



USS Constitution
Museum

Daily Routine at Sea on American Warships in the Age of Sail

Matthew Brenckle

A publication of the USS Constitution Museum, Boston

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Introduction

Samuel Johnson famously wrote, “Men go to sea, before they know the unhappiness of that way of life; and when they have come to know it, they cannot escape from it, because it is then too late to choose another profession....”¹ As if to punctuate the distress which these men felt, he added, “No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned.” Is this an apt or even a fair characterization of sailors and the world in which they lived and worked? Was a ship truly a “jail” from which no man could escape? Johnson was an unrepentant land-lubber and his biting remarks do not jibe well with experiences of American seafarers in the Age of Sail. To be sure, the sea offered up danger and death daily, but so did many other professions at that period. For many young Americans, the sea offered a chance for upward mobility, or at least a steady wage and respectable career. And the United State Navy had charms over and above those offered by the merchant service. Looking back over a lifetime spent in every sort of craft, seaman Ned Myers was able to say, without feigned enthusiasm:

were my life to be passed over again, without the hope of commanding a vessel, it should be passed in the navy. The food is better, the service is lighter, the treatment is better, if a man behave himself at all well, he is better cared for, has a port under his lee in case of accidents, and gets good, steady wages, with the certainty of being paid. If his ship is lost, his wages are safe; and if he gets hurt, he is pensioned. Then he is pretty certain of having a gentleman over him, and that is a great deal for any man. He has good quarters below; and if he serve in a ship as large as a frigate, he has a cover over his head, half the time, at least, in bad weather. This is the honest opinion of one who has served in all sorts of crafts, liners, Indiamen, coasters, smugglers, whalers, and transient ships. I have been in a ship of the line, two frigates, three sloops of war, and several smaller craft; and such is the result of all my experience in Uncle Sam's navy. No man can go to sea and always meet with fair weather, but he will get as little of foul in one of our vessels of war, as in any craft that floats, if a man only behaves himself. I think the American merchantmen give better wages than are to be found in other services; and I think the American men-of-war, as a rule,

¹ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LLD* (London: Charles Tilt, 1840), 301.

| give better treatment than the American merchantman. God bless the flag,
I say, and this, too, without the fear of being hanged!²

Real seamen knew a good thing when they saw it. For those who did their duty efficiently and competently, a naval vessel was a welcome relief from the under-provisioned and under-crewed merchant vessels that plied the North Atlantic. Penny-pinching owners and despotic masters made many merchant vessels unpleasant workplaces, even if the wages were generally higher than those the government offered. Even in wartime, there was less chance of capture in a “public” vessel, and some lucky crews accrued a large portion of prize money. Even with all its attendant dangers, going to sea was perhaps not as bad as some malcontent writers would have us believe.

On a day-to-day basis, life in the navy was not that bad. Food was plentiful and the work not onerous or too heavy. To understand why seafaring was considered a good profession, we must look more closely at the daily routine of seamen in the early American navy. How did they occupy their days? The excitement of battle occurred very rarely indeed; it was the constant rounds of ship maintenance, sail trimming, training, and anticipating that mark a sailor’s days. What was the experience of these men?

George Jones, USS *Constitution*’s chaplain in the 1820s, was a keen observer of sailors and their daily lives. He was certain that those who knew nothing of life at sea thought it “dull and monotonous.” But the sailor, intimately attached to the ship and the work on board her, “falls into a train of employments that keeps ennui at bay: among so many there is abundance of incident; we have fine promenades for all weathers, plenty of room and plenty of society.”³ Many of Jones’ fellow clergymen may have questioned his last assertion, but it was true that seamen on a man-of-war were usually too busy to be bored. Naval officers took to heart the old adage that “idle hands do the devil’s work.” Discipline and its maintenance were the orders of the day.

