THE ADMIRALTY SHIPYARD ENGINEER OVERSEER

BY

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The Admiralty Shipyard Engineer Overseer acts as an intermediary between the Engineer-in-Chief's Department and the machinery contractors, to assist in making the Admiralty's intentions more clear where necessary and to represent the contractors' difficulties to the Engineer-in-Chief's Department, particularly when these can be eased by headquarters action. He attempts to expedite deliveries or find suppliers for scarce items after the efforts of the firm's buyer have failed. He endeavours to ensure that the work is carried out by approved methods and to the standard of workmanship and degree of accuracy required.

The Overseer's civilian assistants are few in number but are able, conscientious men with a sound background of engineering knowledge and experience. On taking up an overseeing appointment they have usually had little previous opportunity of dealing with official correspondence and the calls on their time for practical work are so great that it is difficult to give them as much experience

as one would wish. They have not usually had any sea-going watch-keeping experience although the old stagers' experience of sea trials, particularly during the busy wartime period, is of great value. B.R. 2007, *Marine Engineering Notes*, although primarily intended for artificers and mechanicians, is a most helpful book for explaining the principles of machinery with which they may not be familiar. For those entering during peace-time, sea trials of ships completing are too infrequent to give them sufficient practical experience of steaming conditions to enable them to view the job from a seagoing point of view. The outstanding contributions that a naval officer can make as Admiralty Engineer Overseer arise from his personal knowledge of headquarters staff, his ability to deal efficiently and rapidly with correspondence through the correct channels and his appreciation of the finished result from the users' point of view. He should be able to co-ordinate efficiently the detailed activities of his staff and to exercise a broad directive influence.

Admiralty Shipyard Engineer Overseers are not perhaps too highly esteemed by any of those whose interests they serve. Headquarters sections of the Engineer-in-Chief's Department may not feel that their individual requirements are being prosecuted with sufficient vigour. Machinery contractors call on the Overseer to achieve the impossible when they have been unable to do so themselves. Engineer Officers standing by ships are sometimes aggrieved that their suggestions for improving the approved arrangements are not supported with greater enthusiasm. Dockyard officers complain that firms directly approached concerning delivery of items of spare gear sometimes assert that the items are complete and await only inspection or despatch instructions. Suspicions are sometimes entertained that after an Overseer has been appointed for some time, he may become unduly biassed in the firm's favour. Some colour is no doubt given to these suspicions by the nature of some of the representations which the Overseer occasionally feels it his duty to make, although these are generally in what he conceives to be the interest of the Service.

Refitting

The duration of my own appointment as an Admiralty Engineer Overseer has coincided with the period of open hostilities in Korea. This resulted in a general Reserve Fleet refitting programme, much of which was undertaken by private contract. This work is the responsibility of the Director of Dockyards, whether undertaken in a Royal Dockyard or private shipyard and supervision of contract refitting during the war was carried out by an Emergency Repair Organization responsible to the Director of Dockyards. The recent programme of Reserve Fleet refitting by private contract has however been supervised by the Admiralty Engineer Overseers who have therefore been attempting to serve two masters. The visible results of this refitting programme far outweigh the output of the slow patient work on new construction. Messrs. Scotts have refitted and modernized three ' S ' Class submarines and carried out one A/S frigate conversion. Messrs. A. Stephen & Sons Ltd. have completed two A/S frigate conversions, besides refitting three L.S.T.s, four L.C.T.s, and a number of L.C.A.s. The Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co. Ltd. have refitted one ' Battle ' Class destroyer and two L.S.T.s, as their contribution to the Reserve Fleet refitting programme. This additional work has caused a considerable expansion of correspondence, the score for 1952 being as under :—

Admiralty Engineer Overseer's Correspondence

	Incoming	*Outward*
Messrs. Scotts' S. & E. Co., Ltd. . .	1,403	184
Messrs. A. Stephen & Sons, Ltd. . .	2,769	412
The Fairfield S. & E. Co., Ltd. . .	785	266

Digesting and acting upon incoming letters and replying where necessary has naturally absorbed a good deal of time.

A number of other odd jobs have been undertaken for the Director of Dockyards, including overseeing of emergency repair work connected with ships visiting the Clyde during N.A.T.O. exercises, docking of H.M. Ships *Diamond* and *Savage* in connection with propeller trials, besides the normal following up of dockyard orders for spare gear for ships.

New Construction

New construction work for the Engineer-in-Chief has included :—

A. Stephen & Sons	*The Fairfield S. & E. Co., Ltd.*
' Daring ' Class destroyer (completed)	' Daring ' Class destroyer (completed)
2 A/S frigates (in hand)	2 A/D frigates (in hand)

Messrs. Scotts' S. & E. Co. Ltd.
A/A frigate (in hand)
New submarine (in hand)

Skeletons in the cupboard are the the ' Tiger ' Class cruisers, *Blake* and *Defence*, the work in connection with which has been nominal to date but which, in view of the time since building was suspended, will be no laughing matter when resumed.

In recent naval machinery designs, improvements have been introduced which were not possible earlier owing to the need to maintain a high war-time rate of production, free from design snags and supply restrictions. One of the greatest difficulties lies in obtaining sufficient high quality alloy steel. As the demand must precede the supply, there is an extreme temporary difficulty in obtaining the materials required. Demands from other users are stimulating production and it is hoped that expansion of manufacturing capacity will facilitate the supply of future requirements.

One approaches the end of one's appointment conscious of one's shortcomings and haunted by the sad faces of disappointed patrons. On taking stock I feel it might well have been possible for the work to have been discharged more efficiently, although not by me. To those with whom I have come in contact, who have had reason to agree with this sentiment, I offer my sincere apologies.