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Exodus, 1947.

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Exodus - 1947

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see correspondence

John Stanley Cranel

Aug. 13, 1947

WRHS



A F F I D A V I T

I, JOHN S. GRAUEL, journalist and lecturer, of 1A Wachusett Street, Worcester, Mass. U.S.A., at present at Shoshanath Hacarmel Hotel, Shoshanath Hacarmel Street, Mount Carmel, Haifa, hereby make oath and say:-

1. My name, profession and address are as above stated.
2. I was on board the S.S. "President Warfield" otherwise known as "Exodus 1947" (hereinafter referred to as "the Exodus").
3. I proceeded on board the Exodus from France as a correspondent for the "Churchman" journal to observe the voyage.
4. During the voyage I was in constant contact with the Master, officers and some of the members of the crew of the Exodus and I was given free access to the bridge, chartroom and Master's quarters and I had personal knowledge of the position of the Exodus from time to time.
5. Before I boarded the Exodus I had already some knowledge of navigation, including fixing positions of ships, which knowledge was improved during this voyage by actual participation in fixing the position of the ship from time to time.
6. Between 5 p.m. of the 17th July, 1947, when the Exodus proceeded from a point off Damietta, Egypt, towards Palestine, until about 2 p.m. of the 18th July, 1947, when the Exodus arrived to a point off the Palestine coast, the Exodus was at no time within the territorial waters of Palestine. I ascertained the correctness of the statement contained in this paragraph as follows:-
 - (a) As from about 5 p.m. of the 17th July, 1947 until about 2.30 a.m. of the 18th July, 1947 I several times ascertained and checked the position of the Exodus by means of the ship's compasses and charts as well as by the course and speed of the Exodus coupled with the position of the ship off Damietta; and
 - (b) During the period between about 5 p.m. of the 17th July, 1947 and about 2 p.m. of the 18th July, 1947 I saw no land, although I was on the lookout at frequent and short intervals.
7. During the part of the voyage between about 5 p.m. of the 17th July, 1947 until the control of the Exodus was taken over by the members of the British Navy as hereinafter set out the Master of the Exodus in my presence and in my hearing several times ordered his officers and some of the members of his crew to navigate carefully and to reduce speed in order to avoid at all costs the approach before sunrise of the 18th July, 1947 to any point off the Palestine coast nearer than 20 miles off coast.

8. I took a special interest in ascertaining the position of the Exodus off the Palestine coast, in view of the numerous reports that had appeared in the press in the past alleging that immigrant ships had been captured in violation of international law by the British Navy on the high seas before reaching the territorial waters of Palestine, and of my desire to ascertain the correctness or otherwise of these reports.

9. On the 18th July, 1947 at about 2.30 a.m. I saw two British destroyers converging on the Exodus whereupon I went on to the hurricane deck of the Exodus in order to observe closely the ensuing events. I saw and felt the Exodus being struck violently both port and starboard in a squeezing action by the two destroyers. At the same time I observed an onslaught of tear gas and other explosives discharged at the Exodus, whereupon passengers on the Exodus fell down on the deck of the Exodus. The Exodus was subsequently violently rammed several times by British destroyers.

The attack on the Exodus as aforesaid was carried out by a flotilla of British men of war consisting of five destroyers and the cruiser "Ajaz".

10. Almost immediately after the Exodus was first struck by the destroyers I saw a party of British sailors, who wore gas masks and were armed with pistols and wooden clubs with steel bands around the heads of the clubs, boarding the Exodus. Shortly thereafter as I heard that someone on the bridge had been wounded by the boarding party, I proceeded to the bridge and found that the bridge was in the possession of British sailors.

11. Subsequently, as I heard that William Bernstein had been seriously wounded by the boarding party and was lying in the Master's quarters, I attempted to bring a doctor and a nurse of the Exodus to the Master's quarters in order to render him medical aid, but a British sailor stationed in the chartroom and in control of both of the chartroom and the Master's quarters adjacent thereto refused my request to permit a doctor and nurse admission to the Master's quarters.

12. The British sailors used clubs as aforesaid and firearms to establish their control of the Exodus; three persons of the Exodus were fatally wounded by the British Naval personnel, one of whom, William Bernstein, one of the officers of the Exodus, was clubbed and died later of the injuries received and another, a youth of about 15 years, whose name, I believe, was Hirsch Yacubovich, was fatally wounded by bullets. I counted over forty persons of the Exodus wounded with some degree of seriousness, at least four of whom, including William Hillman, were suffering from bullet wounds.

13. There was a considerable amount of resistance by the passengers to the establishment of the control of the British Naval personnel over the Exodus; in resisting the British, the passengers of the Exodus used potatoes and canned food, but no explosives or firearms of any nature whatsoever, save

a small number (not exceeding a dozen) of smoke bombs of the usual type required for all lifeboats.

