

CUSTOMS OF THE NAVY

LIEUT A.D. TAYLOR, R.C.N.

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## P R E F A C E

There is a wealth of fascinating lore behind many of the routine practices of our naval profession of which many serving officers and men are not aware, or at least do not appreciate. In this small volume are recorded some of the more interesting of the nautical customs and traditions--their origin, development and present form.

It is hoped that this book will in some way help to check the present tendency noted in civilian circles and in the press to condemn our alleged unswerving allegiance to "the traditions of Nelson's day". A custom that has no apparent basis is quite meaningless and therefore might be reluctantly observed. If these pages should serve to enlighten, to make at least some of the naval customs and traditions meaningful, they will amply have served their purpose.

In the Queen's Regulations and Admiralty Instructions is an order that "...every officer...shall...in all respects conform himself to the established customs and practices of Her Majesty's Service at Sea". This is not strange and unreasonable if we realise that the customs and practices referred to are the naval equivalent of the unwritten Common Law of the nation; we are legally bound to conform with the law of the land, of which a large part is not recorded in statute form. The naval enrolment form includes an obligation "to comply with the usages and customs of the Royal Canadian Navy".

The study of naval customs and traditions, like the study of the larger body of history itself, is not an exact science, and much material that has been stated as fact is actually little more than opinion substantiated by some evidence. Although treated dogmatically by some writers, much of what they have recorded is open to question. If this volume should provoke discussion, whether on matters of opinion or on outright errors, its production will have been justified.

A.D.T.

H.M.C.S. Magnificent  
at Portsmouth, England.  
15 May, 1954.

## CHAPTER 1 - SHIPBOARD TERMS

It may be considered tactless to presume that 'old hands' do not know the origin of the names of parts of a ship, but despite the risk of offending a few well-known points are mentioned by way of introduction.

The word ship itself is from the Anglo-Saxon scip or the Gothic skip, both meaning boat. In the navy we draw a distinction between ship and boat, the latter being a smaller vessel, usually without decks, which is carried aboard a ship. Certain exceptions exist: submarines, out of a possible sense of friendly rivalry, are often called boats, and we refer to passenger ships as boats though probably not as a compliment.

From the ancient Greek and Roman eras until long after the Grand Armada of 1588 warships carried soldiers, accustomed to conducting sieges on land, as their offensive strength. The soldier ashore felt secure in his castle, although a castle is essentially defensive, and on going to sea to fight battles required that castles be provided in the ships of war. There were, in fact, two self-contained castles in each ship, one forward and one aft, known as the forecastle and the aftercastle. From these, the soldiers fired the slingshot, longbow, and crossbow. These castles almost disappeared with the advent of muzzle-loading cannon due to the obvious factor of top-weight. The name, forecastle, has remained through the years, though, often contracted in spelling and always abbreviated in pronouncing.

The memory of the aftercastle, later to become the quarterdeck, is recorded only in abbreviations of the parts of ship, FX and AX, "X" in this instance representing castle. The more common abbreviation now for quarterdeck is QD but AX is still marked on part-ship stores belonging to the quarterdeck division because it is easier to carve into deck scrubbers or paint on buckets.

In the course of time the aftercastle became the poop; the development of this word, like many things to follow in this text, is conjectural. The Romans and other ancient seafarers carried with them their gods or idols. These were worshipped in the open rather than between decks, and the forecastle, like the 'sharp end' of any ship at sea, was liable to dampen idols and worshippers alike. The best place would seem to be high up on the aftercastle. As the Latin word for idol is puppis, we derive a poop-deck or poop. We use the expression, "I'm pooped" meaning "I am completely exhausted"; that usage comes from the effect of a following sea breaking over the poop of the ship, in which case it was said that the ship was pooped. Apart from this expression the term survives only in the merchant service where it is used instead of quarterdeck.

A deck which runs unbroken from forward - aft is of course a whole deck; and one which goes approximately half the ship's length, like the forecastle deck of a destroyer, is a half deck. Consequently a quarterdeck was roughly a quarter of the ship's length; it was a small deck forward of, and just below, the poop, between poop and mainmast. When the aftercastle disappeared the quarterdeck came into its own.

The waist, a term still with us in ships where it has not been replaced by the expression boatdeck, was the lowest part of the upperdeck, between the forecastle and the aftercastle, and included the quarterdeck. The word top formerly referred to a mast; the topmen, the hands who worked aloft, were the most agile of the seamen and could be considered the cream

of the seaman complement.

The deck above the holds in the old ships, what would now be called the platform deck, was known as the orlop deck, a contraction of 'overlap', a word of Dutch origin meaning 'that which runs over the hold'. In HMS Victory, this deck is painted red; the wounded were taken there to be tended by the ship's surgeon. On this first deck below the waterline they were safer, and their blood was not so noticeable against the red paint of the deck. This term orlop is still in use in merchant ships.

During the 18th century there was little difference between warships and merchantmen. Ships were usually built for merchant service and were easily converted and armed when required. Most were armed in any case for defence against pirates. The practice of converting merchant ships into armed merchant cruisers was continued to the end of World War II.

Before the invention of the rudder, a ship was steered with a long oar or sweep fitted over the stern on the right or steer board side of the ship. The Norse were the first to use a single oar; Greek and Roman ships had two steering oars, often connected and controlled by a tiller. It is not known why the Vikings had chosen the starboard side; their choice, however, became universal. In the course of time the term steerboard changed to starboard; it has not connection at all with stars.

It was found awkward to put a ship alongside a jetty on the side this oar was shipped. By preference ships were put alongside starboard side outboard. A plank was put across from shore to ship and over it stores were embarked. This plank or board was called the ladeboard or loadboard, later larboard. There was doubtless much confusion over the use of the terms larboard and starboard but after 1580 there was a way out. The French with their high ships' sides devised a shortcut to handling cargo; they cut loading door or porte in the ship's side. To mariners this became the port side.

Another version of the origin of starboard and larboard is by derivation from the Italian (aque)sta borda - this side, and (aque)la borda - that side, equivalent to the expressions found in the Highway Code of the United Kingdom, near side and off side.

From early times, to avoid collisions, ships underway or at anchor by night carried at least a single lantern showing a white light. There seems to have been no fixed rule about the use of lights until 1824 when two white lights were required to be shown in ships navigating the canals of the Netherlands and Belgium. In 1845 colored lights were authorized for this purpose.

