

CG 101-601

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Date 26 March, 1943.

Memorandum for- Captain Shephard. *MS*  
Comdr. Jewell.

Subject: SS LIPSCOMB LYKES, loss of.

Enclosure: (A) Confidential letter (Op-16-B-5, Serial 0794316) dated 22 March, 1943, re Subject, from VCNO to JAG, with enclosure.

1. Enclosure (A) is forwarded to you for your information.

2. Ultimate return to the Intelligence Division is requested.

*FP*  
F. E. POLLIO.

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Op-16-B-5

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NAVY MARINE INSPECTOR SECTION  
U. S. COAST GUARD  
WASHINGTON, D. C.  
Op-16-B-5,  
22 March,  
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Authority *NN3 26-8311*  
By *[Signature]* NARA. Date *6/14/17*

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"Mr. Joseph W. SMITH, #Z-1140339, United States citizen, Radio Operator, ex SS LIPSCOMB LYKES and officer in charge of the thirty-two survivors from that vessel, supplied the following information relative to the last voyage of his ship and her loss: The SS LIPSCOMB LYKES sailed from San Francisco on October 13, 1942, arrived Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, on November 2, 1942, left Espiritu Santo, December 23, 1942, and proceeded around the northern part of the New Hebrides to various outports and returned to Espiritu Santo on January 15, 1943. The vessel again departed Espiritu Santo on January 16, 1943, bound for Noumea, New Caledonia. She carried five civilians and one United States Naval officer as passengers. Mr. SMITH stated that at 2315, ship's time, on January 18, 1943, he was in the radio shack when he felt the vessel shudder and shake and immediately take an extreme list to port. He stated that he immediately reported to the bridge and was directed by the Captain to send an SOS. SMITH returned to the radio shack and tripped the auto alarm after which he obtained the position of the vessel from the Chief Officer, which was given as Lat. 22°00' N, Long. 158°28' E., and sent the usual distress signal. Three answers to the distress signal were received, but were transmitted from such distances that immediate assistance was not expected. Mr. SMITH stated that no reefs were visible from the deck and that at the time it was not known just what the vessel had struck.

"All hands abandoned ship between 2400, ship's time, on January 18, 1943, and 0100, ship's time, on January 19, 1943, on orders from the master. Mr. SMITH stated that provisions were taken from the life rafts and placed in the two port lifeboats and all hands took to the boats in an orderly fashion. Captain E.W. JAHN was in command of one boat and Chief Officer Sergay GOFF of the other. As the lifeboats were being lowered, the vessel was listing approximately 28 to port and was settling rapidly by the stern. Both boats stood off from subject vessel approximately 1000 yards on orders from the master, awaiting daybreak. At 0630, ship's time, on January 19, 1943, a United States Navy PBY plane flew directly over the two lifeboats and signalled to them. The Navy signalman aboard one of the lifeboats received the message which was substantially as follows: "Have your position. Do you need medical assistance?" The Navy signalman, using a blinker gun, replied that no medical assistance was required, but that original position given was incorrect. The plane then departed.

"Mr. SMITH stated that at 0900, ship's time, the SS LIPSCOMB LYKES appeared to be righting itself and that Captain JAHN ordered all hands back aboard the vessel. He stated that upon orders from Captain JAHN and against his (SMITH's) better judgment, he sent another SOS, giving the vessel's correct position. The Navy answered immediately, stating that they had his correct position from the PBY plane and were sending assistance. The correct position placed the vessel on Durand Reef. Mr. SMITH stated that he had not wished to send the second distress message due to Navy regulations instructing a vessel not to do so if confirmation of the first message had been received but that he had done so as he did not wish to dispute the master's orders. At 1130, ship's time, on January 19, 1943, a United States Navy destroyer was sighted approximately one mile from the vessel. The United States Navy signalman aboard the SS LIPSCOMB LYKES signalled to the destroyer, advising her to stand off to avoid the reef upon which subject vessel rested. The passengers and crew again took to the lifeboats and were taken aboard the destroyer which took them to Noumea, New Caledonia.

