

UNIT 9 ON THE WATCH

THE CREW AND ITS TASKS

The Marina is now well on the way towards the Port of Antwerp in Belgium, which is her first port of call on the route.

It is high time we took a closer look at the Marina's crew and their tasks on board. We shall let them tell us what they do on the watch to find out what life and work are like on a modern merchant vessel - what maritime careers really involve and require.

The crew on a ship is divided into three departments:

The Master

The Deck Department

The Engine Department

The Steward's Department

THE MASTER

Responsibility

We find the Master of the ship, Captain Andrew James on the bridge.

- Good morning Captain, we would like to ask you a few questions. How would you describe the Captain's or Master's role on a modern ship today?
- Well, first of all you might say that it involves an enormous responsibility. The Captain is in charge of everything and everyone on board. He has complete responsibility for running the ship while at sea and for the safety of the crew, passengers and cargo. Whenever there is an emergency or a serious problem of any kind I will be called upon. I do not stand a watch but in reality I am on duty 24 hours a day. I'll be on the bridge, conning the ship in foul weather or fog until the danger is over, for however long it takes, be it 24, 38 or 72 hours, and no matter how tired or exhausted I am. I am also the last to abandon ship in case of a disaster.

Supervision

The Master of a ship is not actually a crew member. But I have to supervise the work of any other officer or crew member on board. I direct or oversee crew members who steer the vessel, determine its position, communicate with other vessels, operate and



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overhaul engines, perform maintenance, handle lines or operate vessel equipment of any kind.

This means that, in theory, I have to be as familiar with the work done by stewards and cooks in the Catering department, engineers and pumpmen (on a tanker) in the Engine department as I am with the work of the Mates on the bridge and the Able Seamen, Ordinary Seamen and other deckhands in the Deck department. All this makes me into a kind of Personnel Manager - it is important to maintain a good morale, team spirit and atmosphere on board.

Coordination

The Master of a merchant vessel is the agent of the company that owns the ship. This means that he represents the company business in every operation both at sea and in port. A Captain has to be able to coordinate both of these aspects. All this involves quite a lot of paper work. When we are at sea, my bridge officers and myself maintain the Ship's Log and the records of the ship's movements. Then there are the Ship's Papers such as the Certificate of Registry, the Muster Roll or Crew List etc. and the documents dealing with loading and unloading of the ship; the Bill of Lading, the Cargo Manifest, the Stowage Plan, the Dangerous Goods Stowage Plan, the Loading and Discharging plan.

There are quite a number of documents concerning the ship's safety and security, certificates issued by Classification Societies and other Maritime Authorities. They are all granted by the ship's Flag State. This bureaucracy is increasing all the time. Finally there are the documents for clearance with port authorities and Port State Control. Today port security regulations have become very strict - the ISPS Code has increased our work as well.

THE CHIEF OFFICER / THE CHIEF MATE - DUTIES

Second in Command

The Chief Officer or the Chief Mate is the head of the Deck department. This means that I am responsible to the Master in all matters related to the Deck department. I am also the Captain's assistant in assigning duties to the deck crew and in managing personnel.

I am second in command under the Master and will take command in the event of the Master's death or inability to command the ship.



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On the watch

I stand a watch on the bridge like the other mates when the ship is at sea. Navigating the ship is the primary responsibility of all the Deck Officers. My watch is usually the 4-8 watch, and involves all the ordinary work on the bridge; seeing that the correct course is being steered, posting radar and visual lookouts and monitoring the navigational equipment and their readings.

Working together with the deck crew I plan and supervise the loading and unloading of the cargo and I am responsible for its safe delivery. I also have to make sure that Deck department equipment like all loading gear, cranes, ramps, doors, lifts and hoses are in good working order. I make sure that deck personnel maintain the mooring equipment, like the windlass, anchors, cables, wires and hawsers.

THE FIRST OFFICER

Fire-fighting drills and boat drills

My most important task is, naturally, navigation - to stand a watch and navigate the ship safely. I am the ship's damage control, safety officer and training officer. This means that I have to make sure that the station bill and the muster bill are properly prepared and posted and that the fire-fighting equipment and the life-saving equipment are accessible and operational.

I see to it that the crew is well trained in using it and I am in charge on deck during fire and boat drills. It is extremely important that the crew know their emergency (or muster) stations and duties.

In a real emergency I have to take charge of the whole scene.