In that same year, HMS Comet carried out experiments at Spithead with red, green and white lights, and in 1847 Admiralty regulations called for all British steamships to be fitted in the approved manner. No such requirement existed for sailing vessels. After 1850 all steamships in the busy fairways of the open seas were required to show colored lights by night. The colors, red and green, had been selected as the least likely to be confused.

The French, in 1863, instituted a practice of making the lights visible on the beam as well as ahead. This led to international agreement on the use of sidelights, visible through definite arcs. About the same time, sailing vessels were first required to show red and green sidelights.

Trinity House, the British pilotage authority, had ruled in 1840 that two steamships steaming toward each other by night, to avoid collision were each to alter course to starboard, thereby keeping the other ship on the port hand. The red light, indicating danger, was assigned to the side to be steered away from.

A series of conferences of the principal maritime nations has produced the International Regulations for Preventing Collision at Sea, in which are embodied directions regarding lights, steering and sailing rules. In the most recent revision (1953) these are greatly clarified, and are made applicable to aircraft taxi-ing or alighting on water in ocean areas.

## CHAPTER 2 - RECRUITING AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

"It is seamen, not ships, that constitute a navy."  
- Rear-Admiral Sir Charles NAPIER  
(1786 - 1860)

Just over a hundred years ago came the first efforts to make possible careers as seamen in the ships of the Royal Navy. Before that time, men signed on for the duration of the commission of the ship in which they had elected to serve; only the captain, his lieutenants and warrant officers were retained in the service after the ship paid off. Conditions of service were hard, and the pay was poor but might be augmented in a fortunate commission by prize money.

Until 1825, pay was held back as a guarantee against desertion. It was the practice to pay off the men at the end of a commission, hence the expression, a ship paying off. Men were paid monthly after 1825; it was not until 1949 that fortnightly payment was instituted in the R.C.N. The practice of making payment in cash on men's hats started during the Commonwealth, at which time it was found wise to treat the men well to keep them loyal.

At the end of a commission each man was given a pay ticket which could be cashed at the Admiralty. But as the men had insufficient funds to go to London, moneylenders came to the home ports and paid as little as 60% of the value of the pay tickets. After 1728, men were paid aboard ship after returning to their home port to decommission.

The method of manning the King's ships, which Lord Nelson termed "an infernal system", was to engage men to serve only during a period of hostilities. When peaceful conditions prevailed those who had survived naval service, returned to their former occupations. Until well after the middle of the 17th century, losses in men were chiefly due to disease.

Rounding the Cape of Good Hope, in 1498, Vasco da Gama lost 100 of a crew of 160, most from scurvy, a disease caused by diet deficiency. Admiral Hawkins appears to be the first to have used lemon juice as a preventative. Captain Cook, on his world voyage of over three years in HMS Resolution, in 1776, lost only one man of 118. In a document to the Admiralty he attributed his good fortune to the use of lemons; this resulted in their adoption for general use in British ships. Lime juice, at present in use, has similar properties.

During the Seven Years' War (1756 - 1763), only 1,512 men died in action whereas 133,718 succumbed to disease, or for reasons other than death in action as the result of

wounds were listed "missing"; these numbers are from a total of 184,893 seamen and marines who served during that war. Considering the conditions and the meagre chances of survival it is not difficult to understand why it was necessary to resort to impressment to man the royal ships.

From Saxon times, press-gangs had functioned in order to provide seamen. Henry VIII, in 1545, fearing an invasion by the French, ordered that Devon fishermen were to be "taken as marryners to serve the King". It was an Admiralty rule that every male British subject was eligible to be pressed into service. But the principal raids by press-gangs were on experienced seafarers, particularly those serving aboard inward-bound merchant vessels. Due to impressment of crews, some of these were unable to reach port unassisted. The merchantmen were always preferred by sailors although service in them was hard too.

In Queen Anne's reign, during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701 - 1714), men entered her ships "like men dragged to execution". It has also been said that in the reign of James I (1603 - 1625) men went to serve "with as great a grudgery as if it were to be slaves in the galleys". There is an engraving in the Picture Post Library of a press-gang at work. This is evidently an early type of political cartoon in which the victim says, "For God's sake, gentlemen, don't drag me like a thief". And his wife, on her knees with clenched hands upraised, pleads, "for goodness sake, dear, your Honor, set him free; he maintains his father, mother, sister and wife". The officer-in-charge replies: "Let them starve and be damned. The King wants men. Haul him on board, you dogs". Presumably his five men have no difficulty as each wields a two-foot club.

Samuel Pepys, secretary to the Admiralty, from 1660 to 1669, notes in his diary, in the year 1666, that he had gone to see the Lord Mayor of London ".....about getting shipped some men that they have these two last nights pressed in the city out of houses; the persons wholly unfit for sea, and many of them people of very good fashion, which is a shame to think of; and carried to Bridewell they are, yet without being impressed with money legally as they out to be." We later read that the Lord Mayor did not, at this time, have the money to pay the men. Pepys somberly notes, "It is a great tyranny".

Elsewhere he writes: "Two men leapt overboard, among others, into the Thames out of the vessel into which they were pressed, and were shot by the soldiers placed there to keep them, two days since; so much people do avoid the King's service!" On the bow of the Victory is a grating called a marine's walk on which an armed sentry paced in harbor to fire at any man seen breaking out of the ship.

It is worthy of note that not all captains were cruel and sadistic men who governed their ships by liberal use of the lash and irons; some had little difficulty finding sufficient volunteers to sail with them. The navy of the United States had considerably less of a problem finding men, and their merchant service was more popular still; both recruited many men who had sailed in British ships and had either deserted or had joined the Americans after their ships paid off. During the Napoleonic Wars (1798 - 1815) many British seamen joined American merchant ships to evade naval service. Many of these were stopped and searched by British warships in the War of 1812. Still others had joined the Dutch naval or merchant services.

An order-in-council was signed by Queen Victoria on 1st

April, 1853, which provided for a ten-year engagement period, from the age of eighteen, with a pension after twenty years' service. At the same time, improvements in conditions of the service were brought about, and it was no longer found necessary to press men into service by the methods mentioned. The Crimean War (1854) was the first without any impressment of seamen.