For seamen, life held few surprises. One knew the day of the week by the food served for dinner. They washed their clothes on specific days, weather permitting, and the ship’s day always started at the same time, regardless of wind or weather. One young sailor explained the origins of this unvaried routine like this:

² Ned Myers, *Ned Myers; or, A Life Before the Mast*, James Fenimore Cooper, ed., 1843, Reprint (Annapolis, MD, Naval Institute Press: 1989), 212-13.

³ George Jones, *Sketches of Naval Life: With Notices of Men, Manners, and Scenery on the Shore of the Mediterranean, in A Series of Letters from Brandywine and Constitution Frigates*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Hezekiah Howe, 1829), 18

Order is the first great principle on board a man-of-war. To this everything else must bend, and from it there is no appeal. Month after month, and year after year, the same stroke of the bell ushers in the same exercise or duty. There is time and place for everything, and so complete and thoroughly carried out is the one grand principle, that one is able to find, without difficulty, the smallest object, in the darkest night. This order is necessary, where so many men and such an almost innumerable variety of inanimate objects are crowded together.”⁴

⁴ Charles Nordhoff, *Man-of-War Life, A Boy's Experience in the United States Navy, During A Voyage Around the World in a Ship-of-the-Line* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 69.

Keeping Watch

There were no better symbols of this routine than the half hour glass and the ship's bell. Tolling every half hour, day and night, the bell marked the passage of time and signaled the beginning and end of each watch, much like the factory bell of a slightly later period. Each watch was four hours long, divided into 30-minute segments. Let us imagine it is 12:00 (noon or midnight). The bell has struck eight times, telling us that the watch is ended. At 12:30 one bell rings, at 1:00 two bells, at 1:30 three, and so on, until it is once again eight bells (4:00), and the whole cycle repeats.

The ship's company was itself divided into two parts, or watches: the larboard⁵ and starboard watch. Occasionally, a ship would operate on a three-watch schedule, giving the men more time off duty, but this was generally done only in the merchant service. The typical watch schedule looked like this:

1 st watch	8:00pm – 12:00 midnight
Middle watch	12:00 midnight – 4:00am
Morning watch	4:00am – 8:00am
Forenoon watch	8:00am – 12:00 noon
Afternoon watch	12:00 noon – 4:00pm
1 st dog watch	4:00pm – 6:00pm
2 nd dog watch	6:00pm – 8:00pm

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The ship's day usually began at 4:00am, or as soon as it was light enough to see, when the morning watch was roused from their hammocks. This wake-up call did not come gently, as one sailor remembered:

I was sleeping soundly in my swinging bed, when a most horrid din assailed my ears...."STARBOARD WATCH, AHOY!" was being roared, and

⁵ The term "larboard," used to denote the left side of a vessel, was superseded by the term "port" around 1844.

⁶The dog watch is described succinctly by William Falconer in *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (1780 edition): "The length of the sea-watch is not equal in the shipping of different nations. It is always kept four hours by our British seamen, if we except the *dog*-watch between four and eight in the evening, that contains two reliefs, each of which are only two hours on deck. The intent of this is to change the period of the night-watch every twenty-four hours; so that the party watching from eight till twelve in one night, shall watch from midnight till four in the morning on the succeeding one."

*re-roared to an indefinite extent from half a dozen hoarse throats, on different parts of the main deck, and followed up by emphatic adjurations to “turn out, there,” “rouse and bit,” “show a leg- or a purser’s stocking,” all which meant, I found, not as I had first supposed, that the ship was on fire, or sinking....but simply that our immediate presence on deck was judged highly desirable.*⁷

The watch had six minutes, or sometimes 10, to muster on deck. At the end of that time, the watch list was called, “when those who are not present shall be noted and their names sent to the Ship’s Steward, who shall take care that their Grogg [sic] shall be stopped for the day.”⁸ The men in the watch were in for a rude, albeit expected, awakening, for the first duty of the day was to wash the ship: “the Gun Carriages, Port Sills, quick work, Head & headrails, Chains, sides, &c, are to be washed and great care taken that the water ways are well dried.”⁹ The most laborious and perhaps onerous task facing the watch was holystoning the spar deck. After using a pump (a brass “fire engine”, often appropriately called the “wash deck” pump) to wet the decks with sea water, a few men sprinkled sand over the planks, and the watch set to removing all the previous day’s dirt and grime by scouring with a variety of stones and brushes. The decks were then sprayed down with clean water and left to dry in the sun, or flogged dry using old bits of rope or a “squilgee,” a squeegee like device made of leather. Since the ship’s decks were made of pitch pine, this constant abrasion left them a pale cream color, quite unlike the dark brown of *Constitution’s* decks today.

