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Lack Inspectors, Ship Probe Told

Reports that a "substantial number" of Liberty cargo ships have cracked at sea were investigated here today at a public hearing of the Truman Senate War Investigating Committee, sitting in the Federal Building.

Chairman Truman (D.-Mo.), and Sens. Kilgore (D.-W. Va.), and Wallgren (D.-Wash.), comprised the sub-committee handling the investigation.

John Lyle Wilson, assistant chief surveyor of the American Bureau of Shipping, first witness called, said that due to a shortage of qualified independent inspectors, the reliability of steel going into the manufacture of Liberty ships is almost wholly dependent on the integrity of the steel manufacturers.

He stated his organization, which performs inspection service on materials, construction and maintenance of sea-worthiness of American-built vessels on behalf of shipowners, builders and marine underwriters, at present has a staff of about 75 to 100 metallurgical inspectors in steel mills throughout the country.

FORCE INADEQUATE.

Under questioning by Rudolph Halley, assistant counsel to the Senate Subcommittee on Shipping and Shipbuilding, Wilson indicated he does not consider this force adequate, but that manpower shortages have made it impossible to obtain more inspectors. He also stated it is common practice for bureau inspectors to rely on the findings of Navy inspectors and for the Navy inspectors to accept the findings of bureau representatives.

"Isn't it true, then," Halley continued, "that the entire industry is based on the company's integrity and that actually there is no check if the company wants to cheat?"

Wilson agreed that this is so. Prior to the session, Truman said cracks of varying degrees of seriousness have been found in 55 Liberty ships to date, but that "the percentage is not alarming."