### CHAPTER 3 - UNIFORMS

The universal color of the naval uniform is blue, presumably as a camouflage against the sea itself. For this purpose, the sails of Roman ships, about 55 B.C., were dyed blue so that men dressed in blue standing near the sails would be almost invisible to the enemy archers. Armour was rarely worn at sea, even by soldiers, if only for the reason that steel plate has an obvious disadvantage as a bathing suit.

A more modern version, which does not exclude the first, is that King George II (1683 - 1760) was so attracted by the dark blue riding costume with brass buttons, worn by the Duchess of Bedford, that he ordered the adoption of this color scheme for the officers' uniforms.

Slops, a term referring to naval clothing stores, is derived from the Old English, "sloppe"- a loose-fitting and shapeless garment. Very basic slops were provided in the Royal Navy in 1632, but then as now civilian tradesmen, slopsellers as they were called, were more readily patronized than the naval stores. At that time, to ensure that his men had sufficient clothing to protect them against all weather, a captain could order a man to purchase up to two months' pay in value.

In 1760, other navies having uniforms by this time, officers petitioned the Admiralty for a uniform for their sailors. The unofficial uniform was described as "a little low cocked hat, pea jacket, canvas petticoat trousers, not unlike a kilt, tight stockings and shoes with pinchbeck buckles". The men did not wear cocked hats after 1780, and when worn by officers, they were worn athwartships until 1795, and fore-and-aft from that year, at first for only captains and below. The cocked hat for men was replaced with a shiny black tarpaulin hat with the name of the ship on a broad black ribbon. Straw hats, introduced from the West Indies in 1802, were in use until 1922. The dress regulations of 1847 stated that men's caps were to be like the officers' but without a peak; this is the origin of the present-day cap.

Being unofficial there were numerous variations to the basic uniform described; mention has been made of colored comforters and knitted waistcoats. Captains of ships used to dress their ships' companies, or at least their boats' crews, in the particular rig they fancied.

By 1800, the fashion, still unofficial, was a blue jacket with white stripes or white thread down the seams, a striped or checked shirt, white trousers, either long and bell-bottomed for ease in rolling up or short to show the stockings. Striped jerseys are still worn in the French and Netherlands navies.

In 1814, uniforms had not yet been introduced for the lower deck. The unofficial dress was still the short blue jacket with the addition of two rows of large mother-of-

pearl buttons. This type of button appears to be the fore-runner of the two rows of brass buttons on the fore-and-aft rigged uniforms.

The sailor's uniform, as we know it, was not finally authorized until 1857. At that time, it was established that the collar, formerly in use as a protection from tallow or even tar on the pigtail or queue (the fashion from about 1785 to 1825) was to have three white tapes rather than the former two. This was probably not as a memento of Nelson's victories as is commonly supposed but only to ensure that the unauthorized collars would no longer be used. Pressed men were often lousy and were shorn as a routine; thus the wearing of a pigtail was a mark of service.

Square rig refers to the resemblance between the sailors' collars and the sails of their ships. The other common type of sailing rig is fore-and-aft; this expression is applied for purposes of contrast to officers' and chief and petty officers' uniforms. From this the reader will understand that round rig, and expression current in World War II, really has no place in naval terminology. A doubtful version or the origin of the expression fore-and-aft rig is that it used to take four and a half years to become a petty officer.

The silk did not originate as a sign of mourning for Nelson as has often been suggested since in one form or another it antedated the famous Admiral's birth. It might have been used as a mourning band for Nelson in the manner the crew of HMS Berwick, in 1794, mourned their captain's death, by cutting their silk scarves in half, putting one piece around the cap and the other around an arm. This seems a sufficient precedent for officers to use seamen's silks for mourning bands.

The rag was often worn about the neck, opened at the back like a kerchief, to protect the back of the neck from tar or tallow on the pigtail. It was also used as a sweat band by the guns' crews. Until the uniform was standardized in 1857 the silk was often a colorful article; one writer describes a pattern resembling a mixture of blood and raw eggs! It was, however, normally of black to show dirt the least.

The original use of a lanyard was to hang the seamen's knife in front of his body. It was of such a length that a man aloft could open the knife with one arm outstretched, the other holding onto the rigging. It was and still is worn under the collar for comfort, appearance, and to prevent strangulation should the lanyard be grasped or caught below the running turk's head.

The seaman's knife, for reasons of safety no longer worn except with working dress, is worth brief comment. There are at least four reasons for the shape of the blade; blunt-ended for poor stabbing qualities and so it would cause less damage if dropped from aloft, because it can be used to cut stops without damaging clothes or sails, or can be used as a screwdriver.

The uniform of 1857, in particular the blue serge jumper or blouse as it was then called, with a very few changes is still worn to-day. It is of interest to note the similarity between the British naval uniforms and those of other navies, a tribute to the strength and prestige of the Royal Navy in the 19th century. The new-type R.C.N. uniform of soft blue serge with zippers fitted is a recent change, adopted as a trial in 1949 and issued in the following year. The Royal Navy, after a trial of two-hundred similar zipper-fitted uni-



forms, has now adopted the RCN pattern.

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There was no standard uniform for officers until 1748. Prior to that year, officers, and captains of ships in particular, had worn what they pleased. It has been recorded that one captain wore a plain black tailcoat and a white top hat. This type of headgear may seem out of place at sea but was commonly worn until 1850 or later. It enjoys a special use to-day though not in our own service; it is the custom in some ports which are icebound in winter for the mayor to award a black top hat (and often a gold, or silver-headed, cane) to the first merchant captain to enter the port after the winter season. Another captain is said to have worn a coat of such thin material that his red braces showed through. Several RCN officers knowingly perpetuate this custom, if it is one, of wearing red braces.

Senior officers are still permitted, unofficially, to modify their dress; for example, Field-Marshal Montgomery with his white turtleneck sweaters, and several wartime five-star American officers. One sees very few modifications of naval uniforms except at sea where we all tend to think of comfort before appearance.

What is known as the executive curl, the ring above an officer's gold lace or braid, is said to date from the Crimean War when it was called 'Elliott's Eye' in commemoration of a Captain Elliott who carried his wounded arm in a sling under heroic circumstances. The Term also refers to an eye in a hemp rope, said to be a memento of the Honorable William Elliott, a member of the Board of Admiralty, 1800 - 1801. It is worthy of note that of almost all the seagoing nations of the world, the French and American are the only navies whose officers do not wear 'Elliott's Eye'.

