

# JUST THERE AND BACK!

**What should have been a simple, short run across the North Sea to Norway and Sweden, turned into quite an eventful trip!  
– a short story by Ted Heath (V'55)**

In October of 1960 I signed on as EDH on the SS Volo, a small, Ellerman Wilson Line passenger cargo ship, sailing out of Hull. It was to be just a short trip of a few weeks to Norway and Sweden. I was on the 12-4 watch and as the galley was blessed with an old, coal burning stove, one of my early morning duties was to ensure it was still burning, and to re-kindle or re-stoke it as required.

I'd just finished in the galley when there was a resounding crash, and a sudden stop. We had been cruising under the command of the Pilot, just off Christainsund, about four hours away from Oslo.

We managed to extricate ourselves from the large rock we had hit, but were taking water, and it was obvious that we would need urgent repairs. Fortunately we were able to make Oslo under our own power, but by the time we arrived, we were down by the head, with the bows full of water.

Our cargo was unloaded, and the bows pumped dry, after which we spent about ten days in port, undergoing emergency repairs with the help of several tons of concrete in the bows.

Repairs made, we continued our trip, visiting another three ports in Norway before our last stop, Gothenburgh in Sweden, where a number of the crew were allowed a few short hours of shore leave before we sailed for home. It had already been an eventful trip, and I daresay that the passengers would have some interesting stories to tell of their experience once they belatedly reached home.

Just after 3.30pm we all heard the ships whistle, calling all hands to their emergency stations, bells were jangling and we were all wondering as we rushed to our stations, what could possibly have gone wrong this time?

In number three hatch we apparently had some barrels of an unknown substance. It was very heavy with only three barrels required to make a Ton in weight. The substance had a low flash point

that ignited on contact with water. Somehow, our cargo had ignited! The ship's fire crew was very shortly joined by the local Fire Brigade but were overwhelmed by the type of fire. Obviously water was of little use as an extinguisher, and there was little we could do to fight the fire except to watch as it slowly consumed the passenger's, Officer's, and Catering crew's quarters in the midship accommodation.

After an exciting night, followed by half of the next day, the fire eventually burned itself out. Apart from a few minor burns, nobody had been seriously hurt, although the unfortunate passengers, Officers and Catering crew had lost all of their



*Ted Heath  
in 1966*

News of the fire had been broadcast on television back home, but for some reason the shipping office had either been unable, or perhaps unwilling to pass on any information other than that there had been no fatalities. Of course back in those days it was a different world, and demands for more information from our loved ones at home, were ignored.

After approximately three weeks in our hotel in Gothenburgh, another Ellerman Wilson ship, the MV Rollo sailed into port, and on November 10 we all signed on as supernumeraries, arriving back home to Hull and paying off on November



**S.S. Volo - Wilson Line**

possessions. For once, living down aft for the Deck and Engine room crew had been fortuitous! The only blessing about the whole event was that at least it had happened while we had been in port. Heaven only knows what might have been the outcome had we been at sea!

With the ship deemed uninhabitable, and indeed soon to be declared a total loss, the ten passengers, as well as the entire crew were installed in a local hotel.

20, 1960. It was my 22nd birthday, and I reckoned that I fully deserved a drink!

**Footnote:** It was subsequently discovered recently (contrary to Ted's belief that the ship was written off as a total loss) that the SS Volo, the third company ship to have the same name, which was built in 1946, was sold to Malta and renamed Avolos. The SS Rollo also the third ship in the Wilson line to have that name, was built in 1954, sold in 1970 to Hong Kong and renamed Orient Empress.