

SHIP DESERTIONS INCREASING HERE

December's Total of 66 Is
Double the '60 Number

The twelve seamen who recently deserted from a British freighter in Jersey City have focused attention on the increasing number of foreign crew members who seek to stay in this country illegally.

The number of desertions last month was more than twice the total reported for December, 1960, according to Peter A. Esperdy, New York district director of the Immigration Service.

The desperation of many deserters was emphasized Tuesday when two of the men drowned after jumping from the deck of the Union Atlantic while the vessel was loading scrap iron prior to her departure today for Hong Kong. Four of ten other seamen who deserted the ship—using the gangway—have been apprehended by the Immigration Service and the search for six men continues.

Sixty-six foreign seamen jumped ship here last month compared with thirty-two in December, 1960. For the last half of 1961 there were 294 desertions by various foreign nationals, while in the last six months of 1960 the total was 246.

Greeks Frequently Desert

Greeks are the most frequent ship jumpers, followed closely by Chinese, Italians and Norwegians. Smaller numbers of foreign-ship deserters were represented by Denmark, Great Britain, Spain, Germany, and Italy. A few South American nationals also were listed.

Mr. Esperdy said the service's inspection and investigation staff had been increased considerably during the past five years. More than 200 men now are assigned to the investigation and apprehension of deserters.

He said the majority of seamen who jump ship are caught within a few months. All told, about 80 per cent of the investigations are successful.

Mr. Esperdy said most foreign seamen jump ship for economic reasons while others do so because of tight immigration quota restrictions.

In most cases, ship jumpers are deported without fine or imprisonment. But when the service finds that a deserter has withdrawn all of his pay and has left the ship with no extra clothing, it may seek a conviction through Justice Department lawyers. The defendant may spend thirty to sixty days in a Federal prison before being deported.

The twelve Chinese who jumped the Union Atlantic were all from Hong Kong, by way of Communist China.

"But even before Communist China, Chinese seamen were high among the number of men who jumped ship here to try to improve their financial lot," Mr. Esperdy said.

Deserters from many nations—including the Scandinavian countries and Great Britain—often jump ship just to get on another ship, he said. But most of the time, the reason is economic.