

morning of January 6th, 1953, when the two ships allegedly manoeuvred close to each other in order to allow passengers of each a better view of the other ship. Both vessels survived the collision, and the RUYSS completed her voyage back to Rotterdam, where complete repairs of the damage sustained were undertaken.

Indonesia eventually gained its independence and in December of 1957, after the confiscation of Dutch property in Indonesia, WILLEM RUYSS was withdrawn from her usual run. Initially, she ran Rotterdam to New York, and then was chartered to the Europa-Canada Line for transatlantic service to Montreal, but passenger loads on this run were dismal, often averaging less than 100 per voyage. Not surprisingly, the ship soon was returned to the KRL.

She was drydocked by Wilton-Fijenoord at Rotterdam between September of 1958 and February of 1959, and was extensively rebuilt into a two-class ship of 23,114 grt that could carry a total of 1,167 passengers. She joined ORANJE and the 1930-built JOHAN VAN OLDENBARNEVELT on a new round-the-world service via Oceania. This service initially was quite successful but, despite good passenger loads, increasing labour, maintenance and fuel costs began to reduce profitability. The oldest of the trio, JOHAN VAN OLDENBARNEVELT, was sold late in 1962 to the Greek Line. Under the name LAKONIA, she burned and sank, with the regrettable loss of 128 lives, in the Atlantic off Madeira in December of 1963. Finally, in 1964, WILLEM RUYSS and ORANJE were withdrawn from service. Due to their excellent condition, however, they soon were purchased by Flotta Lauro, of Italy, which renamed them ACHILLE LAURO and ANGELINA LAURO, respectively.

The newly renamed ACHILLE LAURO was sent to Sicily, where she was to undergo an extensive reconstruction at the shipyard of CN Riuniti di Palermo. Work was well underway when, on August 29, 1965, she suffered a devastating fire which destroyed much of the refit work. Ironically, the ANGELINA LAURO, which was undergoing a similar reconstruction at a shipyard at Genoa, had suffered an equally severe fire only five days before the ACHILLE LAURO burned! Six lives were lost in the ANGELINA's fire, but none in the blaze aboard the ACHILLE LAURO.

In any event, the refurbishment of both vessels was continued, and ACHILLE LAURO finally emerged from the shipyard on March 31, 1966. She was very nearly a new ship, sporting a flared bow, streamlined superstructure and two tall, eye-catching, tapered funnels with smoke-deflecting tops. Internally, she had been transformed into a modern tourist liner which boasted public rooms done in a contemporary style; well-equipped cabins with private facilities and closed-circuit television; lido decks; pools, and full air-conditioning. Her capacity was now 1,731 passengers, and her Gross tonnage had been increased to 23,629. Her Net tonnage was 13,397 and her overall length was 642.9 feet.

Along with the similarly rebuilt ANGELINA LAURO, the ACHILLE LAURO was enrolled at Rome, the registered owner of both ships being Achille Lauro. The two ships entered the Lauro Lines' express migrant service from Genoa to Sydney, Australia, and Wellington, New Zealand, via Cape Town, South Africa. She often returned to Europe via Cape Horn or the Panama Canal. These scheduled line voyages often were interspersed with cruises operated from Australian and European ports.

It was on May 19, 1972, whilst undergoing a refit at Genoa prior to beginning one of these European cruises, that ACHILLE LAURO suffered a second major fire. This time, the damage was serious enough that she was out of service for some five months while repairs were made. Shortly after her return to service, the Australia route was abandoned as the contract to carry migrants had been awarded solely to Chandris Lines. As a consequence, Lauro Lines decided to devote their passenger services exclusively to cruising.