

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

RMV
27 October 1952
(GEORGE WALTON - a-13 B)

From: Chief, Merchant Vessel Inspection Division
To: Commandant
Via: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; fire and abandonment of SS
GEORGE WALTON in approximate position 49°30' N 134°05' W
on 6 November 1951, with loss of life

1. Pursuant to the provisions of Title 46 C.F.R. Part 136, the record of the Marine Board convened to investigate subject casualty, together with its Findings of Fact, Opinions and Recommendations, has been reviewed and is forwarded herewith.

2. The SS GEORGE WALTON, a Liberty type dry cargo vessel of 7,176 g.t., built in 1943 by Southeastern Shipbuilding Corporation and operated by Atlantic-Pacific Steamship Company, departed Portland, Oregon, on 31 October 1951 for Longview, Washington. At Longview while a full cargo of grain was being loaded, a new fuel oil discharge strainer was installed in the fireroom by the vessel's engineers. The GEORGE WALTON departed Longview on 3 November bound for India. At approximately 1500, 6 November while the engineer on watch and the chief engineer were cleaning and adjusting the newly installed strainer, fuel oil escaped therefrom in a stream, became ignited and set the entire fireroom on fire which got out of control and necessitated the abandonment of the vessel. One crew member lost his life as a result of the fire and five crew members were lost from lifeboats during hazardous rescue operations. On 18 November the GEORGE WALTON sank while under tow in heavy weather.

3. The Board made the following Findings of Fact:

"1. At approximately 1500, 6 November 1951, the SS GEORGE WALTON experienced a major fire in the fireroom which took the life of one man and caused the vessel to be abandoned. Five members of the crew were lost from lifeboats prior to being picked up by rescue vessels. Three members of the crew sustained personal injury, two of which were serious in nature. Following abandonment, while under tow, the vessel sank in approximate position 48°16' N., 125°48' W. at about 1730 hours, 18 November 1951, in about 36 fathoms of water. All times given in this report are Pacific Standard Time.

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"2. The SS GEORGE W. LITON bearing Official Number 243051, was a U. S. inspected steam screw Liberty type cargo vessel of 7,176 g.t., built of steel in 1943, home port Savannah, Georgia, last inspected at Portland, Oregon, on 12 April 1951, owned by National Shipping Authority, Washington, D. C., operated by Atlantic-Pacific Steamship Co., 1010 Washington Street, Vancouver, Washington. At the time of the casualty Captain [REDACTED], License No. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] was Master. [REDACTED], License No. [REDACTED], of [REDACTED], [REDACTED], was the Chief Engineer.

"3. The SS GEORGE W. LITON signed foreign articles at Portland, Oregon, on 29 October 1951. On 30 October 1951, a satisfactory fire and boat drill was held and witnessed by a Coast Guard Marine Inspector. Thereafter, on 31 October 1951, the vessel departed Portland, Oregon, for Longview, Washington. Following arrival at Longview, minor repairs were made in the engine room. In addition, a new fuel oil strainer was installed. The replaced strainer was leaking oil and was deemed to be a fire hazard. The newly installed strainer was manufactured by the Coen Co., San Francisco, California. It was identified as a Coen Duplex Strainer No. 4, 300 lbs. class, 1 1/2 inch. The basket chambers were secured by means of recessed caps which were fitted with load gaskets. The caps were held in place with a strongback which was secured with a toggle bolt. The operating lever was fitted with a channel bar intended to cover and prevent inadvertent opening of the side of the strainer in use. This strainer differed from the replaced strainer in that it was fitted with a bottom locking lever, rather than with a set screw and locknut. It was installed during the noon hour on 2 November 1951, under the supervision of the vessel's engineers. The Chief Engineer being the only engineer not present. The strainer was checked following the installation. At that time no major difficulty was experienced in the operation, though it was stated that the locking lever was stiff and hard to move. On 3 November 1951, the vessel departed Longview, Washington, at about 0600 hours en route to India via Yokohama, Japan, with a cargo consisting of 9,000 tons of grain in bulk. The draft of the vessel at departure was 27'06" forward, 28'06" aft, and 28'00" mean. The vessel was carrying a crew of 36 which total includes the master. While proceeding down the Columbia River the vessel encountered fog when off Astoria, Oregon. Rather than go over the Columbia River bar during poor visibility the master anchored off Astoria. After anchoring for a short time the fog lifted. The vessel then proceeded over the bar and to seaward. Shortly after crossing the bar on 4 November 1951, the