At 7:00am, the first lieutenant delivered the keys of the purser’s store room to the purser’s steward, “for the purpose of preparing and serving provisions.”¹⁰ It appears that the food was often frequently served out directly to the cook, rather than the individual mess cooks. These were the dry provisions; the salt beef or pork had been issued the night before and had been soaking in the steep tub all night. The cook and his mates made sure that the water was changed every four hours so that by late morning, the meat was ready for the coppers.

At seven bells (7:30am) the remainder of the crew turned out of their hammocks and had between 10 and 12 minutes to lash and stow them in the nettings atop the

⁷ Nordhoff, *Man-of-War Life*, 65-66.

⁸ Congress orders, 1800; *President* orders, ca. 1812.

⁹ Congress orders, 1800.

¹⁰ *Philadelphia* orders, 1803.

bulwarks.¹¹ According to one writer, “nothing is more indicative of ‘order,’ or adds more to the smart and favourable appearance of a vessel-of-war, than a neat and symmetrical stowage of hammocks.”¹² As a result, great care was taken to arrange the hammocks. The quartermasters took charge of the stowing operation, supervised by the midshipmen of the watch.¹³ Men on duty relied on the man berthed next to them to lash and stow their hammocks. Captains frequently allowed a man to carry each midshipman’s hammock on deck and to “make up his bed” when they were piped down.¹⁴ When the weather was poor, hammocks were piled on the berth deck or “in such dry places as the Commanding Officer may direct.”¹⁵

The watch on deck continued to tidy up the deck for the next half hour, making sure that no ropes were towing over the side and that the livestock were fed.¹⁶ After securing their hammocks, the watch below made sure that the “Gun Deck or mess places are well swept & cleared of lumber [i.e. junk] at 7 Bells, so that the men may enjoy their meals on a clear and clean mess place.”¹⁷ The cook, having decided that breakfast was ready, carried “a small quantity of the provisions...for the examination of the Commanding Officer or officer of the watch who is to make his report to the Captain if he shall at any time find the provisions ill cooked or inferior to what they ought to be in quality.”¹⁸ At precisely 8:00am (eight bells), the crew was piped (called) to breakfast, for which repast they were allotted a half-hour. As the bell struck one (8:30), the midshipman of the watch reported to the first lieutenant that the time “allotted for the people’s breakfast is expired,” and the watch on duty set to work.¹⁹ The mess cooks remained below, however, each taking a wet swab to “sweep out and swab his birth [sic], with the part opposite to it.”²⁰

At 9:00am (or 7:00 on some vessels) the master-at-arms summoned the boys to the quarterdeck, where they lined up, “each one having his trowsers rolled up above

¹¹ *Philadelphia orders*, 1803; *Washington orders*, 1816.

¹² Capt. W.N. Glascock, *The Naval Service or Officers’ Manual for Every Grade in His Majesty’s Ships* (London, Saunders and Otley: 1836), 40.

¹³ *Independence orders*, 1815.

¹⁴ Pipe down was the order to send the sailors below deck after they had completed their duties. It refers to the boatswain’s whistle. Each order had a particular cadence on the whistle.

¹⁵ *Constellation orders*, ca. 1813

¹⁶ *Philadelphia orders*, 1803.

¹⁷ *Constellation orders*, ca 1813.

¹⁸ *Keats orders*.

¹⁹ *Independence orders*, 1815.