THE SECOND OFFICER

The Second Officer or Second Mate is, traditionally, the ship's navigational officer. I have to ensure that bridge electronics, navigational and alarm systems, and ship's lights are in good working order. I regularly check bridge instruments and make sure that up-to-date charts and navigational publications are available on board. I also correct the charts and update the navigational publications if necessary.

I provide the Master with information on transit routes to ports of call including the Sailing Directions, Coast Pilot, Light List and Tide and Current Tables and any other



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source of information that might be required before entering or leaving port. Finally, I plot the voyage track and work out the course. In the event of GPS failure I take terrestrial or celestial fixes for positioning. I assist the Captain in taking the ship in and out of ports. In addition to all this I am also the ship's medical officer.

The Able Seaman

I must have a thorough knowledge of, and be able to use, all deck gear and equipment. I carry out maintenance of deck rigging and machinery such as the loading gear, cranes, ramps, doors, lifts and hoses and the mooring equipment, such as the windlass, anchors, cables, wires and hawsers.

In all these tasks I am assisted by the ordinary seamen or other deckhands, who also do much of the work. We clean, chip, scrape, wirebrush, prime, and/or paint the hull, bulkheads, decks, passageways, deck machinery, or spaces, as directed.

In port I handle lines and assist with the loading and discharging of cargo, and see to it that the cargo holds are cleaned and in operational condition.

I stand a watch when the ship is underway as quartermaster or helmsman and steer the ship under the direct orders of the deck officers. This means I have to understand steering commands, have certain knowledge of nautical terms, Rules of the Road, fog and distress signals, running lights, the compass etc.

I carry out important tasks in emergencies. During a fire, for example, I operate fire-fighting equipment. If the order to abandon ship is given I assist in the releasing and launching of lifeboats and life-rafts. In short my tasks are many-sided and interesting.

THE ENGINE DEPARTMENT

THE CHIEF ENGINEER

I am the head of the Engine Department and am responsible for personnel and the proper operation, maintenance, and safety of the vessel's propulsion system, power generation system and all auxiliary machinery and spaces.

I have to decide on effective repairs and I report defects that may affect the ship's performance to the Master. I also advise the Master on all matters relating to



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machinery usage, fuel requirements and an overall economical use of supplies and stores.

I order, receive, and maintain a proper inventory of spare parts and supplies and supervise bunkering. I see to it that fuel and water is monitored daily. I assign and supervise the work done by engine department personnel. I set engine room watches, specify duties, and make sure that watches are maintained.

A MARINE ENGINEER

Today various specialists make up the staff working in the Engine Department. But the Marine Engineer or Chief Electrician still has to be “a jack of all trades”. It is the Engineer or Electrician in charge that has to know all about the mechanical and electrical engineering on board. He has got to have the know-how to service the engines and keep them running in good condition; when the ship is at sea, any breakdown in the power system, machinery, piping, or steel structure will have to be repaired as best as can be done without any help from outside.

A total blackout or propulsion problems can be extremely dangerous for the vessel and its crew. If the ship starts drifting in a strong wind, it may lead to listing and in the worst case cause the ship to capsize. No wonder the Engine room has been called “the heart of the ship”.

For a more detailed description of the work in the Engine Department, different types of engines, engine function, engine parts etc., go to the Advance level.

THE CATERING DEPARTMENT

CHIEF STEWARD / COOK

I am responsible for the overall efficiency of the Catering Department. It is my job to see that the crew is well fed, get a healthy diet and do not have to go hungry for long. I buy and control the food supplies and provisions on board in consultation with the Master. The sea usually gives a man a healthy appetite and the crew on board the Marina are no exception. Planning a healthy diet for the crew, deciding on the menus and supervising meals, are some of my duties. As on so many newer ships my job as Chief Steward on the Marina is combined with the job of Chief Cook. This is no problem for me, as I was Chief Cook on a passenger ferry for a number of years.



As Chief Cook I direct the preparation of meals with their various dishes. I do a great deal of the cooking myself, as I enjoy it very much. Assistant Cook prepares the raw ingredients for cooking and he does most of the cooking of hot meals.

The main meal includes three courses - a starter, a main course and a dessert. The Baker does all the baking on board - an important task, as freshly baked bread makes all the difference.

The Officers take their meals in the Dining Saloon and are served at the table by a waiter. One of my tasks is to direct the serving of meals. I also see to it that the galley, the mess and the living spaces on board are kept clean and tidy. This task is carried out by the messmates.



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