

HAVE THINGS CHANGED?

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THE HAND OVER (OR, HOW TO GET YOUR RELIEF TO SIGN FOR IT)

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“Engine room. . . Engine Room. MEO speaking – what’s that ? Yes I know it’s a bad line — always has been, but if you can’t understand what I’m saying then you should go and shake one of those ‘Greenies’ and get it fixed. It’s nearly stand easy and one of them ought to be up by now. What’s that—you did; oh congratulations! Well never mind — Ask the Chief MEA to come and have a word with me will you?”

“Ah Chief — yes I wanted to have a word with you because my relief is due to arrive tomorrow. Now sit down and we’ll work out a plan of action.”

“Yes Chief, a plan of action — after all, we want him to get off to a good start don’t we? Oh dear — sorry about that Chief, I’ve been meaning to have a word with Chippy about that seat for a long time! Yes, of course I’m sorry about the splinters but don’t worry about them now – we’ve more important things to think about.”

“I’ve got three days to turn over, then he’s got to sign that bit of paper saying that everything’s in tip top condition, and besides, I rather thought I’d like to go up to Town on Friday.”

“What do you mean he’ll never sign it? Of course he will! You have to expect the odd little defect here and there — after all, we’ve been using some of it this last month! Now, I’ve been looking up the regulations — tiresome things don’t you think – and I reckon that he’ll want to see inside some of the old — er — machinery. Now we can’t have that, can we? Don’t want him to get the wrong ideas do we — so — we’ll stay flashed up. Yes — well he’ll probably want to see it working then — can’t see why myself — brings me out in spots just to go near it, but there you are — some people are like that!

“Boiler rooms you say — yersss . . . Well, we haven’t been able to get No. 2 alight for quite a while and we can’t have him going down No. 1! After all, a turkish bath on his first day on board could put the poor chap off his fodder for the rest of his natural. Tell you what, why don’t you get some of the chaps to paint up No. 2 — make a really good job of it — then we can light a bonfire in the furnace just before he goes down there and pretend that it’s steaming. The CB Officer has a cabin full of secret books and things he’s been trying to unload for months — I’m sure he’d be delighted.”

“Leaks? Course the boiler leaks. Been like a bloody colander for ages — even I know that — but we don’t have to put any water in it! Besides — I don’t think we can spare any for that.”

“Of course not Chief — use your loaf. We shut the gauge glasses off and top ‘em up to half a glass through that bung thing in the top. Yes I know it’s cheating

Chief but do stop thinking negatively. Be constructive — spread a little happiness. Life is a great illusion and all that sort of stuff! Now — we have to be very careful — can't let him stay too long down there or the fire'll go out and we can hardly shovel more books into the furnace to keep it going or he'll smell a rat. So — just time for a quick once-over then we ease him over to the engine room.”

“What do you mean he'll see the gauges aren't registering anything? Use your imagination Chief — you'll have them fixed to read something by then — wont' you? Really — I wear myself out working out the policy — the grand design — and you will bother me with these petty details! Now where were we — oh yes the engine room — well as we all know, there are some things down there that not even the Almighty is going to get to turn before next Michaelmas so they'll have to be shut down.”

“How can they be shut down when they've never actually been started? You're splitting hairs Chief — how's he to know that? All it needs is someone with a spanner taking off the odd nut and bolt — I presume there are some left — and they're shut down for maintenance. Simple! Now dash off and get it fixed Chief, there's a good chap, and get Chippy to fix the odd cement box over the holes in the bilge will you?”

“Yes — don't want to give the impression we're sinking do we? Ha Ha.”

“Well that may be your opinion Chief but kindly keep it to yourself. Besides, it's not very deep here is it?”

“Now, Chief Stoker — my relief is certainly going to want to know how many chaps there are in the — er — department. Have you counted heads lately?”

“Yes — splendid, well that's marvellous. Nearly as many as we're supposed to have!”

“Oh — that's not counting the two who missed the ship in Manchester. Well — I don't think we'll tell him about those.”

“Yes — well he'll meet them as soon as they get back anyway and I do think he ought to be free to form his own opinion about people — don't you?”

“Good — and I think we'd better have most of the chaps down below when he's looking round too — looks good if you see what I mean. Oh — and you'd better make a list of them too Chief. He's bound to want to look at a few names. Right Chief — I know I can rely on you — Now I must find the Gunnery Officer. Have you seen him lately?”

“Ah Guns — nice to see you.”

“No, I'm not joking — I really did want to see you. You see I have a problem. My relief is due on board tomorrow and he may get here at a crack sparrow what not. Now I don't want him to run into Number One that early. Could spoil his young life you know. Well, I've got an idea. You get hold of Number One as soon as he's up, feed him a couple of gins to steady him up a bit and walk him round the foc'sle for a half an hour or so.”

“Yes, very slowly — should do you both the world of good! I'll catch my bloke as soon as he comes over the gangway and trot him down below, then I'll bring him up at stand easy and introduce them over coffee.”

“Yes coffee — I thought — well — just for a few days until he's taken over.”

“Well perhaps he doesn't like Horses Necks! After all — we don't want him to get the wrong impression, do we?”