²⁰ Edmund M. Blunt, *Seamanship Both in Theory and Practice, to which is Annexed, an Essay on Naval Tactics and Signals* (Edmund M. Blunt, New York: 1813), 208.

his knees, his sleeves tucked up to his armpits, his feet and head bare, the collar of his frock turned back as far as possible, and his hair combed back of his ears.”²¹ The master-at-arms walked down the line with his rattan in hand and inspected their “appearance, punishing those who have dirty Cloaths [sic], face feet or hands.”²² At 9:00am (or 10:00 in winter) the Marine lieutenant delivered a written report detailing the condition of the Marines to the captain.²³ About 9:15am, the Marine drummer beat a long roll to summon the crew to muster. The men assembled by division, where they were quickly inspected to make sure none were intoxicated and that they were wearing the proper clothing for the duties of the day. The daily muster was not as thorough as that conducted on Sundays, when every man was expected to be “cleaned, shaved, and dressed by 10 o’clock,” and the condition of each man minutely inspected.

The remainder of the morning was given over to maintenance or sailing the ship, as the conditions of the moment warranted. The boatswain, carpenter, gunner, sailmaker, and their gangs set to work, first inspecting the fabric of the vessel that fell within their domain. After making their reports to the first lieutenant, these “idlers”²⁴ set up “shop,” each repairing to a certain part of the gundeck or spar deck to attend to their projects. The rest of the watch on duty might have worked on the rigging, or scraped and painted the hull, or in fine weather, been given the opportunity to congregate on the forecastle until they were needed.

²¹ Nordhoff, *Man-of-War Life*, 71.

²² *Madison orders*, 1813-1814.

²³ *Constitution orders*, 1809.

²⁴ The tradesmen of the crew, the gunner, armourer, sailmaker, carpenter, and boatswain were called “idlers” because they did not stand a regular watch, thus remaining idle all night.

Daily Practice Drills: Sails and Weapons

Several days a week, the mornings were spent exercising, or practicing on, the “great guns” and small arms. Large vessels required large crews to sail them, but the real reason men-of-war carried large complements of sailors was so that the ship could be fought effectively. However, all the hands in the world were worthless unless they were trained in the art of fighting a sea battle. It took time to whip a crew into shape. According to one officer’s manual of the period, “Quartering a ship’s company requires the greatest attention; and when a ship is first put into commission, the people should be frequently exercised at their quarters, that they may be familiarized to the various occurrences which are likely to happen in action.”²⁵

A captain with an inexperienced or “green” crew were particularly anxious to exercise his men at quarters. Soon after the declaration of war on June 18, 1812, Captain Isaac Hull began to prepare *Constitution’s* crew for the clash of arms he hoped would follow. Writing to Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton in early July, Hull confided that, “By Sunday next, the Ship will be in tolerable order for sea but the Crew you will readily conceive, must yet be unacquainted with a Ship of War, as many of them have but lately joined us and never were in an armed ship before. We are doing all that we can to make them acquainted with the duty, and in a few days, we shall have nothing to fear from any single decked ship...”²⁶ A close study of *Constitution’s* log between June 23 and August 2, 1812, the day the ship sailed from Boston, reveals that the crew “exercised at general quarters” or at sail drill 17 times. Clearly, the men took their lessons to heart, for just a month later, Hull wrote that “if I can keep them [the crew] from action a few days I promise myself that we shall be able to see any Frigate. I have great confidence in the men, and they appear in good Spirit.”²⁷ Even after sailing from Boston, the drills continued; every day from August 2 until August 19, when the ship met HMS *Guerriere*, the men practiced at the guns.

When drilling, the men might be made to “run in the gun, load, prime, point and fire it with great rapidity.”²⁸ *Constitution* seaman Moses Smith sweated through all of these drills as sponger on gun number one, the forward-most gun on the gundeck.

²⁵ Edmund M. Blunt, *Seamanship*, 222.

