

S/S "RICHARD MONTGOMERY"

Monday, August 21st. 1944.

On Tuesday, August 15th. 1944. at 2:02 p.m. pilot Mr. J. Newall aboard, proceeded towards the boom-gate. The deepest draft of the ship was 29 feet aft and decided to anchor outside the gate for the night as it was low water and the pilot Mr. Newall and I thought it not safe to go inside the gate on low water and with the incoming flood-tide, at 3:32 p.m. anchored St.B. anchor and 45 fth. of chain in 7 fath. of water, while at anchor ship was trimmed to a draft of 26 feet 10 inches forward and 28 feet 2 inches aft.

At 1:15 p.m. on Wednesday, August 16th. 1944. hove anchor, 1:23 p.m. anchor aweigh proceeded toward gate and our by the Naval authorities assigned anchorage, 1:56 p.m. passed through gate; when near our anchorage the pilot Mr. J. Newall pointed out the anchorage to me and as there was a ship apparently at our anchorage already and other ships at anchor close to our anchorage we anchored ship at an anchorage with Garrison Pt. Lt. bearing 230 degrees true and Great Nore Tower bearing 70 degrees true. These bearings were taken by the pilot and second mate and checked by me, later the second mate took another bearing of Martello Bk. which was 238 degrees true and showed the ship a little north of the afore taken bearings. all of these bearings were taken per Gyro Compass which had a 2 degree W'y error at that time. The sounding by fathometer showed 9 fathoms of water.

On Sunday, August 20th. 1944. at 5:55 a.m. I was informed by the chief-mate Mr. L. Guder that the ship was aground aft and that he had tried at about 5:00 a.m. with assistance of the engine and helm to maneuver the ship free of the ground but did not succeed, the weather was calm and the soundings had shown aft at 4:25 a.m. 5 fathom on the stern, 5 fth. abreast of #5 hatch, 4,5 fth. abreast of the amidship-house and 5 fth. 2 feet on the bow. I also was told by Mr. L. Guder chief-mate that the anchor bearings were the same as at the time of anchoring the ship at the anchorage.

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At daybreak signal was sent to Sheerness signal-station that the ship was aground and showed aft a draft of 17 foot 2 inches instead of the normal draft of 28 feet 6 inches aft and that a pilot was requested to change anchorage at the next highwater. At 7:50 a.m. ship was breaking between amidship-house and the afterpart of #3 hatch combing, signal was sent to Sheerness and also to Southend Pier that the ship was breaking and requested help. The fires in engine room and galley were extinguished at once to prevent any outbreak of fire by any possible oil fumes.

At 8:05 a.m. lowered life-boat to bring back 3rd cook L. Ortis whom had jumped overboard, about 8:30 a.m. I left for Sheerness aboard tug and reported the happenings and the conditions of the ship to the British Naval Authorities. After several telephone calls from the station by the commander I was told to go back to the ship and to send all the excess crew off in two crafts which would arrive at the ship shortly. 11:05 a.m. the gun crew and unnecessary crew left ship. At about 11:45 a.m. signaled for tug to take off the remaining crew to stand by on tug away from the ship until high tide as fuses and detonators were stowed in #3 hatch tween-deck near where the ship had broken and I was afraid that those may explode through pressure etc. due to the rise of the fore-ship with the incoming tide.

Crew was taken off by tug at noon time and brought back on the ship at about

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4:30 p.m. At about 3:30 p.m. Capt. Brooks of the British Salvage Co., Mr; L. Guder chief-mate of the vessel and myself went aboard of the Richard Montgomery where we met Mr. Johnson and Mr. Moore of the W.S.A. Capt. Brooks, Mr. Moore and chief-mate Mr. L. Guder took soundings of the bilges and then it was decided to commence discharging of the cargo the following morning. www.ssrichardmontgomery.com

At 9:10 p.m. the remaining crew was taken off the ship for safety sake and distributed on four Liberty-Ships in the immediate vicinity for the night.

Willecke
master

Now that I've given you some basic background information, I'll inform you that I am presently seventy six years old, retired from a position in the US Internal Revenue Service where I was a Division Chief.

At the time of the catastrophic event, I was eighteen years old. I am extremely fortunate that the ship didn't explode with her dangerous cargo.

Incidentally I have never located any of my shipmates since the incident.

Now I'll try to set forth my recollection of events that led up to the unfortunate grounding and subsequent happenings.

I had been assigned to the SS Richard Montgomery as a signalman in the US Naval Armed Guard. This was my first assignment aboard ship. The date was early July 1944. I had boarded in Brooklyn, New York City. We proceeded to a restricted area in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. It was an ammunition depot called Hog Island. We loaded bomber, TNT, and other ammunition. This cargo was stored in # 2, 3 and 4 holds. The bombs were for the use of US Aircraft. I also recall that detonators were loaded in Hold #3. I believe the loading process took four or five days. Upon completion of the loading we returned to New York Harbor to join a "North Atlantic" convoy which subsequently sailed for the "British Isles". It took us approximately twelve days to make the crossing.

Upon arrival in Great Britain, our first port of call was Oban, Scotland. We then proceeded north along the Scottish coast. We then proceeded east through Scapa Flow and along the Northern Scottish coast. We then headed south along the Scottish and English coasts to our destination Southend on Sea.

I vividly recall that during our trip down the English coast, we constantly saw "allied " bombers proceeding to and from the European mainland.

To the best of my recollection we had a pilot aboard to assist the Captain in anchoring. I believe we were at anchor for two days in the anchorage area off Southend. We were not alone other ships from our convoy were also anchored. I vividly recall that all of the ships would swing around depending on the wind direction.

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Incidentally our destination eventually was supposed to be "Utah Beach" in France, I recall that there was a sign on the ships bridge which read "Utah Beach" which was for purposes of identification.