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"Mr. SMITH advised that this was his first trip aboard the SS LIPSCOMB LYKES; that the vessel's Captain, E. W. JAHN, was unpopular with all of the officers aboard ship; that Captain JAHN remained at all times aloof from the other officers; that he failed to take the deck officers into his confidence, regarding the course of operation of the vessel; that on the run from San Francisco to Espiritu Santo, the Captain ordered subject vessel's speed reduced on approaching the New Hebrides and much concern was expressed among the officers as they considered the danger of torpedo attack was enhanced by the reduced speed. It has been for GOFF's browbeating and cursing them and treating them like "dogs."

"Mr. SMITH further advised that the Chief Officer, Sergay GOFF, is a White Russian; that he was known to have stated that he did not approve of the way the United States was conducting the war; that he, (SMITH), had never heard him make any anti-American statements but that he was definitely of a pacifistic nature; that he was responsible for the transmission of the incorrect position in the SOS message. Mr. SMITH stated that in his opinion, Durand Reef is properly chartered and that subject vessel was eight miles off its course at the time of grounding; that he believes there was no excuse for subject vessel being off its course and the grounding of the vessel was due to poor navigation on the part of the Chief Officer. Mr. SMITH concluded that Captain JAHN and all of the deck and engine officers are being held in Noumea, New Caledonia, for a Naval hearing.

"Ensign Angelo ANTONINI, USNR, who was Gunnery Officer aboard the SS LIPSCOMB LYKES was interviewed and supplied the following: Ensign ANTONINI confirmed Radio Officer SMITH's statement that Captain E. W. JAHN was an arrogant person and one who hadn't taken any of the ship's officers, or he (ANTONINI) into his confidence. Ensign ANTONINI stated that he was not familiar with the vessel's routing instructions when she departed San Francisco on October 13, 1942, but that Captain JAHN had zigzagged the first two days out of San Francisco after which he steered a steady course for the remainder of the voyage; that the vessel had proceeded at a speed of approximately 14.6 knots until off the Fiji Islands, where she was slowed down to approximately nine knots and ran at that speed all the way to Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides. Ensign ANTONINI stated that he and the ship's officers could not understand why the Captain had reduced the vessel's speed on what they considered as the most dangerous part of the voyage and also that the vessel arrived in Espiritu Santo approximately a day later than she would have had they been running at full speed.

"Ensign ANTONINI also confirmed SMITH's statement that Chief Officer Sergay GOFF had stated that he did not approve of the way the United States was conducting the war, and that he is of a pacifistic nature. Ensign ANTONINI stated that he believes GOFF's poor navigation was directly responsible for the grounding of the SS LIPSCOMB LYKES; that GOFF had taken star sights approximately four hours before the vessel ran aground and that the fix which he obtained was wrong; that on changing course approximately two hours before the vessel grounded, he had misjudged the vessel's speed by approximately one knot. When the course was changed on the basis of GOFF's navigation it took the vessel directly over Durand Reef. Ensign ANTONINI further stated that Henry L. DOVE, Junior Third Officer, had also taken star sights at approximately the same time as GOFF had; that his fix had differed from GOFF's, and that he (GOFF) had treated DOVE's fix as though it couldn't possibly be correct. Ensign ANTONINI stated that he believed DOVE's fix was correct and that the vessel would not have grounded had GOFF given consideration to DOVE's navigation.

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"Ensign ANTONINI further reported that valuable Radar equipment carried as part of the vessel's cargo to outports in the New Hebrides, has been damaged due to GOFF's poor supervision of the United States soldiers who were working the cargo. He stated that the soldiers, whose longshoring ability was limited, were very willing and would have done a satisfactory job had it not been for GOFF's browbeating and cursing them and treating them like "dogs."

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