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mate on the k-8 watch was relieved for supper by Mr. [REDACTED], 3rd Mate, who testified that the vessel's engines slowed down for a period of about fifteen minutes due to engine trouble. He stated that he made a notation of this in the rough bridge log. This testimony was denied by Captain [REDACTED] and the 3rd assistant engineer, Mr. [REDACTED], who was relieving the 1st assistant engineer for supper at that time. Likewise, conflicting was testimony given relative to the functioning of the newly installed fuel oil strainer. The 1st assistant engineer, Mr. [REDACTED] testified that he cleaned the strainer while the vessel was at anchor off Astoria. He further stated that he shifted and cleaned the strainer the afternoon of 4 November 1951. According to Mr. [REDACTED], the cleaning of the strainer was done by him, as he had a 'green' fireman. Mr. [REDACTED] stated he had no trouble with the strainer on his watches. The 3rd assistant engineer, Mr. [REDACTED] stated that he was instructed by the 1st assistant engineer to leave the strainer alone. These instructions were relayed from the 2nd assistant engineer whose duty it was to supervise this equipment. Mr. [REDACTED] stated that he never once cleaned the strainer, and experienced no difficulty with it during his watches. The morning of 5 November 1951, the 1st assistant engineer noted upon reporting to the fireroom for his (0400) watch, that the chief engineer and the 2nd assistant engineer were working on the strainer. It was his understanding that the 2nd assistant engineer had called the chief engineer. The two men worked on the strainer until about 0500. During this time the 1st assistant engineer observed the fuel oil pressure to build up to around 300 lbs. when the lever was shifted to the after strainer basket. When placed for the forward basket the oil pressure appeared to be normal, or about 175 lbs. When completing their work, the strainer was left operating from the after side according to the 1st assistant engineer's testimony. He also noted that the oil pressure was normal. He was also informed by the chief engineer that the strainer was all right. On Tuesday, 6 November 1951, the 2nd assistant engineer left word with the 1st assistant engineer to inform the 3rd assistant engineer not to change the strainer that day, as he was going to work on it in the afternoon. According to the testimony, none of the firemen were required to clean the strainer. [REDACTED] the 12-4 fireman, was told by the 2nd assistant engineer to leave the strainer alone, that they were having trouble with it. On the morning of 6 November 1951, Mr. [REDACTED], the mate on watch, experienced a slow down of the vessel's engines for about 30 minutes and stated he made an entry in the rough log to that effect. It was his understanding from the engineer on

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watch that he could not "put pressure up." Captain [redacted] had previously testified that the vessel had experienced no difficulty. On being recalled by his attorneys, Captain [redacted] stated that the mate's testimony had refreshed his memory, and that the vessel was slowed on that date for about 15 minutes due to "trouble with water in the boiler." It is not entirely clear what actually occurred in the engine or fireroom that necessitated the slowing down of the engine.

"4. At 1200 noon, 6 November 1951, Mr. [redacted], 2nd Mate, took over the bridge watch. The course was 292° true, full ahead on the engines, 67 R.P.M. In charge of the watch below was the 2nd assistant engineer, Mr. [redacted]. He was assisted by [redacted], the oiler, and [redacted], the fireman. Prior to 1500 the chief engineer appeared below deck in accordance with his routine custom. He stated that he observed the 2nd assistant engineer in the act of cleaning the basket on the forward side of the strainer and burning off the after side. When the basket was secured and inserted the 2nd assistant engineer shifted the control lever to burn from the forward side. The chief engineer stated that he next noted the 2nd assistant engineer with the basket out of the after side. This was evidently cleaned and replaced and, according to the chief engineer, the lever was then shifted to burn from the after side. Thereupon, oil came out of the strainer and sprayed both the second assistant engineer and chief engineer. The oil ignited within seconds. The chief engineer stated he tried to pull the control lever back but could not do so as it was locked with the locking lever. While attempting to turn the locking lever his clothing caught fire. The temperature of the oil was around 180°. Thereafter, and according to his testimony, he went between the boilers and in back of the port boiler, tore off his clothes which were afire. Leaving this area he found the 2nd assistant engineer, who had come around the starboard boiler, lying on the floor plates and aflame. He threw a bucket of water on him and put the flames out. There was no response from the man. The chief engineer stated that he next tried to lift him but was unable to do so as flesh came right off his body. As the smoke was intense and no one else below, the chief engineer stated that he headed for the shaft alley in an attempt to escape. He was unable to see and felt his way finally to the ice machine room, thence on deck.

