

5 May 1943.

MEMORANDUM FOR: District Coast Guard Intelligence Officer, LND.

Subject: Observations and Suggestions of a Merchant Marine Seaman.

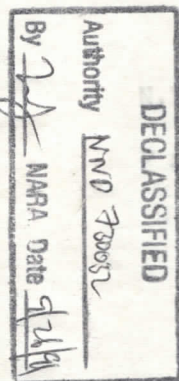
Reference: (a) Monthly Intelligence Summary from I.O., S.R.N.C. to All Naval Districts (less 16th), dated March 24, 1943, Confidential.

1. A member of the Merchant Marine (Rating F) now at the torpedoed Seaman's Rest Home, S.R.N.C. is the source for the information quoted below. He was in a convoy, 7 out of 39 ships of which, succeeded in reaching Archangel on July 11, 1942.

"Referring to convoy security, informant stated that the Captain of the S.S. IRONCLAD, a freighter, continually tried to keep away from the main convoy group during the trip over. He purposely strayed so far away at one time that a British man-of-war fired a shot across his bow in order to get him back in position. Informant and 28 other merchant seamen survivors were ordered to return from Russia on the S.S. IRONCLAD. When they reported on board the Captain told them that they would be back in the United States away ahead of time, adding "watch our smoke once we get out of the White Sea," indicating that he had no intention of staying with the main convoy at all. However, the S.S. IRONCLAD broke down and this informant returned to the United States on the S.S. VIRGINIA DARE, a liberty freighter. Captain A. L. JOHNSON, U. S. Merchant Marine, South Atlantic Steamship Line, Savannah, Georgia, master of the Virginia Dare, allegedly continually violated the rules for convoy security. Captain JOHNSON was reported to be afraid to get too close to the main portion of the convoy. He continually pulled away or held back in order to isolate his ship despite specific orders to the contrary and despite the threats of his crew members to report him to Merchant Marine officials. Captain JOHNSON further angered his crew members by forcing them to double up on all watches because of their isolated, unprotected position. Informant reported that Merchant Marine seamen are always afraid of being torpedoed on an isolated ship, especially in the freezing waters of the North Atlantic, because their chances of survival or rescue are at a minimum.

"In discussing individual ship security and armament informant stated that too many merchant ships were equipped with only four lifeboats, two on each side. Almost invariably when a ship suffers a torpedo hit or other direct charge on one side, the lifeboats on that side are either damaged beyond repair or lost altogether. The two remaining lifeboats will barely hold the ship's complement and are grossly inadequate in colder waters, such as those encountered on the Russian run, because usually there is not even sufficient room to allow the men to sit down. The presence of six lifeboats on a freighter is a great morale booster as far as the Merchant Marine crew is concerned. Crew members are beginning to check such items before signing on any given ship.

"Informant also indicated that .50 and .30 calibre sub-machine guns did not provide decent defense from attacking aircraft. On his most recent convoy trip informant said that the Navy gun crew



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on the SS CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT of the Calmer Line, Baltimore, Maryland, spotted a torpedo at some distance heading directly for them, yet, they were unable to discharge it or deviate it from its path by means of gunfire. Speaking about the same trip, informant stated that it was not unusual to see a torpedo plane travel the entire length of the convoy at very low altitude without running into any difficulty. On a few occasions German torpedo plane pilots were so low that they "thumbed their noses" at crew members standing on deck. Merchant crews have little faith in the effectiveness of .50 and .30 calibre sub-machine guns as anti-aircraft defense. Informant stated that he personally will never sign on another ship that is not adequately equipped with 20 millimeter guns and at least one or two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns. He added that a 4-inch deck gun was also necessary but indicated that Merchant Marine crew members were not as concerned about submarine attacks as they are about aircraft attacks. In this informant's opinion 20 millimeter and 3-inch anti-aircraft guns are necessary defense armament on ships of the Merchant Marine for practical protection and for the upkeep of morale among the ship's crew."

2. Forwarded for information.

E. L. BONGIOVANNI.

N.B.

F = Reliability of source unknown.