On the morning of the mishap – August 20, 1944, it was just about "day break". I was showering when I heard an extremely loud bang. I quickly dried myself, put on my underpants and immediately ran out on deck where I found members of the crew scurrying about. My quarters were in the midship housing just aft the Hold #3. I looked up to the Bridge which was three or four decks above and saw Captain Willecke directly above me beckoning to me to come up to the bridge. I realized that we weren't using our radio equipment for "security" reasons that I was needed for signaling purposes. The bridge was my normal assignment while on duty. I recall that when I arrived on the bridge the senior signalman, Mr Gleason was already there and that he did the signaling during the crisis.

I remember that some of the Merchant crew had already jumped overboard and that the Captain and other officers discussed whether to abandon ship due to the extreme immediate danger but then decided to remain on board rather than to order "Abandon Ship" at that particular time.

The captain and crew realized that we had "run aground" and in examining the damage it was determined that the ship had split from the port waterline and probably below that point up the portside, along the deck just forward of the midship housing and at the rear of hold #3 across the deck and down the starboard side to, at least, the waterline and probably below.

Incidentally the captain had priorities and he was not concerned with the men who were overboard because other ships around us put lifeboats overboard to rescue our comrades who were in the water.

Within a short time all ships which were anchored in the Harbor Anchorage were moved to the Horizon due to the "Dangerous Condition" which existed aboard the Montgomery and in close proximity to the vessel.

Subsequently within the hour all merchant crewmembers and the Naval Armed Guard were ordered ashore with the following exceptions:

As for the merchant crew, the Captain requested that five volunteers remain aboard with him and the first mate who was second in command on board the ship.

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In regard to the Naval Armed Guard personnel, the US Navy ordered them to leave the ship with the exception of the two signalmen (Mr. Gleason and myself). Incidentally Gleason was an "Old Salt." He had been in the Navy for approximately twelve years.

I vividly remember that incident. Mr. Carven the Gunnery Officer in charge of the Armed Guard crew turned to Mr. Gleason, stood at "attention" and with a "Brisk

salute" paid to him "I'm leaving you in charge" at which time he turned over his 45 caliber pistol to him. Gleason remarked "In charge of who – him! (Pointing to me)." That moment was kind of amusing.

Incidentally our Armed Guard crew aboard the Montgomery consisted of twenty-three men in the Gun crew and two signalmen. Mr. Carver was the one commissioned officer in charge of the Naval Personnel. I believe he was a Lieutenant, Junior Grade.

I was the youngest guy among the naval personnel and frankly I was too scared to complain. I had just completed my training at Signal School and Advanced Signal School. I was then assigned to my first ship. I was a Seaman 1st Class – Signalman Specialty.

After the Armed Guard Crew and Merchant Crew went ashore, Mr. Gleason and myself and the Merchant Marine Volunteers remained on board for several hours. Gleason and I had no immediate assignment other than to standby to signal to other vessels regarding any changes in the ships condition. Lieutenant Carver had told us to remain aboard until we received further orders by visual signal.

As our grounding occurred on Sunday, I recall that the cooks had prepared a "Sumptuous Sunday dinner" and in relating my "Sad Tale" to my grandson who was eight years old when I told him my "sea story" I mentioned to him that Gleason and I "overindulged" in eating some of the "delicious food" available to us. We really expected that this could be our last meal. After hearing my story, he said, Grandpa, you and the other guy made the ship go down because you got heavier and heavier.

To be serious once again, I recall that we both jumped over the three-foot split in the deck to go forward to get some personal belongings, which were stored on the foredeck. There were storage lockers under the two forward 20 millimeter Anti-aircraft gun turrets. As the day went on the split increased. We could also periodically hear the sound of additional damage as the day wore on.

One important point that I want to emphasize is that at the time of the occurrence, the ship was at anchor. I remember the "black ball" on the Foremast, which designated "Ship at Anchor." www.ssrichardmontgomery.com

It is my personal belief that the vessel dragged the anchor and ran aground. I recall that while we were anchored the previous day and night that all the ships would automatically shift around based on the incoming and outgoing tide in addition to wind conditions.

I exceedingly regret that most of my recollection is of the personal nature and that technical details are vague. I am sure that you understand that fifty-eight

years have passed and I am annoyed that I can remember some of the details of our demise. I remember the name of the company who owned the ship – "Agustlines."

The only other recollection of that day was that Gleason and myself took turns on an hourly basis to signal ashore asking, "What are the orders for the two signalmen left aboard."

We remained on board for approximately four hours, which felt like an eternity. We went ashore leaving the volunteers in the Merchant Crew on board.

Upon reaching shore at Southend we joined our fellow Armed Guard Crewmembers. We never saw any of the Merchant Crew in subsequent days. We were driven to London in a military vehicle at which time we were all reunited at the Red Cross Building in Richmond, I'm referring to our Naval Crew.

Incidentally, London at that time was in the midst of constant bombardment by "Buzz Bombs." We went "from the frying pan into the fire". That's another chapter.

We remained in London for a few weeks at which time we traveled up to Rosemeath, near Glasgow, Scotland where we subsequently boarded the Queen Elizabeth I, in the River Clyde for our trip back to the USA. It was a wonderful experience to arrive "home again" in New York Harbor.

I hope the information that I've given you helps in your effort to write your article.

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I'm sorry but I'm an "old fashioned guy." I'm not on the Internet.

Incidentally, my wife Doris and I have been married for fifty-two years.

We have three children and five grandchildren.

Please contact me
Sincerely yours

Lenny Nadel

PS I'm sorry it took so long for my response to you. I'm a Community Activist here in Brooklyn and I'm extremely busy.