"5. [redacted], the oiler, gave the following account. He stated that both the chief engineer and 2nd assistant engineer were working on the fuel oil strainer at the time of the casualty. This witness testified that the chief engineer was on the discharge side of the

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strainer, the 2nd assistant engineer on the intake side, and that on shifting the control lever on the strainer the oil pressure built up. [redacted] heard the chief engineer say, "shift it back", and almost immediately a flange gasket at the strainer carried away and oil sprayed from the joint. Fire followed immediately. [redacted] stated that the 2nd assistant engineer went toward the starboard side as if to shut off the starboard settler, and then went to the starboard boiler to start the quick stop. It was [redacted] impression that the chief engineer shut off the port settler and port boiler quick stop. According to [redacted] neither settler had the reach rods connected. This oiler further stated that the fireman, [redacted], threw some sand on the fire before he directed him to go on deck and pass the word of a serious fire in the fireroom. [redacted] then attempted to notify the bridge by telephone but was unable to establish communication. On leaving the telephone he returned to the fireroom and saw the 2nd assistant engineer in flames forward of the sand box. The oiler stated he used a piece of burlap to extinguish the fire on the 2nd assistant engineer and also assisted him from the fireroom to an area between the throttle and the log deck where the 2nd assistant engineer collapsed. According to [redacted], the 2nd assistant engineer was dead, as he could hear nothing when he put his ear on his chest. [redacted] escaped through the shaft alley.

6. [redacted], the fireman on watch at the time of the casualty, stated that he had trouble once with the strainer and was told by the 2nd assistant engineer to leave it alone. [redacted] stated that the 2nd assistant engineer cleaned the strainer about 2:15 p.m. the afternoon of 6 November 1951. Thereafter, the oil pressure dropped and the steam commenced to fall. He went to the fuel oil pump governor and attempted to increase the speed of the pump. The spring on the governor was fully compressed. He thereupon went to the 2nd assistant engineer and told him he was unable to increase the pressure on the pump and he couldn't keep the steam up. The 2nd assistant engineer tried the governor and then started working on the strainer. He and the chief engineer worked on it for fifteen to twenty minutes. According to [redacted], one of the two men shifted the operating lever and oil appeared to squirt from the top of the strainer. It was ignited immediately. [redacted] stated that he ran for the sand box but used none as [redacted] told him to go topside and sound the alarm. The alarm sounded while [redacted] was en route to the bridge. He escaped from the engine room with some difficulty due to dense smoke and heat.

7. The master of the vessel was in his room when notified of the fire by the 2nd mate who was on watch. Captain [redacted] went immediately to the bridge. The vessel at the time was on course 292° true, on a full speed of 67 RPM, with a WSW wind, force 6-7. It was squally but the visibility was fair. The seas were running to 30 feet in height. The captain stated that

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he was notified of the fire at about 1450. Arriving on the bridge he could smell smoke. The chief mate who arrived about the same time rang the fire alarm. [redacted] then ordered the 2nd mate to turn the vessel about, in order to put the wind on the starboard. At about 1500, he sent an SOS. When attempting to turn about, the 2nd mate experienced difficulty with the tele-motor and found that it would not operate. Consequently, the vessel continued to head into the wind. [redacted] stated that he left the bridge to look for the chief engineer. On his way he noted that fire hoses had been stowed on deck. He met the chief engineer on the main deck who informed him that he had shut off the oil and that the 2nd assistant engineer was dead. Thereafter, Captain Burton encountered the 3rd assistant engineer who informed him that he had released the CO₂, but only after learning that the 2nd assistant engineer was dead. As the woodwork had caught afire in the house, portable extinguishers were ordered to that area and used.

