Williams which resulted in Williams losing his temper and his resultant action in attacking and wounding Clarke with his knife.

and

J. V. B. N. D.

There

There is enclosed a signed statement by the ship's officers concerning the conduct of both men.

The master has in his possession the knife used by Williams, also the bread knife which Williams claims Clarke attempted use against him.

Before leaving the ship the writer gave a letter to the master instructing him to report the matter to the proper authorities upon his arrival in the United States and to turn Williams over to the police.

I then came ashore and went to the doctor's office where Clarke was being treated. It was found that he had been out in six places, three large cuts on the right arm and one very large and two smaller cuts on his right chest. The doctor stated that the man had lost a large amount of blood and while the wounds were large, fortunately they were for the most part flesh wounds and he believed that there was a reasonable chance for recovery, unless infection should set in.

On the morning of December 25th I talked with Clarke who stated that he was in the mess room making a chocolate milk when Williams came in and that he began to joke with Williams, that he had been drinking and that his language was no doubt abusive, whereupon Williams said he had stood enough and pulled out his knife and attacked him. He said he tried to get away from Williams but could not. Clarke absolutely denies having reached for the bread knife and further stated that he still had the pitcher of chocolate milk in his hand when Williams attacked him with a knife in his hand.

Clarke further stated that a seaman by the name of Rainwater was a witness to the whole affair. It will be noted in Williams statement that there were no witnesses.

Clarke was sent to the "4 de Septiembre" hospital at Camaguey on the afternoon of December 25th. His condition at the time was satisfactory and there appeared to be no immediate danger.

The officer sent a cablegram to the Port Director at New Orleans, La., the ship's destination, requesting that Williams be detained for his assault on Clarke and also that Rainwater be held as a witness.

Since the attack took place aboard ship, Williams was permitted to remain aboard to be turned over to the proper authorities in the United States pending trial.

Mrs. G. D. Clarke, 354 St. Lawrence St., Mobile, Alabama was informed by cablegram on December 25, 1943, of the condition of her son.

The Department will be informed of any adverse development which may occur in Mr. Clarke's condition, otherwise, the Department will be advised as soon as he has been released from the Hospital.

Respectfully

Respectfully yours,

Edward S. Benet
American Vice Consul

Enclosure:

Statement of ship's officers.

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ESB/jc

Original and Hectograph to Department.
Copy to Embassy, Habana.

Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No. 20 dated December 27, 1943, from American Vice Consul at Nuevitas on knife wounds received by seaman George Clarke from seaman Robert F. Williams.

(C O P Y)

Nuevitas, Cuba, Dec. 24, 1943

We, the undersigned officers of the S. S. Lake Pleasant, do hereby declare, under oath, that we have known Robert F. Williams, A. B., since the beginning of this trip and that he has been very reliable, sober, faithful to his duties, and obedient to his superiors. While on the other hand, George C. Clarke, C.S., has been drunk on several occasions, and he has been very troublesome and quarrelsome with both officers and crew since the beginning of this voyage.

We also believe that, after giving these facts due weight, they should be considered on behalf of the accused.

(SIGNED) V. R. KRAMER, 2nd. Officer

(SIGNED) WM. LADOUCEUR, 3rd Officer

(SIGNED) S. GOFF, Master

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 24th day of December, 1943.

(SIGNED) EDWARD S. BENET
Edward S. Benet
American Vice Consul
Nuevitas, Cuba.

S E A L

Service No. 393
No fee