²⁶ Isaac Hull to Secretary Hamilton, 2 July 1812, quoted in *The Naval War of 1812, Vol. I*, William S. Dudley, ed. (Naval Historical Center, Washington, DC: 1985), 160.

²⁷ Isaac Hull to Secretary Hamilton, 2 Aug. 1812, quoted in Dudley, 207-9.

²⁸ Jones, *Sketches of Naval Life*, 19.

Soon after the declaration of war, the ship sailed from the Washington Navy Yard to Annapolis. While lying off the town, “we busied ourselves in daily exercise, to acquire a skill in aim,” Smith remembered. “Among other methods, we anchored a hogshead a mile off in the water, and fired at it as a target. Small as it appeared at that distance, we soon made close work of it. After we had practiced some time, Hull gave a knowing look as he passed along:- ‘I’ll risk you now, my boys!’ said he. ‘If it were an enemy’s boat you had there, you’d cut it all to splinters.’”²⁹

When not building muscle memory on the guns, certain members of the crew were trained in the use of muskets, pistols, pikes, and cutlasses. Generally, a 44-gun frigate had 80 men trained in the use of small arms. The master-at-arms or the most junior lieutenant directed the training. Seamen seem to have had a natural aversion to training in a military fashion, and exhibited “a most invincible dislike” for anything that smacked of soldiering. Despite this, commanding officers “ought to crush this obnoxious evil, and persevere in rendering the officers and men, from frequent exercise, familiar with it,” for “honor and conquest is as likely to crown good discipline and order, as defeat and disgrace is sure to attend the want of it.”³⁰ The manual of arms and the various maneuvers practiced by the army and Marines were considered too complicated for sailors, or for the space available on a ship, so the navy used modified versions of platoon and company drills. The use of the pike was another important skill learned by the boarders; “a close column of pikes formed in order, with musquetry in their rear, present such a barrier to the enemy that they can seldom or ever cut through, or sustain the force and weight of this phalanx in a well-directed vigorous charge.” The expert use of the sword or cutlass also came highly recommended in a boarding action. “In action a good swordsman has not only a better chance of preserving his own life, but is more destructive to an enemy than from the tumult in boarding we might suppose, for with judicious parrys and scientific cuts and thrusts he mows down all the inexperienced that oppose him.”³¹

²⁹ Moses Smith, *Naval Scenes in the Last War* (Boston, Gleason’s Publishing Hall: 1846), 24.

³⁰ Edmund M. Blunt, *Seamanship*, 247.

³¹ Edmund M. Blunt, *Seamanship*, 252.

The Surgeon's Rounds

At 10:00am, in the midst of the hubbub on the gundeck or spar deck, the surgeon and his mates made their rounds in the sick bay, examining their patients, prescribing medicines, and issuing orders for any special dietary needs. A written statement containing the names and conditions of the sick men was submitted to the first lieutenant and the captain; one of the mates slipped a duplicate into the binnacle drawer. The watch officer consulted this list at the beginning of each watch and made note of who was sick, "as no man on any account will ever be excused from duty without he has reported himself to the surgeon, and has his name inserted in this list."³²

Sadly, on every voyage, there were men for whom the ministrations of the surgeon and his mates could do nothing. A death at sea was always a melancholy affair. As one seamen remembered:

At Seven bells (half-past eleven), the mournful call of "all hands to bury the dead" was heard, and the crew were gathered upon the upper deck, the marines paraded on the quarter-deck, with arms reversed, the ensign was lowered to half-mast, the officers mustered aft, with crape on their left arms, and all were hushed in silence, as beseemed a company about to commit a shipmate to the deep....

The burial of a foremast hand is conducted with [little] ceremony. The ship is not brought to, unless there is a very strong breeze, which makes it necessary, in order to steady her.

Poor Jack, sewed up in his hammock, is borne to the gangway by his mess-mates, and a portion only of the funeral service being read, the corpse is launched into the ocean- while many a long and lingering look is cast after it by those to whom daily intercourse has endeared the departed.³³

³² *Independence orders*, 1815.