The curl was originally worn only by executive officers, but in 1915, engineer officers adopted it, followed by officers of the other branches in 1918. Although in the British navies, the curl is now common to all officers, some other navies who copied the custom have restricted its use to their deck officers. While in some navies insignia placed above the braid indicates a special branch, Commonwealth navies used colored cloth between rows of gold lace. From 1879 to 1891, British naval officers wore three brass buttons between the lace, and several navies still do the same.

In 1795, epaulettes (from the French, epaule - shoulder) or shoulder knots, indicating rank, were worn on the officers' tailcoats. The custom was adopted from other navies because British officers abroad were often slighted by not being recognized as officers. After the Crimean War, tailcoats and epaulettes became obsolete except for full-dress uniforms, and even these were placed in abeyance for economy reasons during World War II; some effort has since been made, both in the R.N. and the R.C.N., to reintroduce the full-dress uniform.

Swords were a part of the officer's uniform but gradually slipped into disuse except for ceremonial occasions. Possession of a personal sword is in abeyance, but it is interesting to note that in January, 1954, the United States Navy declared the intention of requiring possession of swords, commencing with admirals and captains, and later including commanders and below.

Aiguillettes have always been a sign of an aide de camp. The insignia developed in the army; the general's A.D.C. carried rope and wooden pegs over his shoulder with which he hobbled the general's horse and his own on arrival in camp.

Since the early 19th century it has been the custom for officers to wear civilian clothes ashore. Before that time uniforms were always worn ashore; in fact until about 1815, naval members of Parliament sat in the British House of Commons in uniform. It is a slackness tolerated in some wardroom messes for officers to remain onboard in plainclothes; this privilege was formerly only permitted if the officer were going ashore immediately or had just returned aboard. In any case it is 'proper routine' to say "Pardon my rig, sir" to the senior uniformed officer present, no matter what his rank or branch.

It has already been mentioned why blue is the universal color for naval uniform; in passing let us comment on uniforms in general. The first British uniform was worn by Henry VIII's bodyguard -- a distinctive dress of gold and silver cloth. A uniform gives prestige to the wearer, and has been shown to add immeasurably to the morale of a military organization. The army now wears khaki, the intention being that it is an inconspicuous color; similar reasoning stands behind Germany's steel grey (later dark green), France's field grey, and the olive drab of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. The reason for khaki in the navy as a summer uniform is that it is cool and yet does not become soiled so easily as the white uniform which used to be worn in the tropics and in summertime. The same properties would, of course, exist with a slight blue summer uniform.

#### CHAPTER 4 - RANKS

The title, admiral, is derived from the Arabic, emir-el-bahr --lord of the sea! This was adopted by the Spanish during the Moorish conquests in the 8th century as almirante, then in French as amiral, and in English as admiral. The prefix, vice, with admiral means in place of, and therefore subordinate to, an admiral. At one time it was considered most important to protect the head and rear of a fleet of ships in fixed formation, usually with two squadrons known as the vanguard and the rear-guard. The admiral commanding the rear-guard was the admiral of the rear or 'rear-admiral'. The admiral of the van was next in seniority to the admiral-in-chief (later admiral of the fleet) and bore the rank of vice-admiral. Commodore, a much more recent term, is an officer who commands a (detached) squadron of ships. Several merchant shipping lines confer this rank on their senior captains, and in wartime, retired senior naval officers are appointed as commodores of convoys. Yacht squadrons go a stage farther with their ranks of vice-commodore and rear-commodore.

Captain has its root in the Latin, caput, meaning head. As the head was thought to be the controlling part of the body we can see how the idea of a head man developed; this was shown in the Latin word, capitus, for chief or head man. In Spanish it became capitan; in French, Capitaine; in German, Kapitan; and in English, Captain. From the 14th century the term captain referred to the officer commanding the soldiers, whereas the ship was under the command of the master. In the last half of the 17th century, the duties were combined when the soldiers were no longer a separate entity onboard (except as marines); the captain's word was law.

Many nautical words come from Arabic; in particular are

the names of the navigational stars.

In R.N. regulations (QR&AI) provision is made for a "First Captain" or senior captain, i.e. - a commodore first class.

The captain's title became master commanding, and somewhat later master-and-commanding officer, abbreviated in 1794 to the present rank of commander. From this derivation may be seen the reason for the courtesy title, now rarely heard, of captain for a commander.

Although a commander is actually second-in-command (executive officer) of a large ship, in smaller ships he is a commanding officer. The French and some other navies indicate rank by captain of...., a particular type of ship being named; for example, a capitaine de vaisseau in the French navy is equivalent to our captain, and capitan de corbeta in the Spanish and some Latin-American navies ranks with our lieutenant-commander.

Lieutenant is French in origin - (en) lieu tenant - and means holding a place or position for someone else; e.g. - lieutenant-governor, acting for a governor. The American pronunciation, 'loo-tenant' is closest to the French though our obsolescent naval pronunciation 'letenant' is close, whereas the army's 'LEF-tenant' seems a corruption of the worst sort. Lieutenants with over eight years in that rank were considered as a separate rank after 1877, the year the 'half-stripe' was introduced. Before World War I, a lieutenant who held a command was called lieutenant and commander; in 1912, this was officially abbreviated to lieutenant-commander. In most branches promotion to this rank is automatic after eight years as a lieutenant, though regulations now provide for future promotions to that rank to be by selection.

First Lieutenant is an appointment rather than a rank; the officer so appointed will be the senior executive lieutenant in the ship. Similarly, in a large ship, the senior executive lieutenant-commander is usually known as the First Lieutenant-Commander. Some traditionalist insist that no matter what the officer's rank, his appointment should be First Lieutenant; so far as origin of the term is concerned this view must be considered correct.

The rank of sub-lieutenant was instituted by Lord St. Vincent in 1802.

A midshipman was, originally, as the name suggests, one who lived amidships, that is mid-way between the officers who lived aft and the men who lived forward. While training as an officer he worked with the men somewhat like our own cadets. In the U.S. Navy, this original status is more closely maintained, the U.S.N. midshipman, ranking with the RCN cadet. The midshipman used to serve seven years on the lower deck and was roughly equivalent to our present-day petty officer in rank and position.

