

THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AMERICAN CONSULATE
Maracaibo, Venezuela February 10, 1944.

SUBJECT: Case of Smuggling by American Seaman.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,
WASHINGTON.

SIR:

File

I have the honor to refer to the Department's mimeographed instruction of January 20, 1944, File no. 196.31/63A, entitled Discipline of Seamen -- Coast Guard Hearing Units. A case of attempted smuggling by an officer on the American steamship "Lara", of the Grace Line, occurred December 12, 1943. It has not been reported because it was thought that the man involved would be set free without punishment. He is, however, in the local jail awaiting trial. A memorandum of the case prepared by Mr. Silloway of this office on December 14, 1943, is as follows:

Pablo Martis, Chief Steward of the American S.S. "Lara" and an American citizen (Puerto Rican) is detained by the Resguardo Maritimo.. According to depositions in the hands of the Customs authorities the case occurred as follows. About 6:30 PM Sunday Martis approached a customs guard and proposed that the guard, at 1 AM, should enter Martis' room and get 5 cases of cigarettes and 2 cases of smoking tobacco which there and take them on deck and lower them to a launch which would be waiting on the off-shore side. For this Martis agreed to pay the guard Bs.300.00 the next morning. The guard accepted the proposition and took the key to the room. Martis advised that he had to be ashore that night. The guard then informed the watchman in charge of the whole scheme and he, in turn, informed the Chief Watchman. They then proceeded to set a trap to catch the smugglers. The gangway watchman would be able to see when the goods were put over the side, at which time he would light a cigarette which could be seen by watchmen in a launch farther down the wharf. These watchmen in their launch

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would then catch the people in the smuggling launch red-handed. However, they brought the goods on deck slightly early, about ten minutes to one. While they were waiting for the smuggling launch to come along side, the second mate came along and noticed the bundles and began investigating. He lit a flash light and made considerable noise and it is presumed that this activity frightened the people in the launch as they never appeared. From here on the story differs. When I first went to the customs house this morning to find out about the case they as much as told me that they had taken the goods from the ship as contraband. When I raised the point as to how it could be contraband until it had reached shore they were somewhat at a loss and began to talk about unmanifested cargo which they also have a right to hold. I pointed out that that, also, to be held, must first be landed. About half an hour later I went to the Resguardo to read the depositions in the case and found that they had concocted a new story in the mean time. They claimed that they had not seized the goods on an American ship before they were landed but that the watchman - accomplice, who had authorization from the owner of the goods to move them, had put them on the wharf, where they were then seized. Apparently that would have been the end of the case but on Monday afternoon Martis went to the Administrador de Aduana and demanded the return of the cigarettes. That was too much and they held him. It seems that they were going to charge him with smuggling but after the points I brought up I believe they will charge him with attempting to bribe a customs official.

Respectfully yours,

Renwick S. McNiece
American Consul

Original and hectograph to the Department
Copy for the Embassy

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