³³ Nordhoff, *Man-of-War Life*, 157-158.

Liquor Rations

Luckily, the grieving men had a way to drown their sorrows. The navy considered the spirit ration an indispensable part of the sailor's fare, and considerable ceremony surrounded the issue of this highly esteemed article. Served as grog - that is, mixed with one or two parts water - the whiskey or rum ration was issued "twice a day to prevent the ill effects of the whole allowance being given at once."³⁴ At seven bells in the forenoon watch (11:30am), a master's mate and the steward prepared the noon-time ration. Tubs were set out on the gundeck, abreast the mainmast. Using a copper hand pump, the steward carefully measured out the amount of raw spirits needed for that day's issue. Chaplain George Jones describes what happened next:

Shortly after eight bells [12.00], as the drum rolls, all move aft, towards the grog tub. Around this point of time concentrate half the meditations of the day. I often place myself at the tub, to watch the rolling eyes, and the look of supreme gratification with which they swallow their half pint, for that is the measure to each; it is one gill of whisky diluted with an equal quantity of water. A rope is drawn athwartships, near the tub; each as his name is called, and crossed, takes his allowance which must be drunk on the spot. From this, they pass to dinner. The whole operation is superintended by the officer of the deck.

Petty officers could carry their allowance from the tub to enjoy in their messes, and warrant officers could take it neat to consume as they saw fit.³⁵ The effect of quickly consuming a quarter-pint of alcohol on an empty stomach may be imagined. Those who were more familiar with the side effects of the ration could only say that grog was "highly pernicious to [the sailor's] constitution, destructive of his morals, and productive of insubordination and wickedness. It is a notorious fact, that most of the crimes committed on ship-board, are perpetrated either while the offender is intoxicated, or grow in some way or other out of such disgraceful condition."³⁶ For the seaman, however, for whom it was said that, "liquor is the very cement that keeps [his] body and soul together,"³⁷ the grog ration was the highlight of the day.

³⁴ *Maryland orders*, 1799.

³⁵ *Independence orders*, 1815.

³⁶ William P. C. Barton, *A Treatise Containing a Plan for the Internal Organization and Government of Marine Hospitals in the United States, Together with a Scheme for amending and Systematizing the Medical Department of the Navy* (Philadelphia, Edward Parker: 1814), 223.

³⁷ Quoted in, John Laffin, *Jack Tar: Story of the British Sailor* (London, Littlehampton Book Service Ltd: 1969), 88.

Dinner

While the grog was being prepared on the gundeck, the cook, as he had done with the morning breakfast, carried a sample of the food to the commanding officer or the officer of the watch, “who is required to make his report to the Captain if he shall at any time find the Provisions ill cooked or inferior to what they ought to be in quality.”³⁸ Having received the approval of the officers, the cook proceeded to empty the coppers with his “tormentors,” enormous forks with long handles. While the cook busied himself about the “camboose” (cook stove), the mess cooks began to assemble with their mess kids, wooden tubs that held the cooked food. As soon as the bell struck eight (12:00pm) the command to the boatswains rang out, “pipe to dinner!” The cook and his mates issued the food to the attending throng, and mess cooks carried the steaming victuals to the waiting messes. Those men whose duty it was to man the wheel, or stand lookout or sentry, were allowed to take their dinner early, at seven bells, and were therefore known as “seven-bell men.”³⁹ Under normal circumstances, the men were allowed one hour to dine, after which a midshipman of the watch reported to the first lieutenant and the men “turned up and again set to their respective duties.”⁴⁰ The mess cooks stayed behind to clean the mess dishes and tidy up the berths. They were to be careful to always throw any garbage or “dirt” from the lee side of the head. The cook and his mates cleaned out the coppers, carefully selected the cinders from the firebox, and threw the ashes overboard. When this was done, the master-at-arms inspected the galley and reported his satisfaction to the first lieutenant.

³⁸ *Keats orders*.

