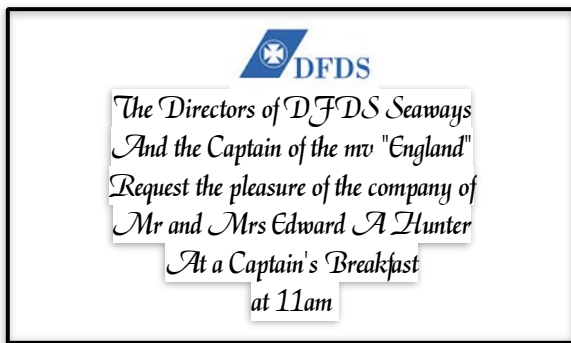


## Dredgings from the fast-failing memory of Electrical Superintendent Eddie Hunter

Two more gentle tales, a few years apart, from Eddie.

### The Captain's Wife

The Danish Shipping Company DFDS Seaways introduced a new ship on their Harwich to Esberg route. I think she was the mv "England" but my memory is fast failing. No matter. A week or so before she arrived for the first time at Parkeston Quay, I received an embossed envelope through the post. It contained an embossed invitation card reading:



"Well, bugger me!" I thought ungraciously and ungratefully. "I'm not important enough to be invited to dinner, I'm not even important enough to merit lunch, but *breakfast*, I mean, that has got to be some sort of insult."

I had almost decided to R.S.V.P. in the negative and commented to that effect to my boss, Peter Frost, the Superintendent Engineer. He laughed, and told me that the ship was berthing at 09:30 and would be sailing again at 15:00 and everyone had received an invitation to breakfast. Mollified, I accepted on behalf of Dorothy and myself.

Well, that was the most alcoholic breakfast imaginable, commencing with champagne and progressing through just about every falling-down fluid known to man!

As we were still very new to the local shipping community, Peter and Kate Frost, took my wife and I under their care. Everyone present seemed to know the charming Kate, and she introduced Dorothy and I to numerous people she thought we should know.

The non-alcoholic part of the breakfast consisted with an elaborate smorgasbord which was a gastronomic delight, and we found ourselves at a table with the Frosts and our Commodore Captain, Monty Gregor, and his wife.

Presently, the Danish Captain and Chief Engineer joined us and invited Captain Gregor and his wife to view the

bridge. Monty eagerly accepted, but Mrs Gregor preferred to stay at the table, saying that one wheelhouse was much like another to her.

The Chief Engineer invited Peter Frost and I to see his engine room. I glanced at Dorothy, saw the panic in her eyes at the prospect of being left alone in a sea of strangers, and declined the invitation. Had I gone, I knew that Dorothy would have coped, but I had not married the girl to ever make her uncomfortable, and after all, I had given up *all* ships to be with her - there was never any contest! So, there I was, squire to three ladies, Dorothy, Kate and Mrs Gregor, for the remainder of the morning.

About six weeks later, Rank Xerox chartered the ss "Avalon" for a sales promotion. Their primary push was to present the first ever colour photocopier and a number of other novel products to their business guests during a three day cruise to Amsterdam.

As the main technical problems to be solved concerned matching the ship's available voltages to the voltage requirements of the Rank Xerox machines, I was seconded to liaison duties between Rank Xerox technical people and our Port Workshops.

Between Monday morning and Thursday noon, we all slaved furiously together and effectively converted the ss "Avalon" into the ss "Rank Xerox," using mostly hundreds of yards of a Fablon stick-on logo, specially made for the purpose, building a small stage in the aft saloon and a plywood film projection room outside on the deck. We had a local optician polish one of the portholes using jeweller's rouge, in order to project films into the saloon without compromising its fireproof integrity.

Anyhow, the work was finished in record time and Rank Xerox were so pleased that they gave an impromptu party on board for all those involved in the work, and their families together with as many of the Sealink dignitaries and their families as could attend.

During the buffet, I found myself talking to Mrs Woon, wife of our most senior Chief Engineer, Mr Des Woon. As we were talking, Mrs Gregor came to join us.

"Ah, Mr Hunter, have you met Mrs Gregor, Captain Gregor's wife?" Mrs Woon asked as Mrs Gregor approached.

Well, I'm afraid my mischievous Irish sense of humour kicked in.

"I have," I said. "And please don't take this the wrong way, Mrs Gregor and I have actually had breakfast together. . ."



### Two Weather Forecasts

Despite all the historical contra-indications; Texel in 1673, when they shot the sh one t out of the Royal Navy; all the trouble and woe begun in 1690 ( and continuing ever since ) in my poor benighted little homeland by Orange Billy; and the Boer War - despite all that, I met a charming, talented and, very beautiful Dutch lady, a widow and, well, who could blame a lonely widower?

So, my future Mother- and Father-in-Law from Holland were on a winter visit to see their daughter. I am sure that an important part of the visit was also to vet. . . but that's another story outside the province of these Dredgings . . .

They had arrived before Christmas 1980 and were returning to Holland in mid-January.

Mrs Verhagen never enjoyed ferry crossings and was particularly concerned about the weather when she travelled by sea. So, the night before their return, the old lady, whose English was very good, watched both the BBC and the ITV weather forecasts with special interest. Actually, as I remember, the forecasts were not too bad.

On the morning of departure, I took them to the Quay, escorted them through Customs and Immigration and went on board the mv "St.George," the day-boat, with them. I took them up to the Old Man's cabin introduce them to the Old Man, who happened to be Billy King. ( Now, where have I seen that name recently? )

Captain King greeted them warmly, invited them to the bridge for departure and offered each of us a gin and tonic, which the old couple accepted, but which I refused because I would be driving, and I am very law-abiding. ( And any Sealink Captain's g&t would knock a horse over.) Preliminaries taken care of, and the old couple comfortably seated in easy-chairs, Mrs Verhagen broached the topic uppermost in her mind. "Captain? What, er . . . What will the weather be like?"

"Ah, well now," said Billy, his eyes twinkling. "Actually, I get two weather forecasts through our wireless room. I get an English weather forecast and that is followed by a Dutch one. I read them both carefully, and then I pick the one I like the best."

Well, if the event had been a television comedy sketch the timing could not have been better. There was a brisk double knock on the door and Peter Roper, the Radio Officer, entered. Tall, imposing, immaculately uniformed and always beautifully well - mannered, Peter did a double take, not expecting the Old Man to have company so close to sailing time. He quickly recovered from his surprise. "Good morning, madam, sir, Mr Hunter. Weather forecast for you, sir."

Peter handed the Old Man a sheet of paper, bowed slightly and withdrew. Billy King excused himself, donned reading glasses and looked at the paper. He looked up directly at Mrs Verhagen. "This is the English weather forecast," he explained, and Mrs Verhagen watched nervously as he read it.

Well, I have never seen better acting even from the best of the Hollywood method actors. As he read the forecast, Billy King's face became longer and longer, his expression more and more doleful, until finally he screwed the paper into a ball and tossed it accurately into the waste paper basket, saying, "I think I'll wait for the Dutch one!"