Ropeyarn Sunday "Sea Stories" and Open Trackbacks

Description

Sea stories? You want sea stories? Laterâ€¦and I plan to bore you with one about life at seaâ€¦.no kidding. More when I get â€œre-attachedâ€• at lunch time.

OK, itâ€™s later. Life at seaâ€¦itâ€™s not a wonderful life. Yes, the stars assail the eyes with displays â€œlandlubbersâ€• seldom are witness to. The sea life far out in the ocean will give you pause and let your mind settle on the moment for some time, considering the very different environment they occupy, where you are but an interlopper for a brief time, passing through, as it were, on your way to another part of the solid ground that emerges above the wave tops. Large and small, and sizes in between, were something of wonder to myself and my shipmates, mostly in a visual sense, but the sonar technicians also experienced the audible dimension of the creatures.

default watermark

While we sail in formation, in the company of the ships of our battle or amphibious groups, where you have come to recognize voices on the radio, particular speech patterns, and associated watch changing schedules, there are many times you are â€œin transit,â€• alone with the sea and those trapped aboard with you, sometimes for weeks, but maybe only days at a time.

You may be far from the sea lanes, where merchants ply the most cost efficient route from their departure to their destinations. There are times not even air travel crosses the sky above. It is a blessing and a curse. The radios, for the most part, remain silent. Even the usually cluttered VHF for international bridge-to-bridge communications speaks nothingness to the bridge watch team. You scan the horizon, straining for some glimpse, not a breaking wave some 7-8 miles away, but the hint of a tall mast, of some vessel â€œhull downâ€• on the other side of the line that separates sea from sky, but none comes. The Quartermaster of the Watch brings you the weather observation message, coded in short, well established groups, to be released at under your signature, in the stead of the Commanding Officer, so the world may know the sea surface temperature, wind direction and speed and cloud cover in your locale, a time honored tradition, suspended only when your track is classified. It is the work of centuries of sailors, mundane in each instance, yet monumental in itâ€™s reach, to pass along a greater understanding of the weather patterns of the planet.

The sweep of the radar beams only disclose â€œnoiseâ€• in our eyes. Rough seas and periodic anomalies in the density of pockets of air are not items of great interest, but worthy of note. Grist for the mindâ€™s mill, with possible indications of the future environment to be experienced. We still stare at the blackened background, and just behind the ghostly green or orange â€œsweepâ€• indication, as it completes each revolution, and seamlessly starts over, without hesitation, to uncomplainingly do it once more, and many more times, too. You can suddenly realize, much like a long drive on a empty interstate, that you have been awake and almost sleep simultaneously, for having focused so intently on ensuring you would first see the track of a target appear.

The striking of the Shipâ€™s Bell, to indicate the passage of the watch in unconsciously heard and recorded. The â€œShipâ€™s Routine,â€• from the pages of the Shipâ€™s Organization and Regulation Manual (SORM), is passed, as modified by the Plan of the Day (POD), as it has been for

days now. Those regular events, such as Muster for Instruction and Inspection, Officerâ€™s Call, Messing and Berthing Inspection, early chow, the regular meals and the setting of the watches, once more, have become a part of your natural circadian rhythm, and you havenâ€™t even realized it. Your body responds by going somewhere, or making certain log entries in a stage of awakening just below the surface. The words are even routine, to the newly assigned and those who have sailed the seas before you. They are placed there by those of the US Navy, and the British Navy before that, a part of custom and tradition and expectation, and, most importantly as a definition of normality, easily scanned by the eyes of the chain of command and others who may trouble themselves to peruse the records in the future, gathered from the Naval Archives, to help them tell a tale of events and lives at sea.

The sunset comes, lighting is altered, â€œdarken shipâ€• curtains are rigged in passageways leading to the weather decks. Despite the lack of any detected traffic, above, on or below the sea, only navigational lights will be displayed to any eyes, human or otherwise. Internal checks are performed by the damage control petty officers, to make sure spaces not in regular use for the night hours are secured, protected from flooding and fire. Others sweep assigned areas, and collect the trash, as the â€œ20 to 24â€• watch teams settle in.

default watermark

The darkness adds another dimension to the day. The body tends to relax and despite the mandate for full alertness, the tiredness becomes observable. It may come as inattention to the task at hand, preferring to â€œshoot the bullâ€• with shipmates on things of other topics, or in people showing physical signs of the inability to stay alert. It is not the domain of the enlisted or officer, but that of all aboard.

Despite the low level of local activity, the ship is never out of reach of routine reports required from â€œshore dutyâ€• sailors and civil servants, nor the umbilical of communications via radio, with the requests and â€œADTAKES,â€• that can flow like a small stream, or a breaking dam. In addition, the exercise of regular maintenance and training continues, providing a full daylight working experience, that still leaves other tasks undone. All who have them steal time from sleep in order to catch up, then hope to bag some shut eye before they must rise, dress, brush their teeth, maybe eat, before saying â€œI relieve youâ€• to a shipmate at midnight or at 3:45AM.

On the bridge, your mind prods you to continue to seek out something â€œnon-routineâ€• just to keep the synapses functional so as to shun the tiredness. You try to comply, but the outside world does not comply. You find a gap between the commercial radar set bracket and a mounted radio speaker and handset along the front of the Bridge, where you might substitute their support for that of your own skeleton. The goal:Ã‚ Remain upright in a posture of alertness to the eyes of the other observers, yet accepting some respite from the hard decks under your feet.Ã‚ You lean in and are both refreshed and relaxed for a moment. Then the conscience goes to work, silently speaking words like â€œduty,â€• â€œresponsibility,â€• and related ones to you, all the while beckoning you to close your eyes and allow the rest you need to be fulfilled.

In the Combat Information Center, or Combat Direction Center, seated at your console in a large padded chair, complete with arm rests, the call is greater, the struggle to resist more intense. Here, most watch standing tasks do not allow you to be able to rise and move about, which at least, the bridge team has the luxury of doing.

The night goes on, the sunlight, possibly muted by cloud cover will come, soon, soon, you hope, before you are numbed completely.

And then it begins again, with the coming of the dawn.

Post your trackbacks in the meantime, or anytime.

Category

1. Open Trackbacks

Date Created
March 19, 2008
Author
admin

default watermark