³⁹ Quoted in Nicholas Blake, *Steering to Glory* (London, Greenhill Books: 2006), 118.

⁴⁰ *Independence orders*, 1815.

The Marines and Afternoon Duties

At 1:00pm, a roll of the drum summoned the Marines to the spardeck, where their officers and non-commissioned officers exercised them.⁴¹ Some days they practiced marching and wheeling, on others firing at a mark or repelling boarders. As the Marines went through their evolutions, the sailing master reported to the captain with a bundle of papers under his arm. He delivered over the log for the commander's inspection. This was a legal document, in which the master was to record all "proper occurrences and all expences [sic] of stores," mindful that it was "liable to be called for" as an official record of events.⁴² The master also brought neatly ruled sheets containing an account of the expenditure of stores and water remaining.⁴³

The crew spent the rest of the afternoon engaged in various duties, some continuing to perform maintenance, others finishing up projects under the eye of the carpenter, sailmaker, boatswain, or other warrant officers. The watch below took naps between the guns, read, repaired clothing, or performed any other personal tasks that needed doing. At about 1:30 the purser's steward began to issue provisions for the next day's meals.

⁴¹ *Constitution* orders, 1809.

⁴² *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁴³ *Philadelphia* orders, 1803.

Supper

One hour before sunset, all hands were piped to supper, typically a meal comprised of leftovers from dinner, served cold.⁴⁴ Sometimes hot water for tea was allowed, depending on the weather. The timing of the evening meal obviously varied according to season and latitude, so there was often several hours of daylight left after dinner for the men to relax, as much as the duty of the ship would allow. The master's mates and their helpers rummaged in the hold, shifting casks and "shaking" others so that the water for the next 24 hours could be brought up.⁴⁵ The mess cooks, who had cleaned up from supper, now delivered the salt meat for the next day to the cook, who would begin the steeping process.⁴⁶ The gunner and his mates examined the guns to make sure they were secure for the night and that all their implements were ready for use.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁴⁵ *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁴⁶ *President* orders, 1812.

⁴⁷ *Independence* orders, 1815.

Evening Roll Call

At sunset, the Marine drummer and fifer once again beat to quarters and the crew assembled by division on the spar deck. The division officers called the roll, and inspected each man to ensure that he was not intoxicated or otherwise incapacitated. The Marine captain or lieutenant inspected their men's arms and accoutrements.⁴⁸ After evening quarters, the captain ordered the hammocks piped down, and the men were allowed between 10 and 12 minutes to retrieve their bedding from the rails and sling them in their proper location.⁴⁹ A man on duty could not sling his hammock, so the man berthed next to him (i.e., a man from the other watch) accomplished this for him.⁵⁰ After the first watch had been set at 8:00pm, the men not on duty were supposed to be in their hammocks. On some ships, the men on duty on deck were allowed to lie or sit between the guns, or otherwise make themselves comfortable so long as they were able to spring up at a moment's notice to attend to the ship. For those below, however, their proper bed was the only place they could sleep: "The Crew of this Ship are forbid sleeping on the Decks or in any other place than their Hammocks. Should any man be seen after this laying on any of the decks after sun set, the Officer of the Watch will cause the master at arms or ships Corporal to take him to his hammock, and the person so offending to be reported to me in the morning."⁵¹

⁴⁸ *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁴⁹ *Philadelphia* orders, 1803.

⁵⁰ *President* orders, 1812.

⁵¹ *Washington* orders, 1816.

Lights Out!

