S THE COMMANDANT, U. S. COAST GUARD AND REFER TO NO. COLIOF-64



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

BETY

WASHINGTON

29 October, 1942

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CONFIDENTIAL

Subject:

Fire, SS MAKUA, Honolulu

Reference:

Summary of Information:

The following is the substance of an official report from the DCGO. 14th ND. re Subject fire:

At 2020, 5 October, 1942 fire occurred in the hold of Subject vessel at Pier 8, Honolulu, T.H. and was extinguished at about 2145, after an unreported amount of damage to part of the vessel's cargo. The fire is reported to have been caused by an improperly packed case of nitric acid being stowed below, due to possible negligence and inexperience of cargo workers. Potential danger from this fire lay in the fact that the vessel at the time was loaded with 264.37 tons of explosives, the fire being in the immediate areaover the most dangerous part of the explosive cargo.

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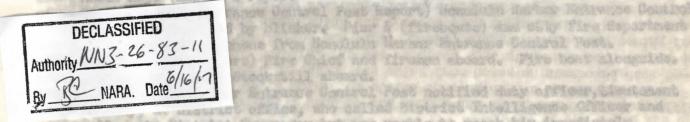
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Declassified NARA Project: NW 63684 661 NAVY fluid tins had handles processories to the filling fittings. the deck issediately over the fire indicated that it burned with Quitellige to Post Seen from the impediate vicinity of the fire, one brids broken, some og the brake COCCOCCANOCCA TO OF TOURISES DIAMETER 21 October 1942 TER OF THE MET LENDANG 2135. At this time firemen had gone through the variant sentions and established District Coast Guard Officer, 14th Naval District. Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard. The continued streamstell and parallab bothse satare chorne more an SS MAKUA Fire, 5 October 1942, Honolulu Harbor, the strong escence Subjects Also noted was the fire nued progressively. (a) Memo. to Comdt., 14th Nav. Dist., 6 Oct. 1942 (661). Report, SS MAKUA, Fire on, by U.S. Naval Intell. Service dated 13 Oct.1942 (received 17 Oct.). (d) Memo. 20 Oct. 1942 to Comdt. 14th Naval District (661). tolic spice and it its heart at their cite (A) Copy of reference (a). Your 12 winntes later it was obened Inclosures: (B) Copy of reference (b). TOH was benefitted Actified. The hatch (C) Copy of reference (c). The error of any carron and the hatch was opene (D) Copy of reference (d). section, the steam was secured, one fire was actual is water in sens and trucks see it the main open the hatch At about 2020, 5 October 1942, a fire was discovered in the hold of the SS MAKUA lying at Pier #8 in Honolulu Harbor, smoke being seem coming and want down on the hatch downing. from No. 2 hatch. 2025 (Master's report) Ship's crew out and ship's fire hoses led out and charged 2025 (Mester's report) Steam smothering line opened. Take sug sarg ano, co 2025 (C.O.Pier 11 Captain of the Port detail report) Coast Guard gangway guard reported fire to Captain of the Port's office at Pier 11. About 2030 (Master's report 2030 (Honolulu Entrance Control Post Report) Honolulu Harbor Entrance Control Post notified by blinker. Pier 4 (fireboats) and city fire department notified by phone from Honolulu Harbor Entrance Control Post. 2033 (Master's report) Fire Chief and firemen aboard. Fire boat alongside. 2035 Lieut. Comdr. Stockstill aboard. Honolulu Harbor Entrance Control Post notified duty officer, Lieutenant Anthony, at district office, who called District Intelligence Officer and called the District Commander but was unable to reach him immediately. t to stand by in case they were needed, The steaming was continued (10 to 15 minutes, fire chief's report), and then the hatch cover was opened. This move was taken by orders of Lieut. Condr. Stockstill with the fire chief in full agreement, some of the ship's officers opposing the move. The fire was found to be in a number of mattresses which were smoldering and pouring out large volumes of smoke. It was necessary to remove these mattresses using water to extinguish the fire. . No great amount of water was poured into the hold; the ship's drainage system was able to keep up with it. Smoke was the greatest difficulty; four city firemen were overcome and hospitalized. Most of the actual fire-fighting was done by these men, using hose lines from ashore. Lines from fire boats were (over)

need to extrudnish amoldering mattresses on deck and keep them met down boats were 3. No Erreing County afockstill, a statement is danted complete. by four city

ported a fire aboard same, to the Junior C.D. soffice. Easign Leary was noti-fied and he left immediately with three men to investigate same. Shortly thereafter a city fire truck passed enroute to the seene Jand at the same time Ive learned of the fire. I arrived on the MAKUA at about 2035. Before leaving the unit I ordered Mr. Wing to take all men which were dressed to the scene and have all other personnel broken out to stand by in case they were needed.

