

La Guaira, Venezuela

July 27, 1943

Airmail

SUBJECT: Dangerous lack of coordination in authority of master of vessel and that of gun crew as shown by the visit to La Guaira of the S.S. MALANG.

THE HONORABLE

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

WASHINGTON.

SIR:

I have the honor to refer to the visit to La Guaira, July 20 to 25 of the American flag vessel, S.S. MALANG, out of New Orleans and chartered by the Grace Line.

During this visit there were several serious cases of lack of discipline among the members of the crew of the vessel and among the members of the gun crew. There were disputes between members of the gun crew and the local authorities and there was drunkenness. A fight took place on board the ship involving both members of the gun crew and the ship. When order had been restored one member of the gun crew had to be hospitalized. A basic cause of friction is that members of the gun crew receive \$27 per month while the lowest paid seaman usually receives \$200 per month. When on shore leave the members of the gun crew did not wear their regulation "whites" and presented a very

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poor appearance in dungarees.

When the Ambassador learned of this situation in which there was complete demoralization due to lack of proper discipline, he requested the Acting Naval Attaché, the Consul in Caracas, and myself to summon the Captain and the head of the gun crew for an investigation. At this meeting it was stated by the Captain that the authority which he exercises over the gun crew while at sea ceases when in port.

From the attached list it will be seen that the ages and ranks of the men comprising the gun crew ranged from a senior seaman of 22 years to an apprentice of 17 years. Without going into the question of the wisdom of sending such a young and inexperienced group to so hazardous an assignment without an experienced official in charge, it is evident that lack of adequate continuity of authority in the hands of the master is responsible for a situation in which incidents having serious repercussions are almost sure to occur. In addition, the importance of having an experienced official in charge of gun crews can not be over emphasized.

Respectfully yours,

Carl Bruer
American Vice Consul

File No. 383.3
CB/fm

Copy to American Ambassador, Caracas.
Copy to Acting Naval Attaché, Caracas.

Members of the naval gun crew on board the
S.S. MALANO while in La Guaira:

Dittler, Robert K., seaman first class, 22 years of age,
in charge.
Platke, Richard A., 19 years of age.
Fuson, James Elvin, 17 years of age.
Graves, Franklin Monroe, 18 years of age.
Thompson, Myron S., 19 years of age.
Kechter, Arnold, 18 years of age. Signaller.