

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE AS SANITIZED

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2003

11 June 1953

MEMORANDUM:

TO : CWH

SUBJECT : Debriefing of []

[] reported to [] at 1545, 11 June 1953 regarding the reconnaissance trip in which he engaged in Caribbean waters. []

[] stated that he arrived at Panama at 0030 2 June and was met by [] of DTROBALO. He occupied quarters at the base. During ²⁺ 3 June he discussed the project with station personnel and inspected the vessel. [] that he was not to be in command of the vessel but that he might go along as an adviser with the title of Executive Officer. [] agreed to this arrangement since he felt that he had no alternative and that it was his duty to make the trip. On inspecting the vessel he discovered that it was not seaworthy. The after deck was so rusted that, at spots, chipping had penetrated the plates, the anchor winch was inoperative for dropping anchor and the compass had not been compensated. Compensation requires the work of a specialist. Although two naval technicians were available no attempt is known to have been made to have this work done since the vessel came under our control. This resulted in later navigational errors of up to 50 miles. The steering wires were not protected, as is normal, and were in danger of being severed or burning out. The steering engine room leaked considerably with the result that six or seven inches ^{of water} were on the floor. Another foot of water would put the ship out of commission. Only one bilge pump was in operative condition although four are normal for a vessel of this type. One bilge pump leaves no margin for unusual strain. Consequently in the event of rough weather or fire it may not be possible to keep the ship afloat. In any event, if the only bilge pump breaks down an extremely grave situation results. The engines are in very poor condition giving a maximum speed of five knots. [] will give technical details

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upon his arrival. [] is somewhat concerned that the cargo may have been damaged by storage in the hold since this has no ventilation. [] had recommended that the hatches be removed to permit ventilation but this was disapproved.

The ship sailed at 0600 4 June and was swung after proceeding six miles from the breakwater. At approximately 0800 she was put on a northwesterly course. In navigating, [] relied heavily on use of a log, a highly inaccurate instrument, particularly for a vessel travelling at speeds below six knots. The northwesterly course was held until approximately 0530 6 June at which time [] decided that something must be wrong and put about to a course of 180° . Daylight revealed that they had been headed for the coast in the vicinity of Punta de Perlas and would have run aground within forty-five minutes had they not put about, Establishing their position by terrain features ashore they set a new course east and sighted Big Corn Island at approximately 0830. Little Corn Island was sighted at approximately 1000. Approaching the northwest ^{coast} ~~shore~~ of Little Corn Island, horses were observed on shore but not people or houses. The light-house tower, however, was visible. After anchoring some 150 yards off shore, a party of roughly ten men under [] was landed. The landing party walked for an estimated two miles and discovered houses, natives, well kept coconut groves, horses and pigs. The cook, [] said that he was familiar with the island, having visited it before when a Marine and that when he knew it Little Corn Island was inhabited. Printed sailing directions of the Navy Hydrographic Service and the Coastal and Geodetic Survey state that fresh vegetables and meat may be obtained on Little Corn Island. The landing was made at 1230 and by 1330 natives had gathered on the beach. One of them stated to [] that he had lived on Big and Little Corn Islands all of his life and would like to

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accompany the ship when it left in order to see more of the world. At approximately 1415 an armed man in uniform came down to the beach and asked the identity of the ship and captain and why it was there. He was told that the ship was commanded by [] that they had had engine trouble and had put in to go swimming. After stating that he was a member of the constabulario and should report the incident to his superior on Big Corn Island he mentioned needing sugar. A pound of sugar was given him, as well as cigarettes. The name of the vessel was plainly visible from shore.

The ship got under way at approximately 1630 6 June. Heading for Panama a sight, taken at noon 7, June revealed a navigational error of 15 miles. Between 1300 and 1530, 7 June, it became necessary to lie to in order to transfer diesel oil using a one lung gasoline engine since the transfer pump did not work. After sighting Porto Bello at sunup, 8 June, the ship was found to be between 30 and 50 miles off course. The breakwater was reached at 1500. While attempting to land at the pier [] on the ship on the beach. Bumpers which had been provided in anticipation of this type of maneuver prevented permanent damage.

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