"2. Upon arrival aboard, I wont to the bridge and asked the Commanding Officer what cargo was in the No. 2 hold. He stated that he didn't know. The fire truck's, city, crews were directing the water from hoses on starboard deck between the command on tween the hatch and the bulwark. It was reported that steam had been turned on (in the hold) to try smothering the fire. Smoke, slight amount, was coming from a few places around the hatch which was covered with terpoulins. They had been wetted down. The deck on the starboard forward side of No. 2 hold appeared the hottest as steam would appear immediately after the hoses were directed to areas further aft. I suggested to the C.O. opening the hatch slightly and directing the hoses into the hold. About this time the ship's mate (I could be mistaken about this man as to being the mate) appeared on the bridge and said "No", to do so would let in more air and increase the intensity of the fire. He stated that there were 1,000 cases of ammunition in the lower section of the hold, I lead left the bridge after about four minutes and went down on the hatch covering. The city firemen kept the hoses trained on the hatch cover and starboard area. I contacted the fire chief in charge of the city crew who agreed that they should open the hatch slightly and get some water in same and try to see if the main fire was actually on the starboard forward section. The steam was secured, one hatch was opened by removing two boards on the starboard side. After the smoke and steam cleared somewhat the fire's location was partially verified. The hatch was closed and the steam again turned on. About 15 minutes later it was opened again. The steam had been secured. The smoke appeared to be heavier than the first time, indicating increasing intensity. This time the hoses, practically all of them, were trained on the starboard forward section and the volume of smoke seemed to decrease. Then the hatch was opened wider and after clamping down for about four minutes, firemen started removing the cargo. (Shortly, enough was removed to permit crews to train neggles below the decking but on top of the cargo. This work continued progressively. Also noted was the fire seemed to have spread along the starboard side from forward to the after section of the hold on a line roughly six feet outboard of and parallel to the starboard side of the hatch coaming. The process was continued alternately, of wetting down and removing cargo until it was brought under control at about 2135. At this time firemen had gone through the various sections and established that the fire was confined to the starboard side. Burning mattresses, some one-gallon tins of Lockheed hydraulic brake fluid, and jugs of acid were removed from the immediate vicinity of the fire. One jug was broken. Some of the brake

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fluid tins had handles melted off, also the filling fittings. The heat of the deck immediately over the fire indicated that it burned with intense heat, too hot to be regarded as coming from the smoldering mattresses alone. There were trunks, miscellaneous luggage and cargo in the upper section, serions starboard side, of No. 2 hold. suggested that loading operations

The first Coast Luare firshout arrived at about 2136 and started purpose. The others arrived about ten minutes later. All operated on the minutes later. All operated on the minutes comparison. Massoni notified me of the fire prior to my departure from Mary All, and said held sent the fireboats to the scene.

preliminar 4. On the second opening of the hatch, masks were of no value as smoke any include steam obsoured vision. Firemen did not attempt to use them thereafter.

of ore blace to The fire was extinguished at about 2145, although mattresses thrown out on deck continued to smolder, only slightly, for about six hours afterword. I do not know if the ammunition was damaged by water. Later the
sug bess following was obtained as to explosive cargo on board at the time of the

communication port side.

No. 1 hold, lower, 77.74 tons assumition.

Renny Company. (8) No. 2 hold, lower, forward end, 119.96 tons case assumition, (3) gation Company, do (4) Ligo. 2 pold fraction deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company do (4) Ligo. 2 pold fraction deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company do (4) Ligo. 2 pold fraction deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company do (4) Ligo. 2 pold fraction deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company do (4) Ligo. 2 pold fraction deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company do (4) Ligo. 2 pold fraction deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company do (4) Ligo. 2 pold fraction deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company deck to 2 four datast fewal air Bases does like a company deck to 2 four datast fewal datast fewal a company datast fewal datast

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second of the should be noted that the fire was in the immediate area over the ties, alleger conserons burt of the explosine cateo he harbor, subject to approval for

of the Military Covernor, Cargo and Passenger Control, with complete charge of prior delayed by an error in transmitting the directive over the phone and by difficulty in transportation during blackout. On my arrival, fire was apparently coming under control. On questioning master as to whether he could move ship, he said "No." I directed that he get ready immediately. The was standing by. I also had adjacent held (No. 1) checked. When fire was completely extinguished, arrangements were made for immediate removal of cargo. Fire watch was kept all night and the fireboat was kept standing by. At 0800 I examined the hold from which the upper third approximately of the cargo had been removed. The burned shared and desired approximately of the cargo had been removed. mately of the cargo had been removed. The burned, charred and damaged cargo had been removed. The remaining cargo had suffered little or no damage and vessel sailed at scheduled time for two Inter-Island ports where the remainder of the cargo was disheper day, was not forwarded to Headquarters; action was taken by the Army. The danger

panage was negligible but might have been serious, heport on this life is on the Cabrain of the Port detail, which was maintained until the hatch was closed. In the case of Army bloadings, such as this one, there was little or no control over nature of material tratomed out tob of a main it out an organization that might not fail even with more excareful reading conservating proper stowage of cargo does not function property; it appears Dervice report to be an impreserly packed case of nitric acid which was stowed helow as the result of negligence and inexperience of cargo workers in stowing acid in the hold mather than outlest he cause of the fire was the Improper packing of the case

