

INFORMATION CONCERNING MERCHANT CREWS

(Excerpt from Boarding Report)

SS "JOHN LANGDON" (U.S.), 5ND Boarding Report, 2/12/43

It is reported that the first trouble with the merchant crew took place at Lagos, Nigeria. A number of tractors, trucks, tanks, and other heavy equipment was to be discharged here, but there was no labor at the port capable of handling the ship's winches. The second mate asked the crew to help unload material, but they refused on the grounds that the union didn't allow them to discharge cargo.

At Takoradi, West Africa, the incident was repeated. While the ship was in Freetown, informant advises, the Armed Guard Commander threw a rope ladder over the side in order to climb down to board a tug to go ashore. The Armed Guard Commander was reprimanded by the Bos'n., because the crew could have claimed overtime pay for performing the task.

Some time later, informant stated, the Master invited some of the gun crew to go ashore in his boat, but the merchant crew objected to the invitation extended the Navy men, again claiming that such procedure would prevent them from compiling additional overtime. Because of this incident, the gun crew was issued orders to the effect that they should never accept future invitations from the Master for transportation.

Although the quality of the food served aboard the SS JOHN LANGDON to the gun crew was satisfactory, the service was not, it is reported. All ten members of the gun crew protested because they were never served their dishes. No matter what type of food composed the menu, it was all dumped on one plate and put before them. Neither were they allowed to participate in the merchant crew's "coffee hours" or "midnight lunches" available to the men just going on or coming off watch. It was further reported that the merchant crew accused the gun crew men of eating too much.

According to reports, only once during the whole voyage, did any of the gun crew ask for "seconds". On that occasion, the colored cook refused to give second helping of pork chops. A man had waited until everyone had been served before making his request and accepted the cook's refusal quietly. On the way through the galley it was noticed that a whole pan of pork chops were being distributed to the native colored workers who were gathered in the galley for a big feast."