"8. The 1st assistant engineer was in his room when he heard someone yell "fire." The alarm sounded shortly thereafter. He put on his clothes and started below to his station. Going below he encountered smoke and heat. He managed to reach the area adjacent to the L. P. piston but could go no further and returned topside. While below, this witness testified he did not hear the CO₂ alarm. Prior to returning on deck he went to the CO₂ controls and noted that the tripcock was hanging down with about 8 inches of the lanyard showing. This was the normal position in which he had observed it previously. He pulled the control to make sure it was released but no change was noted. Thereafter, he went on deck and back aft to assist in making rafts. While so doing he looked at the chief engineer in the Bo'sun's locker and gave him a life-jacket. The 1st assistant engineer abandoned the vessel in number 4 life-boat. This man, who is [redacted] years of age, fell while going down a line into the lifeboat and sustained a fractured hip.

"9. The Bo'sun, Mr. [redacted], stated that while walking aft about 1450 on the date of the casualty, he heard the alarm bell. He immediately started forward through the passageway to get his lifejacket. In reaching the saloon area he observed the deck maintenance man trying to close the forward valve on the two valves in that area. After securing a 36 inch pipe wrench the Bo'sun stated that the valve was freed, but that it never did close -- just kept spinning around and around. The chief engineer appeared and said, "get the valve closed." He stayed about two minutes and returned later on but only a second or so. After working on the forward valve for about 15 minutes the Bo'sun went on deck to prepare lifeboats for launching. He noted thereafter that portable CO₂ and

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and foam type fire extinguishers were used in the fidley and on the starboard side of the house where the wood was burning. According to the Bo'sun, the 3rd assistant engineer released the CO₂ bank to the engine and firerooms, but said he was not certain that it actually released. The Bo'sun recalled that he made a second check to ascertain if it did release. The Bo'sun did not hear the CO₂ alarm and no one, to his knowledge, worked on the after valve of the two previously mentioned valves. The Bo'sun cut the clothing off of the chief engineer. He stated that the pants and skivvy shirt were oil soaked and that the chief engineer was burned on the arms, legs and face. According to the Bo'sun the engineroom ventilators were never trimmed and the ventilators on the cargo hatches were sealed.

"10. [REDACTED], 3rd assistant engineer, stated that his first knowledge of the fire was hearing the deck engineer shout "fire." He went at once from his room to his station, the engineroom CO₂ control panel. Eventually he heard the alarm. [REDACTED] stated that he did not release the CO₂ fixed system until advised by the chief engineer and oiler, [REDACTED] that the 2nd assistant engineer was dead and no one else was in the engineroom or fire room. To the best of his judgment he stated that he tripped the CO₂ system about ten minutes after he heard the alarm. His testimony in explaining his actions in releasing the CO₂ system indicates that he did not in fact discharge the CO₂. His testimony indicates clearly that he manipulated only the control valve and did not pull the release cord. Mr. [REDACTED] drew a sketch of the valve which he claimed he tripped. Mr. [REDACTED] stated that he knew how to operate the CO₂ system on this vessel and did not need any instructions. He further stated that he heard the CO₂ alarm, the bell, go off."

11. (No paragraph numbered 11).

"12. All witnesses on watch in the fire and engine rooms at the time of the fire, including the chief engineer, were in agreement that no attempt was made to utilize the two 2½ gallon portable and 40 gallon foam type extinguishers, fog nozzles or ten cubic feet of sand. Also, except for inconclusive testimony concerning the fuel oil service pump, the testimony of these witnesses shows that when the engineroom was abandoned the main engines and associated auxiliaries, including the forced draft blower, were left in full operation.

"13. Mr. [REDACTED], 3rd mate, stated that about 1145 he heard someone shout, "fire." The fire alarm sounded immediately thereafter. Mr. [REDACTED] stated that he rushed from his room and noted smoke coming out of the fidley. He stretched hoses on deck but there was no water. Approximately ten minutes later he went to the starboard side and met the master who was coming from the bridge with a satchel. The master stated, "we will have to abandon." The 3rd mate then went to the license rack and took the licenses

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therefrom. Being on the boat deck he saw the chief engineer and seeing his condition, the 3rd mate procured a jar of mentholatum from the sick bay which was applied to the person of the chief engineer by the Ro'sun.

"14. The chief mate, [REDACTED] was in his room when he smelled smoke. He went to the bridge and sounded the alarm. Mr. [REDACTED] observed thereafter that hoses had been stretched on deck. He talked to the chief engineer who stated that fighting the fire was hopeless, that nothing could be done from topside. Mr. [REDACTED] assigned two men to search the quarters to see that all hands were able to abandon ship.

