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William and Lucile Mann - Diary, Firestone Expedition to Liberia, 1940

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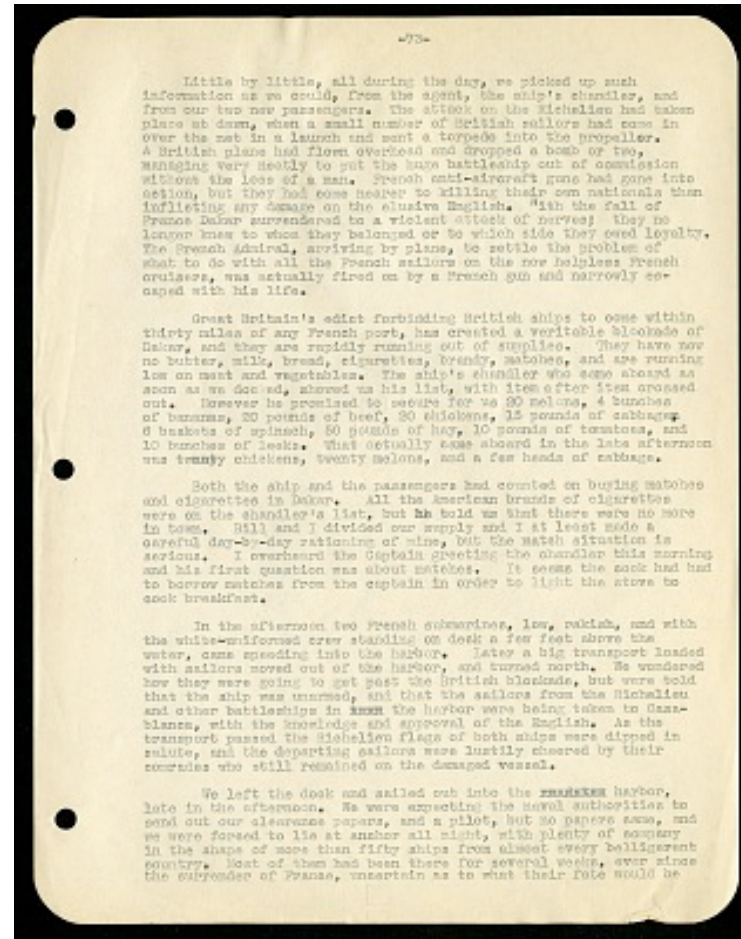
Little by little, all during the day, we picked up such information as we could, from the agent, the ship's chandler, and from our two new passengers. The attack on the Richelieu had taken place at dawn, when a small number of British sailors had come in over the net in a launch and sent a torpedo into the propeller. A British plane had flown overhead and dropped a bomb or two, managing very neatly to put the huge battleship out of commission without the loss of a man. French anti-aircraft guns had gone into action, but they had come nearer to killing their own nationals than inflicting any damage on the elusive English. With the fall of France Dakar surrendered to a violent attack of nerves; they no longer knew to whom they belonged or to which side they owed loyalty. The French Admiral, arriving by plane, to settle the problem of what to do with all the French sailors on the now helpless French cruisers, was actually fired on by a French gun and narrowly escaped with his life.

Great Britain's edict forbidding British ships to come within thirty miles of any French port, has created a veritable blockade of Dakar, and they are rapidly running out of supplies. They have now no butter, milk, bread, cigarettes, brandy, matches, and are running low on meat and vegetables. The ship's chandler who came aboard as soon as we docked, showed us his list, with item after item crossed out. However he promised to secure for us 20 melons, 4 bunches of bananas, 20 pounds of beef, 20 chickens, 15 pounds of cabbage, 6 baskets of spinach, 50 pounds of hay, 10 pounds of tomatoes, and 10 bunches of leeks. What actually came aboard in the late afternoon was twenty chickens, twenty melons, and a few heads of cabbage.

Both the ship and the passengers had counted on buying matches and cigarettes in Dakar. All the American brands of cigarettes were on the chandler's list, but he told us that there were no more in town. Bill and I divided our supply and I at least made a careful day-by-day rationing of mine, but the match situation is serious. I overheard the Captain greeting the chandler this morning and his first question was about matches. It seems the cook had had to borrow matches from the captain in order to light the stove to cook breakfast.

In the afternoon two French submarines, low, rakish, and with the white-uniformed crew standing on deck a few feet above the water, came speeding into the harbor. Later a big transport loaded with sailors moved out of the harbor, and turned north. We wondered how they were going to get past the British blockade, but were told that the ship was unarmed, and that the sailors from the Richelieu and other battleships in the harbor were being taken to the Casablanca, with the knowledge and approval of the English. As the transport passed the Richelieu flags of both ships were dipped in salute, and the departing sailors were lustily cheered by their comrades who still remained on the damaged vessel.

We left the dock and sailed out into the harbor, late in the afternoon. We were expecting the naval authorities to send out our clearance papers, and a pilot, but no papers came, and we were forced to lie at anchor all night, with plenty of company in the shape of more than fifty ships from almost every belligerent country. Most of them had been there for several weeks, ever since the surrender of France, uncertain as to what their fate would be.



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