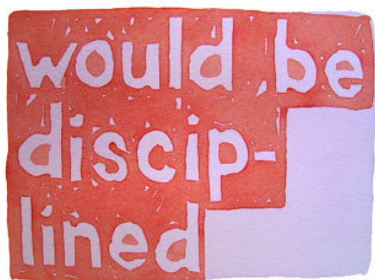


Story for performance #997
webcast from Sydney at 07:16PM, 13 Mar 08



Source: Thomas Ricks, 'Admiral resigns over Iran discord', *Washington Post*, Reuters, AFP in *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 13/03/08.

Tags: [evidence](#), [travel](#)

Writer/s: [Tony White](#)

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The officer was obviously not trained to appreciate logic. 'But something happened on the 28th March. Am I right? Could you check up on this matter?'

I told him respectfully that we should simply look in the log—everything was written down there. What trains were going where, which ones stopped. That was the point. That was what the log-books were for, to keep a record.

'May I?' I asked, as I opened the book. I flicked through a few pages and turned it towards him. 'Look, here,' I said. 'On the 24th of March, there were seven trains running: three in one direction, apparently four in the opposite direction. And again on the 25th and,' I flicked forward a few pages further, 'Look, here, the 2nd of April the same. All of this seems to be in order.'

'And there is no indication as to the capacity, the number of passengers? Or if an exceptional train, a non-stopping train, might have passed through this station on its way to...?'

'No. Unfortunately, no, I don't see any records here about the number of passengers. As you can see, there are records only about the number of trains that passed through. As to the number of passengers, of course this information would be taken down at the departure station. If you'd like I can telephone my superior and file a request for any information that might be held at another office.'

He made a slightly dismissive gesture with his hand, then looked at me with some kind of approximation of a we're both men of the world expression on his face. He must have thought I was an idiot if I was going to fall for that. I knew what was coming.

'Might there be a reason for someone not to enter a particular train in the log? Perhaps someone making a...I don't know, a gesture of independence?'

I started to shake my head, but he lifted a hand to stop me from speaking.

'Might there be an instance...?' He looked at me hard, searching my face for the briefest flash of complicity, 'where the member of staff on duty during a particular shift might ask another member of staff to cover for him in order that he could attend to some personal errand, or perhaps just go home for lunch?'

He looked at the book and pointed at an indistinct squiggle that seemed to confirm the possibility: 'These signatures are illegible. It could be anyone.' He pushed the book towards me. 'Which member of staff was this?'

I shook my head. 'In this instance I would have to consult the duty log. But I can assure you that in future...?' I knew it sounded feeble—not what I intended.

'Might there be,' he continued, 'an instance where, I don't know, perhaps in order to finish early one day—or every day, for example—that one might fill in the log book in advance just by looking at the timetable.'

I did not back down here. 'With respect, sir, Article 3.1 of the regulations clearly states that for every train passing this section of the line a log book entry must be made, and the entry timed and dated, by the authorised scrutineer. Such authority being delegated by myself. It is one of my many...'

'Yes I know,' he said, 'you explained that, but you see my point I think. All I'm doing is asking whether such an instance might explain why an exceptional train running an exceptional timetable—for example on the 28th of March—was not entered in the log book when you yourself tell me that it is your responsibility to ensure that every such movement is recorded in precisely this log book. And yet, I see no such entry here. I'm just trying to understand why that might be the case. You don't need me to explain the importance of such information.'

I shrugged. It was my turn for a little pantomime, but the smile was real. I was off the hook at least. 'Of course, of course,' I said, spreading my palms as if to embrace some kind of mutual accord. 'But unfortunately I can't remember precisely this particular time, I'm just telling you what can be inferred from the log. I can only reiterate that to the best of my knowledge all of these entries are correct. If there has been a breach of regulations then I can assure you that the member of staff concerned will be dealt with. A suspension, perhaps. Something to underline the severity of the situation. We...' that sounded good. 'We have a duty, you and I, to make an example where necessary.'

As I was talking I tried to remember who was on the roster that day, the 28th of March. Who was on at 6.15 when the train came through. I lined them up in my mind like an identity parade in some policier: the drunkard, the idiot, the card player, the skiver. I would not be sorry to see any one of them go. It was a relief: we could resolve this very quickly. It was clear that someone would be disciplined, but I would be damned if it was going to be me.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tony White.