"15. At approximately 1530 the master ordered number 3 lifeboat launched with six men and the 3rd mate in command. Orders were given to the 3rd mate to stand by astern on a painter made fast from the vessel to the lifeboat. As the lifeboat drifted astern the painter was cut for fear the line would be entangled in the screw of the vessel which was still turning. 4th lifeboat number 3 adrift, the master ordered number 1 lifeboat launched at about 1600. This boat was under the command of the 2nd mate and was launched with four men aboard. The 2nd mate also was ordered to stand by astern on a painter from the ship. Shortly thereafter, this lifeboat was pulled back alongside the ship and eight more men boarded it before it was cast off and drifted away. At this time it was noted that number 3 cargo hold was afire. Smoke was coming from the hatch. The boat deck was becoming very hot. At 1700, number 4 lifeboat was launched from the disabled vessel on the windward side with the chief mate in command and twelve men aboard. Captain [REDACTED] placed in the custody of the chief mate a brief case containing log books, ship's registry data and cash. The classified Navy publications had been previously placed in the vessel's safe. It was the intention of the master at this time, to go into lifeboat number 4. However, being on the weather side, with the lives of the men in the lifeboat jeopardized by pounding against the vessel's hull, the chief mate cast off and rowed away from the vessel's side. Remaining aboard the WALTON at this time were the master, 3rd assistant engineer, and the Ro'sun. Just prior to 2100 number 4 cargo hatch was observed to be afire, and at 2100 the three remaining men abandoned the vessel in number 2 lifeboat. Thereafter, this boat sighted and took two men from lifeboat number 1. The two boats then drifted apart.

"16. About 2330, the Japanese flag vessel KINKON MARU, in answering the SOS, came alongside number 1 lifeboat. Seven of the eleven men in this boat were able to board the Japanese vessel. The remaining four men appeared to have made no effort to get aboard. Further attempts to get alongside to pick up these four men were unsuccessful. About 0200, 7 November 1951, the KINKON MARU came alongside and picked up the survivors in lifeboat

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number 2. The next morning the KINKON MARU in attempting to rescue the four men in number 1 lifeboat, approached alongside. In so doing the lifeboat collided with the side of the steamer in such a manner that it overturned and threw the occupants in the water. Lines and buoys were thrown from the vessel and, in addition, a Coast Guard plane dropped four rubber liferafts. The men appeared to make no attempt to grasp the lines or rafts and disappeared as they drifted aft. Number 4 lifeboat was equipped with a motor. In launching this boat the shaft was bent and the motor rendered useless. This boat remained adrift all night. The occupants could see the burning WALTON and in addition, saw a plane overhead. Flashlights, flashed in the direction of the plane were acknowledged. The next morning the Greek SS KATHERINE came alongside number 4 lifeboat with three jacob ladders placed over the side. When alongside the KATHERINE and in reaching distance of the ladders [redacted] an oiler, made a lunge for one of the ladders. He climbed about three rungs when the lifeboat went down in a trough. As it came up on the crest of a wave it hit the ladder. Mr. [redacted] feet appeared to have been knocked off the ladder, but he held on with his hands and climbed about two more rungs before he fell in the water between the ship and the lifeboat. Attempts to grab him were unsuccessful. A line was thrown out and Mr. [redacted] grabbed it but was unable to hold on and disappeared before further assistance could be rendered. The remaining nine men aboard number 4 lifeboat made it aboard the KATHERINE with no serious difficulty. While aboard the KATHERINE the rescued chief mate stated that the brief case entrusted to his care was stolen by the chief mate of the Greek vessel. The money was removed and the remainder of the contents were reportedly thrown overboard. This incident being reported to Captain [redacted] by the chief mate, Mr. [redacted]

"17. Number 3 lifeboat was in the water some 35 hours prior to being sighted by the CGC WACHUS IITS. Subsequently the survivors in this lifeboat were picked up by that vessel. The 3rd mate, Mr. [redacted], injured his foot in boarding the Coast Guard cutter. The injury was not of a serious nature.

"18. All lifeboats from the WALTON were of metal construction. They weathered 30 foot seas until the survivors were rescued. It was necessary to bail water continually. The equipment in the boats was in accordance with regulations.