Midshipmen's patches were in use prior to 1799. It has been suggested that the patch is all that remains of what used to be a white coat collar which went out of use because the 'Young Gentlemen' used to dirty it too quickly. No support can be found for this doubtful theory. The significance of white, however, is of great antiquity; to it our word candidate is related. Candidus, Latin adjective for white, referred to the pure color of the togas worn by those aspiring to high office in the Roman government. The same purity motif

is seen with a bride's wedding dress. The midshipman's white patch and the officer candidate's white cap ribbon probably stem from this Roman origin.

It has already been mentioned that topmen, who worked aloft in the rigging, were the cream of the seaman complement. Carrying this aspect still farther, we can see that the term upper yardmen for officer candidates from the lower deck implies the very best men.

The title of purser is related to burser - a treasurer; it dates from the 14th century, and existed as a naval rank until 1852. Possibly much of the facetious vilification practised in wardrooms against supply officers refers to the purser's predecessors who received no pay but were expected to make a profit by their sharp practises. In the 18th century, a purser paid two sureties, totalling as much as £1200, to the Admiralty, and in addition had to buy a warrant costing about £65. That there was a great demand for the post despite these outlays proves the expectation of making more than a reasonable profit. It has been recorded that most pursers charged slop-sellers a shilling in every pound, i.e. - 5%, but that they made a good deal more on sales to the men. False pay tickets, which they cashed with moneylenders, were almost an expected thing, and brought about by necessity the custom of muster by open list, quarterly and at inspections, when each man stepped before the captain and told his name, ran, and his duties on board.

The rank of gunner dates from the early 16th century. He was a warrant officer, in charge of the ship's armament and the gunroom, not only of the muskets kept there but also of the junior and subordinate officers who used it as a mess. In HMS Victory, at the time of Trafalgar, these were the junior or 6th lieutenant and the purser as well as sub-lieutenants and midshipmen. The old ranks of chief gunner and chief boatswain were the fore-runners of the rank of warrant officer, an officer who held a royal warrant rather than a commission. This rank was abolished in the Commonwealth navies in 1948 to be replaced by the commissioned branch officer.

In the year 1688, the Board of Admiralty revised the system of rank and seniority, giving all officers seniority of that year, and at the same time published the first Navy list, a list of all serving officers with their ranks and seniority. The Canadian Navy list (restricted) is published quarterly by Naval Headquarters. RCN Regular Force and Reserve officers are also listed with Dominion navies in the R.N. Navy List.

In the lean years of the Soviet Fleet, from 1917 to 1940, officers were chosen by election, until Marshal Stalin reintroduced ranks. It is interesting to note that 'tradition' was provided for the Red Fleet by the simple expedient of re-writing naval history, even to the extent of glorifying several of the Czarist heroes, besides claiming numerous naval inventions as being of Soviet origin.

The rank, or rating as it used to be known, of petty officer (literally: inferior officer) was established in the 18th century, and that of chief petty officer just over 100 years ago. It is of interest that there were petty officers first and second class in the Royal Navy from about 1830 until 1907. The RCN has done nothing new in reintroducing those grades, we have done so to parallel the other two Canadian forces, thereby implementing a tri-service policy to equalize pay rates and promotion tables.

Ranking as petty officers were the master-at-arms (originally the small-arms instructor), the sailmaker, the armourer and the armourer's mate, and the ship's cook. The master-at-arms, or in a large ship, the lieutenant-at-arms (often the junior lieutenant) together with the ship's corporals, had so little to do as small-arms instructors that it became the practice to assign to them what we would now call regulating duties. After a time the original duties disappeared or were taken back by the gunner and his staff. The ship's corporal eventually became the regulating petty officer though part of his duties are now carried out by the corporal of the gangway.

In 1853 was established the rank of leading seaman, described at the time as a "higher class of able seaman". Since in the RCN the ranks have been put back to where they were over a hundred years ago this description again applies.

## CHAPTER 5 - SALUTES AND CEREMONIAL

All forms of military salutes are signs of mutual trust and respect between members of armed forces. Unfortunately, as with many of the customs of our service, we tend to find saluting little more than a required, yet meaningless, ritual; we find it so because we forget its origin and background.

In the days of knights in shining armour, it was not only difficult to distinguish friend from foe but it was almost impossible to determine if one's adversary were in a friendly or a fighting mood. It became the custom for a knight wishing to make a gesture of friendliness to remove his helmet while still at a distance, and if the other did the same the two would approach, each at the mercy of the other. Removing the helmet was no easy task and a common and recognised shortcut was to raise only the vizor, thereby leaving at least a part of one's head vulnerable. Even this became a tiresome routine and it became sufficient to raise one's right hand (the left held the shield) showing the flat of the palm, indicating no weapon was concealed therein. This same type of salute has been in use for centuries as a signal of peace among native tribes in many parts of the world. Rules of conduct, particularly for knights, the gentlemen of the court, were strict and it is doubtful if there were many cases of unfair advantage being taken.

An integral part of saluting while passing is the 'eyes right' or 'eyes left'. In feudal times, serfs and slaves were not permitted to look at their master; they were required to stand aside with bare heads bowed, or even to crawl past in the mud and slime of the road-side ditch. The soldiers employed by the lord of the manor enjoyed the privilege of looking their master straight in the eye, and raised their hats or helmets as a mark of respect.

Until about 1800, the normal type of salute was the raising of the cap, originating with the removal of the steel helmet. Merely touching the cap became a recognized alternative. Admiralty regulations of 1882 defined the salute as removing the cap, or at least touching the brim between the index finger and thumb. This is a clear indication of the origin of the naval type of salute, though other more interesting reasons have been offered. One of these is that in the year 1890, Queen Victoria, renowned for her primness and femininity, while inspecting a body of her sailors, turned out in their best uniforms, was horrified at the sight of their tar-stained hands, and ordered that in future the naval salute was to be with the offending palms turned down.

Officers were permitted to salute with the left hand if

the right were engaged, but this privilege was withdrawn in 1923 to standardize the salute.

An old type of salute, removing the cap, is still used in the navy on some occasions: the reading of prayers at divisions, reading of the National Defence Act or the Articles of War (to show respect for the statutes of the nation), for a captain's, or senior officer's, inspection, and for defaulters. A fine custom, now obsolete, was for a signalman, before hoisting or lowering the colors, to lay his cap on the deck. 'Doffing one's bonnet' is generally recognized as a mark of shame, though not intended as such, rather than to show respect for the Commander or the law one has contravened; it has been said that some men remove their caps as infrequently as possible because the act reminds them too much of their appearance as defaulters!

