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15.9.53

Recd. in letter from [ ] 17 Sept. 53  
[ ] report on LG FANGLED last cruise

It is somewhat difficult to recall the events that occurred some two months ago; however, the following are the facts that I saw from my insignificant position as one of the assistant engineers aboard the ship.

The overall condition of the ship on my arrival could not be determined since I arrived at 0230 on the morning of departure. The mechanical section of the ship was in relative good condition at the time of departure. The only question that was not answered to my satisfaction was the lack of weather reports prior to departure, the reason for my concern in this matter, was the fact that flying in from Port au Prince we had run into heavy weather some three hundred miles out of Panama. The sea was running south-west and heavy weather approaching when we left port.

The mechanical failures that plagued us after several days at sea were not unnatural but the result of many tired parts giving out. However, in the case of the bilge pumps I feel that Pan Canal should be held responsible for the failure since they were supposedly to have rebuilt them. The reduced engine power did not effect the maneuverability of the ship in any way the first several days. However, when we went beyond the first site into the relatively strong currents there was some change but it was not sufficient to warrant any concern. The Navy ascertained that our speed was approximately 3.5 when they came along side; however, the inability of the navigator to put us on the point of the second site increased the pressure on the mechanical section of the ship. At that time, if we could have put into some island sufficient repairs could have been made that would have enabled us to complete the mission. The increased strain on the remaining motive power left only the question of time until they would break down.

Altho I was not present at the conferences held by the Captain, Navigator, Chief Engineer, and Case Officer, where the decision was made by all to request assistance, I did note the following points of interest and concern.

- a. Passing word to the crew to prepare to abandon ship prior to clearance by Headquarters for such action. This was done by the Case Officer.
- b. Sending of radio messages in open text by the Case Officer without consulting the Captain requesting the Navy to standby while we scuttled the ship.
- c. Making known the intentions to abandon or scuttle a ship that has motive power, when there is no immediate danger to life and is able to stay afloat (by bucket brigade if necessary).

At no time, in my opinion, did conditions warrant the abandoning of ship. I realize that there was a possibility of being without motive power, drifting into a reef, etc.; however, I feel that only then the decision should have been made.

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The fact that we were supposedly drifting toward point three the afternoon of the day the navy arrived on the scene is the responsibility of the navigator. If he had been thoroly familiar with the area he could have avoided the occurence of such a situation, even with the set of the current and the power of only 3.5 knots.

The conference following the trip led me to believe that at Robalo there were some efforts made to read into messages events that were not of particular concern to us at sea. There was no immediate concern when the first message requesting assistance of a tug was sent. The declining of aid from commercial ships at this time indicates the small concern of the people at sea in the beginning of the incident. I do not feel that the backstopping was at the finger-tips of the people in the local headquarters and the resultant messages to the ship tended to create concern for those in charge at sea. Sometimes, unfamiliarity with ships, sea and seamanship tends to create anxiety; I think, this may have occured with the Case Officer in his desire to protect the lives of the personnel aboard the ship.

In deference to the above facts it might be said, that the crew displayed some very remarkable seamanship under the command of their Captain in view of their little experience.

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