- 7. I agree that the cause of the fire was the improper packing of the case of acid but the rules require the stowage of acid, even when properly packed, on deck. The hazard to the vessel resulted primarily from the act of stowing it below deck. A careful reading of all statements made indicates that the organization for receiving checking and insuring proper stowage of cargo does not function properly; it appears that management has not set up an organization that might not fail even with more experienced and more literate workers.
- B. An almost similar incident occurred on the steamer WAIALEALE on 29 July. Damage was negligible, but might have been serious. Report on this fire is on file here, but was not forwarded to Headquarters; action was taken by the Army. The danger arises from miscellaneous cargo in small shipments. These shipments should be carefully checked on receipt, preferably in a special area. If dangerous articles are included they should be placed in a definite area clearly marked as deck cargo, special cargo, etc. An arrangement like this is now in use at Pier 31-A, but not as far as known on any other pier in this harbor. It is the function of management to provide the facilities to handle this material rather than for the clerk to find a clear space somewhere on the pier "at the base of a post, clear of all other cargo", "For four or five feet in all directions", and hope that it will not get mixed up with other cargo.
- The handling of cargo in this port has been under the control of an agency of the Military Governor, Cargo and Passenger Control, with complete charge of priorities, allocation of space, assignment of berths in the harbor, subject to approval for safety by the Captain of the Port, and control of the loading and unloading operations. Stevedoring is done chiefly by two large organizations, Castle & Cooke Terminals, Ltd., and McCabe, Hamilton & Renny Co., who continue to function as private companies doing the Army and commercial unloading. A small steamship company, Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company, does its own stevedoring. Contractors, Pacific Naval Air Bases does its own stevedoring and also most of the stevedoring for the Navy in Honolulu. Most of the Navy cargo is handled at Pearl Harbor under contract by McCabe, Mamilton & Renny Company.
- 10. Former employees of Castle & Cooke and McCabe, Mamilton & Kenny have been commissioned in both military services and are serving in various capacities in Cargo and Passenger Control. Practices in regard to compliance with regulations regarding handling and stowage of cargo were lax before the war and have not been made more rigid since then due to the emergency. Continuance of old personnel means that change of old practices will be difficult.
 - 11. I have taken the following action in this matter:
- randum that the fire indicated that conditions involving considerable danger existed. While the investigation was proceeding it appeared that a person of Japanese ancestry might be involved, but whether or not charges could be established in this particular case that the organization of loading was such that persons of Japanese ancestry (in spite of many restrictions) were in a position to commit acts that hight lead to serious consequences.

fluid tins had handles melted off, also the filling fittings. The heat of the deck immediately over the fire indicated that it burned with intense heat, too hot to be regarded as coming from the amoldering mattresses alone. There were trunks, miscellaneous luggage and cargo in the upper section,

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Declassified NARA Project: NW 63684 (b) I conferred with representatives of the Army Transport Service, suggesting changes in their loading arrangements such as not loading small lots of miscellaneous cargo with uncertainty as to exact contents in the same hold as explosives and other dangerous cargo. I also suggested that loading operations be removed to other wharves further from the center of the harbor. No particular success has been achieved in these matters due partly to practical difficulties which can only be overcome with considerable change in the methods of planning and handling shipments and in the use of wharf facilities under the control of one agency by another agency. These changes cannot be completed without considerable preliminary work. The officers, on the whole, are cooperative but naturally resist any increase in their present difficulties. (c) I have had better success in arranging for the unloading of large cargoes of explosives at safer distances from vital facilities. Information not formerly available has become available to me in time to take action before arrival. I have obtained cooperation of Army and civilian authorities in this endeavor. (d) I have taken some steps to make enforcement of "NO SMOKING" regulations more effective. (e) I have issued more definite instructions to Coast Guard units regarding communications in event of fire or other waterfront casualty. I have also issued an order to all masters regarding the method of reporting casualties and calling for assistance. (f) I have reported to the Commandant, 14th Naval District the uncertain status of responsibility of various individuals in the matter of security. (See Reference (d)). This memorandum was prepared after receipt of investigation by the U. S. Naval Intelligence Service. tain status of authority and responsibility, but also because I believe that all rather than to exact penalties or punishments for past mistakes. An investigation may be called within a reasonable time and the possibility of its being called is

(g) I have made no other investigation, primarily because of the uncerefforts should be made to effect changes to prevent similar occurrences in the future undoubtedly more effective in obtaining cooperation than an ineffective investigation that closes the matter without result. The complicated issues involved appear to require more competent legal counsel than is available to this office. It is recommended that no investigation be called until these complicated issues be examined by a competent counsel and further that no steps be taken until definite approval of the proper Naval authority is obtained.

Approval of my action is requested. 12.