The first movement in saluting with the sword, known as the recover, is said to have religious significance dating from the Crusades (1095-- 1271 A.D.). The sword in earlier forms was in the shape of a cross, and the position of the recover closely resembles the Crusader's act of kissing the cross of his sword before going into battle. It may also have some connection with the oriental custom of shielding the eyes from a superior. The position of the salute itself is a modification of the former practice of thrusting the point of the sword into the ground, from which position it would be more than difficult to strike suddenly at one's opponent. The same principle is true of either the butt salute with a rifle or the present arms.

Our custom of saluting the quarterdeck originates at least in part from the deference shown the pagan idols and shrines to the gods placed there. Also, for centuries, the quarterdeck has been regarded as the seat of authority, though it is saluted even by the captain. Surely the simplest reason is that in harbor and in fair weather at sea, the colors are flown from the quarterdeck. In the United States Navy, officers and men coming onboard face aft and salute their ensign whereas we appear to salute the ship. In harbor, some men salute as they step over the brow to go ashore. An officer does so only to return the courtesy salutes of the officer-of-the-watch and the gangway staff; it is incorrect for men to do likewise.

The principle mentioned of putting oneself at the mercy of a possible adversary as a gesture of intended friendship may also be seen in forms of salutes by armed vessels. When the ship that was to windward had the advantage of speed and position the act of letting-fly her sheets was clearly one of friendly intentions. We employ the same principle in sailing craft, in pulling boats by resting on the oars or tossing oars, and in powerboats by cutting the engine or shifting to neutral. After 1201 A.D., the customary salute by a merchant vessel to a man-of-war was to strike a topsail. Even before steam replaced sail, the practice of dipping the ensign in lieu of a topsail had been introduced. The Second Dutch War started because of repeated failure of Dutch ships to salute British war vessels as agreed in 1673. There are now no written regulations regarding such salutes, even by British and Commonwealth merchant vessels, but flagrant or repeated occurrences of failure to conform with the usual courtesy are to be reported to Naval Headquarters. The Admiralty order regarding salutes by foreign vessels was withdrawn in 1808.

A warship, before entering a foreign port, to signify her friendly intent, would fire all her guns singly, thus leaving the ship temporarily unarmed because of the time required to reload. Usually the charges were blank, but even if shotted, no damage would result since all guns were fired

on the beam outside the port. There is an order that no warship may fire a salute in the Thames River above Gravesend because in the 16th century a ship accidentally fired shotted rounds which caused minor damage to Greenwich Palace in which Queen Elizabeth I was living.

When two warships met each would steer toward the other, firing all guns singly on the beam. Later the practice developed of firing personal gun salutes, a certain number of guns depending on the rank or status of the personage saluted. In the British and American navies, a salute of twenty-one guns -- the royal or national salute -- is the maximum; there is no maximum established internationally. You will perhaps wonder why we always fire an odd number of guns in our salutes. Although nearly all ships of the line and even numbers of guns the reason probably is that odd numbers (thirteen now excepted) have been considered lucky for many centuries. The Roman poet, Virgil, writing about 70 B.C., makes mention of this superstition.

A special gun salute, the firing of a single gun known as the 'Rogue's Salute', is fired at colors on the day a court martial convenes. Formerly this was a signal to the fleet for all hands to muster on deck to witness yardarm execution. A yellow flag was flown in the ship to be watched until execution was carried out; when hauled down, hands could disperse.

Piping the side is a purely nautical honor which originated in the method of arrival onboard of visiting captains, frequently portly gentlemen, who were hoisted onboard while the boatswain passed orders to the men with his boatswain's call. Although the officer-of-the-watch now says, "Pipe" to the side party, the order used to be "Hoist him in". The call itself dates from the era of the Greek and Roman galleys when the stroke of the oars was called with a whistle. It was then and has been ever since both a "whistle of honor" and a "whistle of command". Mention is made that in 1248, during the Crusades, the call was used for passing orders. In 1645, it was carried only by masters, boatswains and coxwains; now it is the badge of office of the quartermasters and boatswain's mates who may wear a boatswain's call and silver chain instead of a lanyard.

The call itself used to be blown three times for a salute. For some reason, this was reduced to two, once as the boat draws alongside, and again as the officer mounts the ladder and steps inboard; the procedure is reversed at his departure. When coming onboard or leaving by brow the side is only piped once.

Members of royalty, their personal representatives, and senior officers of military services are accorded musical salutes, if entitled by regulations. In the original form this type of salute consisted of a number of ruffles on drums -- three for an admiral, two for a vice admiral, and one for a rear admiral. Recently, the traditional British musical salutes were replaced in the RCN by others of distinctive Canadian music.

Another form of salute which originates in the showing of friendly intent is that of manning ship. All hands appeared on deck or aloft and grasped the rigging -- now only the guardrails; this showed that guns were not manned and no small-arms were carried.

## CHAPTER 6 - LAWS OF THE SEA AND PUNISHMENTS

"...the law relating to the Government of the Navy, whereon, under the good Providence of God, the wealth, safety and strength of the Kingdom chiefly depend...."

---Preamble to the Naval Discipline Act of 1866.

All forms of society require rules governing conduct of the members, and this is especially true within the narrow confines of a ship at sea, which its very nature is separate and to some extent independent of other authority. Laws governing the relationship of man to man in service at sea had to be formulated or established by custom, and forms of retribution were necessary in order to enforce these laws. There is, therefore, a very close relationship between laws and punishments, and we must think of both in considering the broad term discipline.

The first written laws of the sea, from which the Naval Discipline Act (governing U.K. and Dominion forces) and the National Defence Act of Canada result, were recorded in the 13th century -- the Laws of Oleron, named for William de Forz of Oleron who commanded a part of the Spanish fleet taking part in the Crusades. Richard I, in sailing his fleet to the Holyland, learned of the Laws of Oleron from the Spanish, and caused them to be written. It has been suggested that these laws originated in the Republic of Rhodes, and had been adopted by Rome and other Mediterranean states.

A development from these laws in the 14th century was the Admiralty Black Book, in which was recorded all law relating to seafaring under the British flag. The Articles of War, a purely naval code of discipline, stem from this source. These were first written in 1661 in the reign of Charles II. The punishments listed were brutal but the principle was remained to present times: "For the good of all, and to prevent unrest and confusion".