During the said resistance of the passengers of the Exodus which lasted as from about 2.30 a.m. until about 6.45 a.m. of the 18th July, 1947, the control of the Exodus by the British Naval personnel gradually increased until the resistance was completely ended at about 6.45 a.m. of the 18th July, 1947, when the British Naval personnel had complete control and charge of the entire Exodus

14. I have read the official communique No. 124, July 19th, published in the Palestine Post of the 20th July, 1947 and I say from personal knowledge the following with regard to the description in the said communique of the events which took place on the 18th July, 1947, namely:-

- (a) At no time was tear smoke used by the passengers of the Exodus nor could any of the tear gas bombs thrown at the Exodus be thrown back, since these bombs invariably exploded before striking the Exodus.
- (b) It is untrue that only a "single shot" was fired by the British as they repeatedly used pistols both above and below decks of the Exodus. I heard three lengthy bursts of machine gun fire directed at the Exodus from a destroyer which was alongside.
- (c) I saw the incident of the axe referred to in the communique; it is not true that the man using the axe attempted "to decapitate one of the boarding party" but he was endeavouring to make a hole in the bridge head to secure a passage which was used in attempt to dislodge the British sailors in possession of the bridge of the Exodus. The man using the axe made no attempt whatsoever to use it against any person, whether of British naval personnel or otherwise.
- (d) At no time have I ever seen before, during or after the boarding any passenger or any officer or member of the crew of the Exodus in possession of a rifle.

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DEPONENT

Sworn before me, S. Rosenberg, Acting Registrar, District Court, Haifa, at the District Court, Haifa, this 24th day of July, 1947, by Mr. John S. Grauel, who was identified to me to my satisfaction.

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A/REGISTRAR
DISTRICT COURT, HAIFA.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WASHINGTON

Henry S. Vellard

Address Official Communications to
The Secretary of State
Washington 25, D.C.

In reply refer to
NE 367N.1115/7-3047

August 6, 1947

My dear Dr. Silver:

I have received your letter of July 30, 1947 with regard to the arrival of the vessel Exodus 1947 in Palestine and to subsequent circumstances during which several members of the crew lost their lives and other persons were injured.

According to reports from the American Consulate General at Jerusalem, the Government of Palestine issued a communique on July 29 in which it was stated that after the arrival of this ship in Palestinian waters on July 18 the vessel took violent evasive action to avoid being boarded, which resulted in damage to herself and to naval units. The communique cited various preparations for resistance, including barbed wire, and stated that boarders met tear gas, fireworks, smoke bombs, steam jets and various missiles. The communique stated that naval personnel fired twice on the ship: one rifle shot and one burst of machine gun fire, both of which missed. According to the authorities, the vessel was boarded within Palestinian territorial waters on the morning of July 18.

The Consulate General reports that six American citizens were on board the Exodus 1947, one of whom, William Bernstein, died of wounds at Haifa on July 19. The exact circumstances surrounding the wounding of Bernstein are not known because of the confusion prevailing during the boarding of the vessel. Another American citizen, William Millman, is presently

hospitalized

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver,
Chairman, American Zionist Emergency Council,
342 Madison Avenue,
New York 17, New York

hospitalized in Haifa, with a jaw injury. No other American citizens who were on board the Exodus 1947 were injured.

With regard to the other American citizens, John Grauel was assisted by the Consulate General, in accordance with his request, in obtaining passage on the Marine Carp, which left Palestine on July 24. Bernard Marks, Stanley Ritzer and Cyril Weinstein, alleged to have been crew members, have been released on bail and are now awaiting trial on charges of aiding and abetting "illegal immigration." Millman has not been detained as a crew member, but as an "illegal immigrant." According to the Palestine authorities, "illegal immigrants" are normally deported. None of the Americans mentioned, with the exception of John Grauel, have communicated with the Consulate General. They have, however, been informed that the Consulate General is prepared to offer appropriate assistance.

The Department and its representatives abroad will continue to follow developments with close attention, and to render all proper assistance to the American citizens concerned.

With regard to additional action of the character suggested in your letter, this Government has the general aspects of the matter under consideration.

Sincerely yours,

For the Secretary of State:

Henry S. Villard
Acting Director
Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs

1A Wadsworth Street
Worcester, Mass.
August 13, 1947

Mr. Henry S. Villard, Acting Director
Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs
Department of State
Washington 25, D. C.

My dear Mr. Villard:

I have read your letter of August 6th addressed to Dr. Abba Hillel Silver and dealing with the capture of the Exodus. The enclosed copy of an affidavit sworn out by me in Haifa, Palestine, will help to correct much of the information from British sources, which according to your letter, has reached the Department.

In addition, I feel it my duty to take issue with two further points mentioned in your letter.

You write that, according to the report of the American Consulate General in Jerusalem, "the exact circumstances surrounding the wounding of Bernstein are not known because of the confusion prevailing during the boarding of the vessel". It will interest you to know that Mr. Ritsar, an American citizen and crew member of the Exodus, now awaiting trial in Palestine, was a witness to the fatal wounding of Bernstein by British naval personnel.

Your letter further states, on the basis of information received from the Consulate General, that "none of the Americans mentioned, with the exception of John Granel, have communicated with the Consulate General". I should like to correct this. Since Messrs. Marks, Ritsar and Weinstein were unable at the time to communicate in person with the American Consulate General, they requested me to transmit on their behalf a request for protection. I did so in the course of a conversation which I had with Mr. Porter of the American Consulate General in Jerusalem.

Sincerely yours,

John Stanley Granel