

[Red Sky]

JUL 6 1939

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 557 W. 144th Street 557 W. 144th Street

DATE June 14, 1939

SUBJECT Maritime Folklore - RED SKY AT NIGHT IS A SAILOR'S DELIGHT

1. Date and time of interview June 11, 1939
2. Place of interview Waterfront - 21st Street & 11th Avenue
3. Name and address of informant Anonymous
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

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Why, the ocean is my home. I sailed in a big hull clipper from Boston to Coby, Japan, 1674 tons, register, when I was a lad of six. I ran away from my old man in Hong Kong when I was twelve. I went to sea shippin sugar to the Delaware Breakwater, 5 months and twenty three days trip. I was in the Naval Reserve, twice wounded and discharged. I was captain of the [Leonard Parker?]. I lost [here?] her in the Keys in 19 and 13. I took her out of Gulfport, Mississippi, goin to Louisburg, Nova Scotia. I didn't have no telegraph, I don't like to blackball nobody so I'm not goin to do much talkin about that. Call it an anecdote. I'm 51 now and I'm the youngest skipper alive. On my papers I'm 49 but officially I'm 51, I really should have been born in Boston but I was born in Pittsburgh and I was 25 years old when I was commander of the [Leonard Parker?]. It was damned good and hard all the way. My own father once hanged me up by the nails in the rigging by my thumbs when I was eleven years old. I stole some tobacco for one of the sailors. In 1904, the [Rhone?], she was English, we left with case oil in fire-gallon cans and barrels in the lower hold from Bayonne New 2 Jersey. Twenty seven thousand yards of canvas on her. We reached

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Saga Light, the entrance to the Ganges River, there are three rivers runnin in there - the Hoogli, the Ganges and another one, I disremember now, it runs all the way to Calcutta. Well, a monsoon struck us and it was three weeks between the time we sighted the light again and went down into Diamond Harbor. We were driven out to the Island of Columbia in the Indian Ocean.

A monsoon, or a typhoon or a pampero in Argentina, off the west coast of Africa they call it a gale. A hundred miles out at sea and you're covered with sand...Jesus, when you're running down the Easting between Cape Horn and Australia, you've taken everything in and tied her down. I seen seas over my head around the Cape. The sea's my home, for Chrissake. And when it's blowin damn good and hard I like it best. I hear it in my ears. Christ, anybody can wash, pain paint or scrub a deck. But can you judge the sky? The color? Can you tell when a breeze is comin up. "Red sky at morning, sailor, take warning." Mare's tails in the sky. The [Hatch?], from London, the first mate's name, it was Machlagian. What a ship. 183 days from Seattle to Falmouth, England.

Listen, if you go up the Seamen's House there's a case of knots, I can make all of them, man, fancy splices. I can tie up a whole ship. There're very few sailors, but I can rig up Old Ironsides, man. There's a man on 42nd Street, and I don't say as good but he's an old timer. Another man, up in the bull, and he can. Now there's a man and I don't know his name lives in Boston, I should think of his name.

Why, man, I'd rather go off in the Joseph Conrad for a long voyage, they've got her tied up alongside the dock. "Red sky at night is a sailor's delight."

3

I knew the captain of the Shendoah, the Roanoke, Captain Murphy was in the Shenandoah, now the Edward Soule, that's the one I came home in after I ran away from my old man. Murphy is dead, one of his sons died too off the west coast of Africa. I happened to be in the Shenandoah the very last trip she made, she was a clipper, they

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built her in '92 or '94, just when I couldn't say. The old man, the skipper, I mean, he was good and he didn't want any hard stuff and the American ships were good and hard. Now there was the Benjamin F. Packard, they brought her back from San Francisco eight or nine years ago, the finest example of a ship ever they built, man. But the man I liked more is Paddy Whalen, I think a hell of a lot of him and I know a lot about him. The Irish makes the best sailors anyhow. I think they're braver. The Newfoundlanders and the men from the Coast of Maine is good too but take them all in all it's the hard time canvas grabber, man, that's the best of all. A seaman never did have to be on the bum in them times and there was always somebody to take of him them. But now you hang around in the street, maybe you sleep in tthe goddam street.

My old man teached me navigation and he sent me to Trinity college too to make some kind of a man out of me. But I didn't want it, I liked it damn good and hard and that's what I got, man. But if a young man was to ask me, I'd tell him to go to school and lay off the booze - what I myself should have done and didn't. "Keep her by the wind, boy" I'd say, No use bein ornery.

The sea ain't ornery, it's just damn good and hard and it's about as honest as most people are.