The King's Rules and Admiralty Instructions (K.R. & A.I.) (now C.R. & A.I.), which made their first appearance in 1731, contain general regulations, including discipline, governing the naval service. In the R.C.N., similar regulations are embodied in the Queen's Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Navy; short title: QRCN.

### The Laws of Oleron

"Know all men that We, with the aid of upright counsels, have laid down these ordinances:

"Whoever shall commit murder aboard ship shall be tied to the corpse and thrown into the sea.

"If a murder be committed on land, the murderer shall be tied to the corpse and buried alive.

"If any man be convicted of drawing a knife for the purpose of stabbing another, or shall have stabbed another so that blood shall flow, he shall lose a hand.

"If a man strike another with his hand, she shall be ducked three times into the sea.

"If any man defame, villify, or swear at his fellow, he shall pay him as many ounces of silver as times he has reviled him.

"If a robber be convicted of theft, boiling pitch shall be poured over his head and a shower of feathers be shaken over to mark him, and he shall be cast ashore at the first land at which the Fleet shall touch."

That these laws were for the good of all is shown by the



fact that the opinion of the crew was required in particular circumstances:

"If a ship is in Haven and stays to await her time, and the time comes for departure, the Master is to take counsel with his companions and say to them - "Sirs, you have this weather." There will be some who will say, "The weather is not good" and some who say the weather is "fine and good". The Master is bound to agree with the greater part of his companions, and if he does otherwise, he is bound to replace the ship and the goods if they are lost, and this is the judgement in this case".

Under the laws of Oleron, the master and crew of a ship which was stranded through negligence of her pilot were authorized, without fear of retribution, to behead the pilot. This seems harsh, but one should realize that pilots were not above working in league with salvagers and wreckers ashore.

These laws further stated that 'all other faults committed at sea shall be punished according to the customs used at sea'.

The punishment listed in the Admiralty Black Book for sleeping on watch, a very serious offence because it endangered the ship, was at first humiliating and for repeated offences brutal. A bucket of sea-water was poured over the head of a first offender. A second time the offender's hands were tied over his head and a bucket of water was poured down each sleeve. For a third offence, the man was tied to the mast with heavy gun chambers secured to his arms, and the captain could order as much additional pain to be inflicted as he wished. The fourth offence was inevitably fatal; the offender was slung in a covered basket hung below the bowsprit. Within this prison he had a loaf of bread, a mug of ale and a sharp knife. An armed sentry ensured that he did not return aboard if he managed to escape from the basket. Two alternatives remained -- starve to death or cut himself adrift to drown in the sea.

The expression Captain's Cloak refers only symbolically to a voluminous garment. It implies that any act could be considered an offence to "the prejudice of good order and discipline". The last paragraph of the quotation from the Laws of Oleron and Section 118 of the National Defence Act are both in this category.

A punishment which was particularly harsh and usually fatal was keel-hauling, awarded for serious offences, and discontinued in the Royal Navy about 1720. It was still practised in the Dutch and French navies until 1750.

A stout line was rove through a block on the lower yard-arm on each side of the ship. One end was secured under the arms and around the chest of the offender whose wrists were secured behind his back. From the other yard, the line went under the ship, as a bottom line, and was secured around the man's ankles. On the word of the captain, the boatswain ordered the man hoisted off the deck and clear of the bulwarks; slack was taken down on the bottom line, as as it was hauled in the line around the man's chest was slacked away. In this way, he was hauled under the ship, and came up on the other side, feet first. With both lines taut, the man was slung in such a way that his stomach, chest and face were dragged across the barnacles on the keel, and in addition he was at least partially drowned.

An incidental feature of this cruel punishment is that the longer the ship was out of port after docking, the less was a man's chance of living through the ordeal of being keel-hauled. As if this treatment were not enough, it was the practice to fire a gun, usually unshotted, above the man as he was hauled up out of the sea, "in order to astonish

and confound him". Perhaps this is the true origin of the Rogue's Salute previously mentioned.

Execution by hanging at the yardarm was the normal punishment for mutiny in the fleet. The last execution was carried out in 1860 (during the second Chinese War) on a marine who attempted to murder his captain. Yardarm execution as carried out in the navy is well described by Nordoff and Hall in Mutiny on the Bounty. As a capital punishment it was by no means instantaneous as is said to be the case with our modern Canadian practice. The prisoner's hands and feet were tied, and with the noose about his neck, a dozen or so men, usually boats' bowmen (the worst scoundrels in the ship) manned the whip and hoisted him to the block of an upper yard, to die there by slow strangulation.

The most common type of punishment, inflicted for almost any crime at the discretion of the captain, was flogging with a cat-o-nine-tails. This was carried out "according to the customs of the service", namely at the gangway. At the time of Trafalgar, a man who was to be flogged was given twenty-four hours in which to hame his own cat. He was kept in leg-irons on the upper deck while awaiting his punishment. When the cat was made the boatswain cut out all but the best nine tails. If the task was not completed in time the punishment was increased.

With heads uncovered to show respect for the law, the ship's company heard read the Article of War the offender had contravened. The prisoner was then brought forward, asked if he had anything to say in mitigation of punishment, then removed his shirt and had his hands secured to the rigging or a grating above his head. At the order "Boatswain mate, do your duty" a sturdy seaman stepped forward with the cat -- a short rope or wooden handle, often red in color, to which was attached nine waxed cords of equal length, each with a small knot in the end. With this the man was lashed on the bare back with a full sweep of the arm. After each dozen lashes, a fresh boatswain's mate stepped forward to continue the punishment. Each blow of the cat tore back the skin and subsequent cuts bit right into the flesh so that after several dozen lashes had been inflicted the man's back resembled raw meat. After each stroke, the cords were drawn through the boatswain's mate's fingers to remove the clotting blood. Left-handed boatswain's mates were especially popular with sadistic captains because they would cross the cuts and so mangle the flesh even more.

After the man was cut down he was taken to the sick berth, there to have salt rubbed into his wounds. This was done not so much to increase the pain as for its antiseptic qualities.

