

STEERSMAN HELD AS SPY AT HALIFAX

John Johansen of Relief Ship
Imo Arrested When He Seeks
to Flee from Hospital.

GOVERNMENT INQUIRY ON

Captain of the Mont Blanc Puts
Blame for Collision on
Signals of the Imo.

HALIFAX, N. S., Dec. 13.—John Johansen, helmsman on the Norwegian steamer Imo, the Belgian relief ship which came into collision with the ammunition steamer Mont Blanc, causing the disaster of last Thursday, was detained as a German spy suspect today. He was turned over to the military authorities by officials of the Massachusetts Relief Hospital, where he has been under treatment.

One of the nurses at the hospital, a young woman from New York, whose name was not revealed, is said to have called the attention of the hospital staff to Johansen yesterday. She had noticed that the patient was acting queerly and that he did not seem to be wounded. Her report on the case led to a second examination of the man by the physicians, and they decided that he was shamming illness.

A watch was set over him, and later it was said that Johansen was making desperate efforts to leave the hospital. Surgeons reported that he had offered a nurse \$50 if she would go out and buy a newspaper for him, the assumption being that he had in mind an attempt to escape in her absence. After the incident, a military guard was placed on duty by his bed, and later when the incident was called to the attention of Captain Henry G. Lapham of the Massachusetts State Guard, the provost guard was sent for and Johansen was locked up.

In connection with the arrest the liveliest lot of spy rumors heard here since the war began was spread broadcast. These culminated in a report that eight Germans had been shot at sunrise. Military and naval authorities, while acknowledging that the Johansen case was being thoroughly investigated, declared that the shooting story was absurd.

Another persistent story was that a secret code in German had been found in Johansen's possession, and that a wireless station had been unearthed in the district destroyed by fire after the explosion.

J. C. Burchall, counsel for the Imo in the Admiralty hearing on the collision of the vessels, said tonight that the secret code story, as far as it concerned Johansen, was absolutely without foundation. Johansen, Mr. Burchall said, had been living in the United States ten years, and as he was anxious to return to his old home in Norway he shipped on the Imo. It is Mr. Burchall's theory that Johansen, who is to testify at the inquiry, was still dazed from the effects of the explosion, and was making efforts to escape from the hospital, fearing that he might be put in jail because of the collision.

French Captain Testifies.

The Canadian Government began an official inquiry today to determine, if possible, responsibility for the ship collision. Justice Drysdale, Judge in Admiralty, presided.

Attorneys present represented the Canadian and Nova Scotian Governments, owners of the two colliding vessels, the French munitions ship Mont Blanc and the Norwegian Belgian relief ship Imo; the City of Halifax, and the Halifax Pilotage Commission. Citizens of Halifax were still so occupied today with the rehabilitation of their city that there was no public attendance when hearing began.

Among the first witnesses to be called were Pilot MacKay and Captain Lamodec of the Mont Blanc and Alexander Johansen, steward of the Imo.

Captain Lamodec, examined by W. A. Henry, counsel for the Government, said that the Mont Blanc was loaded at Gravesend Bay, New York, with a cargo of TNT, gun cotton, and dry picric acid, and a deck load of benzol for the French Government. He described the distribution of the explosives in the hold and said the TNT was segregated from the acid by special wooden partitions. The acid was in wooden kegs and cases. At New York all the necessary precautions were taken against accident. The partitions to the holds were of wooden construction protected by tar cloth. The cargo was her-

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metically sealed and nobody on board was allowed to smoke.

Captain Lamodec testified his ship had not carried munitions before. He said the ship came to Halifax to receive orders where to join their convoy. He received his orders from the British pilot, MacKay, who came on board at Halifax, the evening of December 5. MacKay was "absolutely sober," said the witness. No liquor was on the Mont Blanc as it had been forbidden by the French Government.

The morning of the collision was quite clear. Proceeding up to Bedford Basin his ship sighted the Imo at 8:30 A. M. the Captain said. He had just passed a war vessel on the eastern side about 100 feet distant. He was then 120 feet from the Dartmouth shore. The Imo was heading to sea on the west side, but was taking a direction across his course. The starboard side of the Imo was visible. She was two points on his port bow. He gave one short blast on his whistle to indicate he had seen the Imo and to show the Mont Blanc was going to the right. The Mont Blanc's engines were ordered to go slow. The Imo replied by two short blasts. He thought the Imo changed her course, though it was difficult to determine this as she was against the land.

He was at this time going to starboard, and the Imo to port. He noticed later that the Imo came a little more to the left. He had in the meantime stopped his engines. The Imo gave two short blasts when the ships were about 150 feet apart. The collision was inevitable at this point. The Imo, judging by the force of the collision, seemed to have great speed.

Mont Blanc Turned to Left.

The Captain said he turned his ship to the left and gave two short blasts.

The ships then had each other on the right side and were fifty feet apart.

Mr. Henry asked if the vessels would not have passed at a distance of fifty feet if no other change was made.

The witness said this was so, as the Imo was traveling obliquely up the harbor. The Imo then signaled she was "going astern at full speed."

Captain Lamodec said he saw the Imo's propeller was going astern, but she kept ahead. He then signaled his engines astern, and put the helm to starboard, so that the Imo would not strike the hold where the picric acid was, as he knew the impact would set it on fire. He was not successful.

Captain Lamodec admitted that this was the first time he had ever been in Halifax harbor.

Cross-examined by C. J. Burchell, counsel for the owners of the Imo, the witness testified the Mont Blanc was not carrying a red flag or anything to indicate that the ship had explosives on board. He said the international navigation rules did not call for the flying of a red flag on a ship except when it was loading or handling munitions. He was the last man, he asserted, to leave the ship after the collision. He wanted to remain, he said, but the first officer led him to the ladder. Asked if he understood what the Imo's two blasts meant, Captain Lamodec said he thought she was signalling wrong, but as he had signalled his course first he had no right to change it except in case of collision.

Captain Lamodec said the Imo was half a mile away when he first saw her, that there was a perceptible interval between the blowing of the whistles, and that the collision took place immediately after the Imo signaled she was going astern. The ship's full speed at the time was seven and one-half knots.