

RECEIVED  
IN MAIL ROOM

CONFIDENTIAL 3550 S.S. JOHN DAVENPORT

1943 AUG 5 PM 12 53

Report on Fire

CONFIDENTIAL

Tin Plate

July 10, 1943

From: The Armed Guard Commander  
To: The Commanding Officer

Subject: Report of Fire

1. On Wednesday July 7, 1943 fire broke out in #3 hatch of the S.S. John Davenport while berthed at Queen's Wharf, Wellington, New Zealand.

2. From Wednesday June 30, 1943 through Tuesday July 6, 1943 and after the fire on Wednesday July 7, 1943 there had been escaping ammonia fumes from the ventilators of #3 cargo hatch. These fumes had been reported by the United States Navy Armed Guard Unit members on watch and had been universally observed by all members of the Merchant Marine crew, Merchant Marine Officers, the Armed Guard Commander and the Armed Guard Unit members whose amidships quarters had been impregnated by the fumes. A crack from the coaming athwartships on the starboard forward corner ten feet long and one-quarter inch wide had been caused by heavy seas. Another crack in the after port corner extending for two feet was later discovered. The stop at Wellington N.Z. was made by the Master on the advice of Admiralty after the discovery of the first crack. On Saturday July 3, 1943 the War Shipping Representative, Mr. Flanagan and the surveyor of the American Board of Shipping, Mr. G.B. Lidgett boarded the ship and held consultations with a chemist and an officer of the United States Marine Corps as to proper steps. There is reason to believe that the officer from the Marine Corps was not informed of the entire cargo in Hatch #3 but was told only of the Sulfate of Ammonia and Chloride of Lime. On Tuesday July 6, 1943 the U.S.M.C. Officer strongly advised the removal of all cargo from Hatch #3 even while welders were repairing the crack in the deck plate. The fire was caused either by spontaneous combustion or welding or chemical reactions resultant from the intake of salt water and its effect on the cargo or perhaps by a combination of all or some of these factors. The cargo in hatch #3 was composed of the following items:-

- |                         |                            |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Bundles of Cotton Waste | Brass                      |
| Sulfate of Ammonia      | Small Arms Ammunition      |
| Chloride of Lime        | Medical Supplies, chemical |
| Fumigating Gas          | Lubricating Oil            |
| Sodium Proxide          | Angle Iron                 |
| Linseed Oil             | Steel Bars, plate          |
| Grease                  | Copper Wire                |
| Gear Oil                | Food                       |
| Tire Shop Equipment     | Graphite Electric Rods     |

Arbors

359921  
C.B.



3220

RECEIVED  
MAIL ROOM

CONFIDENTIAL

3550

Report on Fire

July 10 1943  
1943 AUG 5 PM 12 53

Tin Plate

3. The fire was quelled chiefly by the efforts of the United States Navy Fire and Rescue Detail sent from their base by the United States Navy Port Director and his staff. The Wellington Fire Department seemed at a loss to handle the situation while the Navy had control of the directing of the fire-fighting efforts. The Navy caused the S S John Davenport to be moved from Queen's Wharf to Aotea Quay, under control of the United States Navy, and the removal of the deck cargo. On the removal of the cargo over the hatch square flames broke out in the bundles of cotton waste and were quelled by the Wellington Fire Department.

4. The extent of the damage has yet to be ascertained inasmuch as all cargo has not been removed from hatch # 3. There will result a significant delay in the trip of the S S John Davenport to her ultimate destination.

5. There were no personnel casualties.

6. The Armed Guard Unit performed more than creditable service in loosening the lines that held the cargo on the hatch square. The men showed no regard for their own safety nor did they consider the potential danger of explosions in the hatch from whose square they were loosening deck cargo. The unit later turned out completely in handling the lines incident to docking at Aotea Quay and in doing all other work that was requested by the Merchant Marine Officers. High Praise was given them through the medium of the Armed Guard Commander by the United States Naval Port Director and the Master of the S S John Davenport and by the Chief Mate.

ERNEST A WEDGE