

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

The Stewardess's Bunk

As Sealink employed a large shore-based maintenance staff, we carried out running repairs when the various ships were in port. This system, however, was not without its obvious drawbacks.

One: The system was expensive to operate, involving inevitably large wages bills and frequent overtime payments often at greatly enhanced rates of pay.

Two: The system weakened the incentive for Ships' Crews to do any minor on-board repairs themselves. Indeed, even major repairs became someone else's problem if only the vessel could limp home*

* I must say immediately that this was not in the least true of the Ship's Engineers who served on the mv "St George." She had the *first four* Rushton AO marine diesel engines in service, and she had the *last four* remaining in service. And that was all entirely due to the skill and dedication of her Engineers, who became past masters at pulling pistons and changing cylinder liners in record times - but all that is another story involving populist politics and government interference.

The main advantage of the system from the Superintendents' point of view was that we were very firmly in charge, vetting all repair requests and allocating resources as we saw fit, and compiling the annual overhaul and dry docking specifications.

The Ships' Officers and Engineer Officers and the Catering Crew wrote out Repair Orders, of which there were three categories;

"A" Orders, which meant that the vessel could not sail until the repair was complete (obviously rarer than hens' teeth!)

"B" Orders, the repair is urgent.

"C" Orders, please get round to it when you can.

And the various Departments, Deck, Engineering and Catering each submitted screeds of the things every day. Each Repair Order arrived marked with the Originator's assessment of priority. Amusingly, many of the Orders generated by the Catering people were endorsed with the "A" category. Mind you, I suppose it is mega serious if the toast maker in the breakfast galley isn't working, and if the ice maker in the Second Class Bar has given up the ghost, oh dear, let's hope there's no Board of Trade Surveyor around.

The Catering people sometimes sent Repair Orders with double A classifications, and double and even triple A's heavily underlined in red were not unknown.

To keep things moving and to prevent a build-up of paperwork, the Superintendents used to congregate in the Senior Assistant's office each morning and each of us would go through a slack handful of Repair Orders and either deal with them there and then or pass them to each other according to our individual interests or specialties.

I picked up a heavily underlined triple A one morning- It read:

REPAIR And STRENGTHEN Second Stewardess's BUNK

Struggling valiantly to keep my face straight, I handed the Order to Henry Perry, the Junior Assistant Marine Engineer at that time, and said, "Advice, please Henry."

"Beyond me," said Henry, also struggling with his facial muscles. "John?"

"Easy." said John Carley, the Senior Assistant, grinning. "Normal repair. And well advise the young lady to do it standing up in future. Peter? Would you agree?"

The Boss took the paper. "Agreed," he said. "And well stiffen the deck with a doubler if necessary!"

I don't know what the hell they were talking about, do you?