All the lights were extinguished at 9:00pm in the summer and 8:00pm in the winter.⁵² The master-at-arms and his corporals passed through the ship to ensure that everyone, officers included, adhered to this regulation. In some ships, the officers were allowed a lantern to read by in the wardroom until 10:00pm or longer, but it was “nevertheless expected that gentlemen will not Keep a light in their rooms after turning in.” Another commander put it even more forcefully: “It is ordered that officers do not leave lights in their rooms unattended and that they never on any consideration read by candle light when in bed as the practice is not only extremely dangerous but has ever been prohibited by the regulations of the Service.”⁵³ Amos Evans, surgeon aboard *Constitution*, recorded in his journal the near-tragic results of being careless with fire:

Were alarmed about 9 o'clock with the cry of fire in the cockpit – Produced by one of the Surgeon's Mates having left a candle burning in his state room with the door locked. We found considerable difficulty in opening the door, in attempting to force which I had my right hand jamm^d with a crowbar: in consequence of which I am under the necessity of writing with my left.... The cry of fire is dreadful on shore, but ten thousand times more distressing on board a powder ship at sea. It produced much confusion, but was instantly extinguished. The Surgeon's Mate, who is truly a worthy fellow, was arrested for his negligence.⁵⁴

With lights-out came the end of the day. The watches continued to rotate, and assuming there were no emergencies to contend with, the sailors could look forward to a much-needed rest. And so the days came and went, one week very much like the rest, the monotony broken occasionally by the lookout's cry of “sail ho!” or by the racing storm.

⁵² *Argus* orders, 1811.

⁵³ *Concord* orders, 1831-1833.

⁵⁴ Amos Evans, *Journal Kept on Board the Frigate Constitution, 1812* Reprint (Lincoln, MA: William D. Sawtell, 1967), 166.

Daily Variations by Day of Week

The daily routine detailed above varied according to weather and the ship's proximity to the enemy. It also varied according to the day of the week. The following outline shows how the routine could vary by the day of the week.

MONDAY

- Morning: Exercise at great guns and small arms⁵⁵
- Slops are issued on the first Monday of every month.⁵⁶

TUESDAY

- Morning: Exercise at great guns and small arms.⁵⁷ On the third Tuesday of the month the divisional officers hold a muster of clothes to make sure none of the crew is deficient in that department.⁵⁸

THURSDAY

- Morning: On the first Thursday of the month the divisional officers hold a muster of clothes to make sure none of the crew is deficient in that department. The ship's company is expected to be shaved and put on clean shirts and trousers.⁵⁹
- Afternoon: The ship's company ordered to mend their clothes.⁶⁰

FRIDAY

- Morning: Exercise at great guns and small arms⁶¹

SATURDAY

Morning: Clothes washed—water put on to boil at 4:00am, the hands turned up at 6:00 and wash until 7:30. White lines rove between fore and main shrouds when at

⁵⁵ *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁵⁶ Blunt, *Seamanship*, 216.

⁵⁷ *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁵⁸ *Constitution* orders, 1809.

⁵⁹ *Constitution* orders, 1809.

⁶⁰ *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁶¹ *Independence* orders, 1815.

sea to accommodate the wet laundry.⁶² The sailing master will take the carpenter and visit all the store rooms, and discover if any are suffering by leaks, damp, vermin, or any other cause.⁶³

SUNDAY

- Morning: The crew to be clean shaved and dressed for muster by 10:00.
- “Muster, when there is nothing extraordinary to prevent it, takes place every Sunday morning. The object of it is to inspect the crew, and see that they keep themselves in proper trim.”⁶⁴
- “No duty is to be done on Sunday but on extraordinary occasions, except as washing and wetting the ship, trimming the sails or, when they may be required [sic] by the general printed instructions [i.e. church services, reading the articles of war, etc.]”⁶⁵
- Every Sunday the messes appoint one of their members as cook for the following week.⁶⁶
- Articles of War read “on board all of our public vessels the first Sunday in every month...”⁶⁷

⁶² *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁶³ *Independence* orders, 1815.

⁶⁴ E. C. Wines, *Two Years and a Half in the Navy; or, Journal of a Cruise in the Mediterranean and Levant, on Board the US Frigate Constellation in the Years 1829, 1830, and 1831, Vol. 1* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1832), 91.

⁶⁵ *Constitution* orders, 1809.

⁶⁶ *Constitution* orders, 1809.

⁶⁷ Wines, *Two Years and a Half in the Navy*, 47.

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