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No. 257

American Consulate, Puerto Limon, Costa Rica

August 12, 1943

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Further complaints of crew members of the
S.S. DENNY, a Panamanian Vessel.

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NN3-26-83-11
By LEK NARA. Date 4-4-77

The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington, D. C.

Secret

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to the Consulate's strictly confidential despatch No. 275-A dated July 14, 1943 (File No. 880), concerning the complaint of Tage Haakon Gersa, Chief Officer of the S.S. DENNY, a Panamanian vessel, and to report herewith additional complaints from other crew members of the DENNY.

On August 4, 1943, 2nd Assistant Engineer Frank BROOKINS, an American citizen, and 1st Assistant Engineer Vasilios GERSIMON, a Greek national, called at the Consulate. The following complaint was made by Brookins, with Gersimon agreeing to the former's statements:

Engineer Brookins signed on the DENNY on January 28, 1943 at a United States port and, at that time, was told the DENNY would be away from the United States for a period of from six to eight weeks. (As reported in the Consulate's despatch under reference, the DENNY has not returned to the United States since February 1943).

Brookins' complaint centered on the abusive manner in which the Chief Engineer, Harold WARDLIGH, a Norwegian national, treated the members of the crew. According to Brookins, Wardleigh refuses to consider the crew members as humans and, in both his speech and conduct, closely resembles a Gestapo agent. Brookins stated he had stood such maltreatment from the Chief Engineer as long as possible and had left the vessel at Tolu, Honduras on August 3rd.

The informant further reported that there were supposedly three pro-Nazi crew members aboard the DENNY. To Brookins' knowledge, backed by Gersimon, he had actually heard but one praise the Nazis. This member is one Liner PEDERSEN, S.S., a Danish national. According to the American seaman, Pedersen is known to have stated that he hoped Germany would win the war. Brookins also stated that Pedersen had recently given the "Heil Hitler" salute at a cantina in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica. The American seaman stated that upon hearing this he immediately struck Pedersen over the head with a mahogany stool. Patrons of the cantina intervened after the first blow, and Pedersen left the cantina.

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Brookins further stated that whenever Americans are within hearing distance of Pedersen, the latter speaks only in Danish. Pedersen's remarks regarding his hopes that Hitler will win the war are usually made while he is drunk, according to Brookins. The American seaman further related that when complaints are made to the ship's captain concerning the behavior of Pedersen, the captain assumes a noncommittal attitude.

Gersimon, the Greek national, had previously visited the Consulate, seeking assistance to return to the United States and stating he hoped to sign on the Atlantic run.

According to Brookins, again backed by Gersimon, one Peter KUMMEL, in charge of the ship's gun crew, would also testify to the behavior and conduct of both the Chief Engineer Nordleigh and seaman Pedersen.

The Consulate suggested that both Brookins and Gersimon return to the ship, in view of its plans, upon completion of its next run (c.f. Consulate's despatch under reference), to return to the United States. In this respect, it was recently learned by the Consulate that the War Shipping Administration had informed the ship that it was to report to a United States port after completing its next run to Panama.

The seaman did not appear anxious to return to the ship, stating they had taken all the ill treatment they could possibly stand. They added, however, they would give the thought consideration.

On August 7th Brookins again visited the Consulate and reported that he and Gersimon had returned to the ship.

Peter M. KUMMEL, petty officer in charge of gun crew aboard the ship, together with 2nd Assistant Engineer Brookins called at the Consulate on August 7th. The petty officer stated that he wished to inform the Consulate of activities and rumors which have come to his attention aboard the ship. The naval officer specifically stated that his comments were to be accepted in an unofficial capacity. The gun crew officer's statements were as follows:

The three crew members suspected of harboring pro-Nazi sympathies are, Chief Mate Tage Laakon OJEN, A.S. (Last name (first name not known) and A.S. Engineer PETERSEN, all Danish nationals. Kunkel's suspicion of Oasen and Olsen are based more on rumors than on first hand knowledge. However, he definitely believes Pedersen to be a strong supporter of Nazism, since he has heard him make comments in favor of Hitler.

The petty officer also stated that the above three men were unfriendly toward the Americans aboard the ship and, as stated by Brookins during his first visit to the

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Consulate on August 4th, all three would converse in Danish whenever approached by an American.

Navy officer Funkel reported that the DANBY's Captain, Ingvald W. Olsen, a Norwegian national, appeared to be aware of the three Danes' pro-Nazi sentiments. According to Funkel the Captain has been faced with many difficulties - i.e., the discontentment of the entire crew due to the length of time away from United States ports; and the undisciplined conduct of practically the entire crew. Funkel stated that in this respect the Captain was helpless since most crew members would have deserted the vessel or mutinied, had the Captain resorted to punishment.

The naval officer added further that the Captain was compelled to depend a good deal on the Chief Mate Casua and, therefore, was forced to overlook his pro-Nazi tendencies. The Captain, according to Funkel, is most outspoken against the Nazis. Once the DANBY docks in the United States, Funkel believes the Captain will demand the dismissal of Casua as well as that of redersen and Olsen. In this respect, Funkel stated that he believed the Captain and Chief Engineer Nordleigh would be the only two members of the DANBY that would want to remain aboard ship.

Petty officer Funkel reported that he will have been aboard the DANBY one year on August 20th, 1943. As reported to the Consulate by Brockias and Gersimon, Funkel stated that he was surprised of the length of time the DANBY has been away from the United States. Although he had not been officially informed, Funkel stated he had been of the opinion that the vessel would only be away for a period of from six to eight weeks.

According to Funkel, there is scarcely a member of the crew that has not been logged. This, he added, was to be expected since there were so many divided feelings among the crew. He also stated that majority of the members had been ill at one time or another. He credited this to the poor food aboard the vessel, the filth of the ship, the cheap liquor abundantly consumed at each port of call by practically the entire crew, and the discouragement of the men brought about by being away from the United States for over six months.

Respectfully yours,

Julian L. Nugent, Jr.
American Vice Consul

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