"19. The first Coast Guard plane was over the burning vessel before dark the day of the casualty. Thereafter, planes from the Coast Guard Air Station, Port Angeles, Washington, flew under adverse weather conditions over the area almost continually until the last lifeboat was sighted by rescue vessels. The planes' radars were ineffective in locating the lifeboats. The

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These vessels all arrived in Port Angeles, Washington, the evening of 13 November 1951 where the ALTA crew members were put ashore.

20. The ALTA was valued at \$1,500,000.00 and the cargo valued at \$1,200,000.00. DATA forms 2692 have been previously forwarded to HQ. The members of the crew who lost their lives in connection with this casualty are as follows:

(a) On board the vessel due to fire

- (1) Gas A. Larson, Second Assistant Engineer, BK NO. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Oregon

(b) During rescue operations

- (1) [REDACTED] Second Mate, [REDACTED] License No. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] of [REDACTED]
- (2) [REDACTED] Fireman Intertender, [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]
- (3) [REDACTED] Oiler, [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]
- (4) [REDACTED] Second Cook, of [REDACTED]
- (5) [REDACTED] Messman, [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]

(c) Members of the crew who sustained injuries in connection with this casualty.

- (1) [REDACTED] Chief Engineer, BK NO. [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]
- (2) [REDACTED] First Assistant Engineer, BK No. [REDACTED] of [REDACTED]

21. Following receipt of the S.E. on 6 November 1951, the Coast Guard Cutters NORTHBEND, MINONA and MACHUSETTS were dispatched to the scene. The NORTHBEND sighted the MALTON on 10 November 1951. Heavy weather prevented boarding until the early morning of 13 November 1951. Upon boarding it was noted that number 3 and 4 hatches were smoldering. The hatch boards and covers had been burned off. The deck was corrugated

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about the midship section but no cracks were observed on the deck or sides. The house was gutted and 95% of the ports were gone. The vessel was listing about 20 degrees to port on an even fore and aft trim. No firefighting equipment was observed on deck. At about 1505 hours the NORTHWIND commenced towing the unmanned WALTON on an 800 foot hawser, speed about five knots. The position of the WALTON then being about 49°39' N., 131°48' W. The commercial tug BARBARA FOSS arrived shortly after the vessels were underway. The towline was declined on account of oncoming darkness. A minute or two after midnight the towing bridle gave way. About 0900 the next morning, 14 November 1951, a boarding party from the BARBARA FOSS went aboard the WALTON and made their towline fast. The conditions aboard were in agreement with those given by NORTHWIND witnesses. After the towline was rigged the two vessels got underway. The weather was adverse, but on the 15th of November 1951, it moderated somewhat. The list appeared to be the same and the tow was progressing satisfactorily. On 16 November 1951, the wind became stronger and the seas higher. This condition prevailed until the 18th of November 1951, when it was noted that the WALTON was taking considerable water on deck. Steam had been seen rising from number 4 hatch. Though no marked increase in the list of the vessel was noted it became apparent that the WALTON rolled heavily and recovered more slowly. Later on, the 18th of November 1951, the vessel appeared to be going down a little by the stern and her port list likewise increased. At 1730, this same date, men aboard the BARBARA FOSS stated they could not steer the tug. They believed they had fouled their towline on the bottom. The WALTON could not be seen astern on the radar. Darkness and squally weather prevented visual sighting. In communicating with the NORTHWIND it was ascertained that they had lost a target on their radar. Receiving this information the tug picked up her gear and retraced her course. Not being able to locate the WALTON, it was then evident that she had foundered in approximate position 48°46' 6" N., 125°48' W., in some 36 fathoms of water."

4. The Board expressed the following Opinions:

"1. After full and mature deliberation, the Board is of the opinion that difficulty was experienced with the fuel oil strainer on the SS GEORGE WALTON following departure from Longview, Washington, up to and at the time of the fire.

"2. That said vessel's chief engineer was working with the second assistant engineer on the fuel oil strainer when the casualty occurred.

"3. That some part of the strainer, under pressure, was opened while the chief engineer and the second assistant engineer were working on it at the time of the casualty.

"4. That the oil, which caused the fire, came from the fuel oil strainer.

