

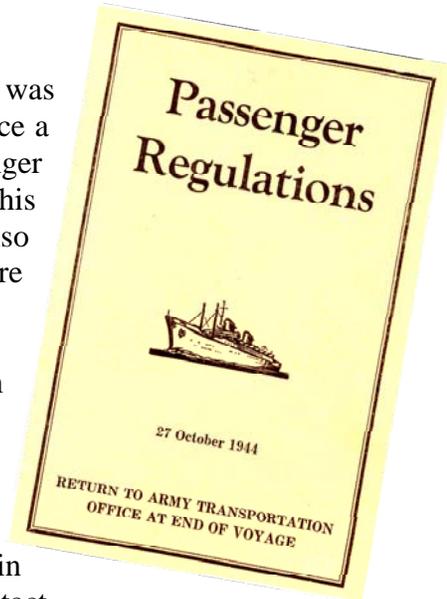
ICE CREAM BY THE GALLON

~ A Much Appreciated Benefit of the WEST POINT'S Gedunk Station ~

Gedunk (also *Geedunk*): Defined in an 'official' list of naval terminology, jargon and slang as dessert/junk food/candy, or a place to buy same. "Gedunk" may be a corruption of the German "ge tunk", which means to repetitively dip something. This supposedly goes back to when bread was usually pretty stale and its taste could be improved by dunking it in milk. It was carried over to the practice of putting ice cream into soda.

One of the few luxuries afforded the troops carried on the USS WEST POINT (AP-23) during World War II was the scheduled issuance of ice cream to each soldier twice a week. Like everything else military, the ship's passenger rules set forth very specific requirements for this procedure. The 'regs', contained in a small pamphlet, also covered numerous other matters, detailing far more 'don't's' than 'do's'.

At the beginning of each trip, as many as 8,000 men were herded onboard. Assigned in large groups to a myriad of berthing compartments, they spent most of their time while at sea packed in like proverbial sardines. They stood in long lines to get two meals a day. They had to eat standing up at chest-high tables in dining rooms that retained their pre-war décor largely intact.

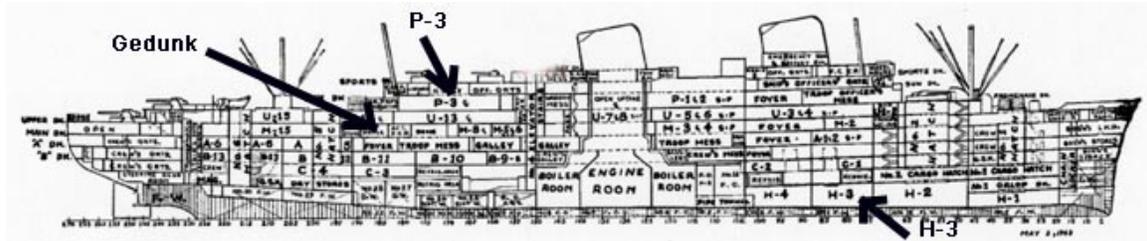


Fortunately, the ship's equipment could produce large amounts of ice cream, never mind that it was always Vanilla. However, since it was impossible for troops to individually visit the 'ice cream store'...the store came to them! Ice cream was provided in bulk to troop berthing compartments. Nothing less than a gallon, and for most compartments, the volume was considerably greater. For example, Troop Berthing Compartment P-3, which originally had been the ship's ballroom, had 545 pipe rack-type bunks, stacked four high. The daily ice cream allotment for the men in Compartment P-3 was 25 gallons.

There was a cost: \$1.00 per gallon, plus a \$2.00 deposit on ice cream cans and scoops, to ensure they would be returned for use the next day. Compartment Commanders were the only ones allowed to make these purchases, which had to be accomplished by 1100 hours each morning. The Compartment Commanders were also required to provide enough men to carry the containers. This table copied from the WEST POINT'S Passenger Regulations booklet provides some idea of the magnitude of this daily evolution.

SCHEDULE					
Mon. & Thurs.		Tues. & Fri.		Wed. & Sat.	
P-1	3 gals.	U-10	8 gals.	U-8	3 gals.
P-2	4 "	U-12	3 "	U-11	4 "
P-3	25 "	U-13	6 "	U-14	3 "
U-7	3 "	M-15	12 "	M-4	8 "
U-9	7 "	M-16	11 "	M-5	6 "
U-15	18 "	A-2	6 "	A-4	2 "
M-1	14 "	A-3	2 "	A-6	14 "
M-2	12 "	A-5	11 "	B-12	9 "
M-3	15 "	B-1	2 "	C-2	13 "
M-6	9 "	B-3	2 "	C-3	11 "
M-8	2 "	B-5	2 "	C-4	10 "
		B-7	2 "	C-5	9 "
		B-9	3 "	H-3	15 "
		B-10	10 "	H-4	5 "
		B-11	9 "	M-10	3 "
		B-13	12 "	A-1	5 "
		C-1	10 "		

What was required to move all that ice cream through crowded passageways, and up and down inclined ladders can be better appreciated by seeing the point or origin, and the location of a couple of the larger berthing compartments. None of these spaces onboard AP-23 were air-conditioned.



Compartment P-3 was relatively close to the Gedunk Station, but Compartment H-3, a cargo hold in peacetime, was located well forward and down several decks from the dispensing point. When the WEST POINT was in tropical waters, it's easy to imagine that the 15 gallons of ice cream issued to the men in Compartment H-3 may have become soft, or even soup-like, by the time it got to its destination. Transporting it in un-insulated containers surely did not help to maintain its frozen consistency.



Presumably, regardless of its composition, the ice cream was scooped into the troops' aluminum trays or cups and consumed utilizing the metal spoons that every soldier's mess kit included. Clean up probably took place in nearby washbasins, using salt water.



The Gedunk Station was also called the ship's soda fountain and was located in what originally had been a novelty shop adjacent to the Tourist Class Foyer on Main Deck, aft, when the ship sailed in peacetime as the SS AMERICA. Although troops were not permitted to make individual purchases there, the ship's crew could. Other items, such as cokes and candy bars were also sold there to members of the Ship's Company.

WEST POINT Crewmember Ben Varner, now deceased, was in charge of this operation. Reportedly, Ben was somewhat of a wheeler-dealer, and occasionally favored his friends with 'deals' of unknown magnitude. As might be expected, the Gedunk Station was a popular place with the Ship's Company and the spacious foyer was ready-made for a few minutes of well-deserved relaxation.



Postwar passengers who utilized this space undoubtedly had no idea of what a morale booster it had once been to the WEST POINT's military passengers and her navy crew.

Bill Lee
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