

299/130/39

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16/12/3/40

No. 594

BRITISH EMBASSY,

WASHINGTON, D. C.

July 1st, 1940.

My Lord,

I have the honour to transmit to Your Lordship herewith the text of a Joint Resolution approved by Congress on June 26th and signed by the President amending Section 4 of the Neutrality Act of 1939.

Under Section 4 of the Act as originally drafted, United States ships operating for the American Red Cross carrying medical personnel or supplies and food for the relief of human suffering were exempted from the provisions of the Act prohibiting American vessels from proceeding to belligerent countries. Such Red Cross ships had however to obtain a safe conduct from all the belligerent states before they could take advantage of this exemption.

Quite recently the American Red Cross despatched a United States ship the "McKeesport" to Bordeaux laden with Red Cross supplies for France. After the vessel had sailed however it was found impossible to secure the necessary safe conducts. The French Government as was to be expected raised no difficulties, but the Italian Government insisted on being informed of all the details of the cargo and the German Government while raising no objection to the visit of this ship to Bordeaux expressed inability to guarantee it against damage from any air raids or bombardments which it might be necessary to conduct against Bordeaux. Further difficulties arose from the fact that no replies could

The Right Honourable
The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,
etc., etc., etc.

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be extracted from the Polish, Belgian, Dutch or Norwegian Governments, all of whom according to the strict letter of the law had to furnish safe conducts. In the end the "McKeesport" had to be diverted to Bilbao in the hopes that it would be possible to send on the medical stores to France overland across Spain.

To avoid the recurrence of such difficulties the American Red Cross, supported by the State Department, arranged for a bill to be introduced in both Houses about the middle of June simply providing that the restrictions imposed by Section 2 (a) of the Neutrality Act should not prohibit the transport by United States vessels acting for the American Red Cross of medical personnel and supplies, food, etc. destined for the relief of human suffering.

When the bill was discussed in the Senate it met with some opposition mainly from certain isolationists who were concerned lest an American Red Cross ship, proceeding to a belligerent port might be attacked and thus increase the risk of involving the United States in war. Senator Vandenberg was inclined to think that there were enough ships of other nationalities available to carry Red Cross supplies to Europe while some other Senators were afraid that a Red Cross ship might be employed to run the blockade imposed against some belligerent country. In the end the bill was amended by the addition of two provisos (1) that no vessel should

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enter a blockaded port without the permission of
the blockading power and (2) that the vessel must
be on a mission of mercy only and must carry only Red
Cross materials and personnel.

I have the honour to be,

With the highest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,

humble servant,

(SGD) LOTHIAN

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[PUBLIC RESOLUTION—No. 87—76TH CONGRESS]

[CHAPTER 431—3D SESSION]

[S. J. Res. 279]

JOINT RESOLUTION

To amend section 4 of Public Resolution Numbered 54, approved November 4, 1939, entitled "Joint resolution to preserve the neutrality and the peace of the United States and to secure the safety of its citizens and their interests."

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That section 4 of Public Resolution Numbered 54, approved November 4, 1939, entitled "Joint resolution to preserve the neutrality and the peace of the United States and to secure the safety of its citizens and their interests" be, and is hereby, amended to read as follows:

"Sec. 4. The provisions of section 2 (a) shall not prohibit the transportation by vessels, unarmed and not under convoy, under charter or other direction and control of the American Red Cross of officers and American Red Cross personnel, medical personnel, and medical supplies, food, and clothing, for the relief of human suffering: *Provided*, That where permission has not been given by the blockading power, no American Red Cross vessel shall enter a port where a blockade by aircraft, surface vessel, or submarine is being attempted through the destruction of vessels, or into a port of any country where such blockade of the whole country is being so attempted: *Provided further*, That such American Red Cross vessel shall be on a mission of mercy only and carrying only Red Cross materials and personnel."

Approved, June 26, 1940.

Bordeaux, warehouse to receive supplies, and

The Viscount Halifax, K.G.,
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