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- "5. That the oil, on striking the hot surface of the boiler ignited immediately.
- "6. That the fuel oil service pump was not shut down.
- "7. That settler valve was not shut off.
- "8. That there was no explosion.
- "9. That the fixed CO₂ system for the fireroom was not released.
- "10. That the fire spread rapidly to the upper decks and house by reason of the fact the CO₂ fixed system was not operated and the firefighting equipment in the fireroom, consisting of two 2½ gallon and one 40 gallon foam type extinguishers, together with spray nozzles and sand, was not utilized.
- "11. That failure to release the fixed CO₂ system to the fireroom is the failure of personnel involved.
- "12. That the testimony of the engineers serving aboard the SS GEORGE WALTON was inconsistent and contradictory.
- "13. That the chief engineer withheld information relative to the operation of the fuel oil strainer and therefore the exact nature of the difficulty with said fuel oil strainer is undetermined.
- "14. That the GEORGE WALTON was ultimately lost by reason of taking excessive water in the engine room, number 3 and 4 holds following the casualty and while under tow during heavy weather.
- "15. That location of the fuel oil strainer on the SS GEORGE WALTON was dangerously close to the front of the boilers.
- "16. That rescue operations were hampered by the lifeboats becoming separated from the abandoned vessel, which was a natural focal point of the search.
- "17. That all assistance and rescue operations were conducted in an efficient manner."

5. The Board made the following Recommendations:

- "1. The Board recommends that the fuel oil discharge strainers on Liberty type vessels be relocated in the fireroom as far away as practicable and shielded from the front of the boilers.

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"2. That the Chief Engineer, [REDACTED], License Number [REDACTED] be charged, under R.S. 4450, as amended, for misconduct, in that he, while under oath gave false and misleading testimony relative to the functioning and operation of the fuel oil strainer in question, thus impeding the Board's investigation.

"3. That the Third Assistant Engineer, [REDACTED], likewise be charged under R.S. 4450, as amended, with inattention to duty, for having failed to release the CO₂ system.

"4. That personnel attached to surface and air craft, utilized in the rescue operations, be cited by the Commandant for meritorious action while conducting rescue operations during extremely adverse weather conditions.

"5. As a possible violation of 18 USC 558 is existent, in view of false testimony given under oath by [REDACTED], Chief Engineer, it is recommended that a copy of this transcript be forwarded to the Department of Justice for review and such action as may be found appropriate.

"The Board approves the serving of charges, under R.S. 4450, as amended, as indicated above against [REDACTED], Chief Engineer, License Number [REDACTED], Book Number [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], Third Assistant Engineer, License Number [REDACTED], Book Number [REDACTED]."

REMARKS

6. Recommendation - paragraph 1 of the Board with respect to the relocation of fuel oil discharge strainers on Liberty type vessels has been fully effected shortly after the occurrence of subject casualty. Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular No. 2-52 of 12 March 1952, a copy of which is herewith attached, contains the requirements for effectively preventing a casualty similar to the one now under consideration.

7. A review of the record of investigation does not indicate that there is sufficient basis for criminal prosecution of [REDACTED], Chief Engineer, on board the GEORGE WALTON at the time subject casualty occurred, on a charge of perjury. Accordingly, Recommendation - paragraph 5 of the Board is not concurred with.

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8. A review of the record indicates that [REDACTED], 3rd Assistant Engineer on board the GEORGE WALTON at the time subject casualty occurred, did make an effort to release the CO₂ system in the fireroom and that the failure of such equipment to function may have been due to circumstances beyond his control. While there may be a basis for a charge of incompetency, there does not appear to be a basis for a charge of inattention to duty.

9. Subject to the foregoing remarks, it is recommended that the Findings of Fact, Opinions and Recommendations of the Marine Board of Investigation be approved.

/s/ [REDACTED]

App. 13, Ontario
Acting

Encl: (1) Navigation & Vessel Inspection Circular
No. 2-52 of 12 March 1952

FIRST ENDORSEMENT TO MVI memorandum of 27 October 1952

M
20 November 1952

From: Chief, Office of Merchant Marine Safety
To: Commandant

Subj: Marine Board of Investigation; fire and abandonment of SS
GEORGE WALTON in approximate position 49° 30' N 134° 05' W
on 6 November 1951, with loss of life

Forwarded, recommending approval.

/s/ [REDACTED]

APPROVED: Nov 24 1952

/s/ [REDACTED]

MERLIN O'NEILL
Vice Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard
Commandant