(A sealed pattern of a cat-o-nine-tails may be seen in the Canadian Maritime Museum, Halifax, Nova Scotia)

At one time men were literally flogged to death with a hundred lashes or more. The figure three-hundred has been mentioned in history, and in the time of Czar Nicholas II, a common punishment in Russia was one-thousand lashes; Peter the Great had limited the number in the Russian army to two thousand. As late as the early 17th century a thousand lashes was a punishment for mutiny and other serious offences in the British forces; this was more prolonged than hanging but just as fatal.

From 1750 into the 19th century, twelve lashes were the maximum authorized for any one offence. The famous admirals Jervis (Lord St. Vincent) and Collingwood rarely exceeded this maximum except in the case of a double offence. It is recorded that they punished fewer men than captains who awarded more than the maximum. Nelson usually sentenced men

to less than a dozen lashes, occasionally as many as eighteen, and rarely twenty-four. In ships of the line, with companies of up to 550 men, the more merciful captains punished about sixteen men a year, while some others punished over fifty. Not taken into account in the records were unofficial punishments, which were quite prevalent, and which will be mentioned later in this chapter.

Until the end of the 18th century the punishment for theft, a hateful crime against one man or many in a ship at sea, was for the thief to run the gauntlet (or gantlope). The offender first received a dozen lashes in the normal manner with a thieves' cat, with knots throughout the length of the cords, and while still stripped to the waist passed through two lines of all the ship's company, to be flogged with short lengths of rope. Lest he move too fast to benefit fully from this ordeal, the master-at-arms marched backwards a pace ahead of him with the point of his outlass against the thief's chest. And to prevent him stopping, a ship's corporal followed him in similar manner. On completion of the course, the thief was given a further dozen lashes.

The usual punishment up to 1735 for attempting to escape or for striking an officer was flogging around the fleet. The offender was secured to an upright timber in a ship's boat, and when it pulled alongside each gangway, a boatswain's mate entered the boat and inflicted a certain number of lashes. For added effect, the boat was accompanied on its rounds of the fleet by other boats, each with a drummer in the bows beating a roll on his drum.

Flogging was abolished in the British forces by the Army Act of 1821, in response to strong public opinion. It was said that flogging "made a bad man worse, and broke a good man's heart".

In the mutinies of 1797-8, Lord St. Vincent (Admiral John Jervis) hanged twelve men. Other fleets and squadrons, after twenty mutinous uprisings had fifty-five executions and many floggings about the fleet; St. Vincent, we are told, intensely disliked the latter punishment.

Until suppressed in 1811, it was a common practice for boatswain's mates to carry and use on their men colts or starters, small whips somewhat like knouts or knotted ropes, which they carried concealed in their hats. The boatswain's mark of authority was the bamboo cane or rattan he always carried, and with which he summarily executed punishment. A punishment awarded by messdeck court martial for cooks who spoiled a meal was to be cobbed and firked, that is beaten with stockings full of sand or bung stays of a cask. This practice was unofficially disallowed after 1811.

Other forms of punishment, in an attempt to make a punishment fit each crime, were usually harsh and often ingenious. In the 19th century, it was ordered that "cruel and unusual punishments are to be avoided". Before that time, in addition to the various punishments mentioned in detail, the following were commonly practised; ducking from the yardarm -- a more dramatic variation of washing in cold brine; the bilboes -- stocks to which painful pressure was applied; and hanging by the arms in the rigging. Discontinued in the 17th century were gagging and scrapping of the tongue for swearing or blasphemy; or boring the tongue with a red-hot iron, presumably for repeated or aggravated offences. Cell punishment was instituted in 1847, and a few years later came the first numbered set of minor punishments. A form of corporal punishment, i.e., "birching or caning on the bare breech" (K.R. & A.I.), remained until recent years as a punishment for boys. Birching was suspended in the service in 1906, but caning is still

administered occasionally in the Royal Navy as a punishment for boys, cadets, and midshipmen.

The term court martial probably dates from the early 14th century, from Edward III's Court of Chivalry. Due to shortages of men, courts martial, in the 17th century, in ordering the punishment of execution, would not only specify that only one or more of group were to die and leave the victims to cast lots or throw dice, but often used to determine which would die although all might be equally guilty.

#### CHAPTER 7 - MORE CUSTOMS

One of the oldest customs still practised is that relating to the launching of a new ship. The oldest reference to this custom is of an Assyrian tablet, believed to have been carved about 2100 B.C., on which the inscription tells of the building of Noah's Ark, and of the launching that a yoke of oxen was sacrificed. In similar manner the Fiji Islanders and the Samoans made human sacrifice to the sharks, which to them were gods, and washed down their new canoes in the victims' blood. Viking legends tell of young men being crushed in sacrifice under the keels of ships being launched.

A later development, probably about the 14th century, was the custom of toasting the new vessel from silver wine goblets. The goblets were thrown into the sea to prevent further toasts, possibly of bad omen, being drunk. For reasons of economy, a wine bottle was substituted in 1690. It was usual for a prince or other male member of royalty to smash the bottle against the bow, but after 1811, the honor was given to prominent ladies. A free swing was traditional until a spectator was injured and sued the Admiralty, and from that time a lanyard has been secured to the bottle. This is not always the case, at least on this continent; Mrs. Eisenhower, launching the world's first atomic-powered submarine, USS NAUTILUS at Groton, Conn., in January, 1954, used a champagne bottle without a lanyard. Some Canadian shipyards use a form of mechanical cradle containing a champagne bottle.

The custom is partly religious and partly pagan in origin, and it is by no means correct to assume that champagne is the only liquid used; it is currently in fashion, but in the past all alcoholic beverages have been employed, and even pure water has made the occasional appearance, especially in Moslem countries. It is still very much in the nature of a sacrifice to smash a bottle of good liquor or wine.

By act of Parliament in 1760, the cost of pay and victuals of one able seaman per hundred borne was set aside for the relief of poor officers' widows. These imaginary men were known as widows' men. This odd form of charity was abolished in 1823.

The most well-known version of the "call the hands" jingle is this one:

"Out or down there! Out or down there!  
All hands rouse out, rouse out, rouse out,  
Lash and carry, lash and carry,  
Show a leg or else a purser's stocking.  
Rouse and shine, rouse and shine.  
Lash up and stow, lash up and stow,  
It's to-morrow morning and the sun's a-scorching your  
(bleeding) eyes out"

To this, a brief weather report was often added so that the men would know how warmly to dress. The question may well be raised why we now pipe the dress of the day with breakfast rather than when the hands are called. Wakey, wakey, is probably