



## U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, Division 20

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### Articles By Vincent Pica

#### United States Coast Guard Auxiliary



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#### Mal DE Mer!

#### Oh My Aching Stomach!

As an avid student of the sea, I am always amazed when I read that even some of the round the world sailors get 'mal de mer' sea sickness. While they get over it in a few days, which everyone will if they are just out there long enough, I wonder how they can put to sea knowing with certainty that they will be sick as dogs for 2 or 3 days.

#### What Is/What Causes Seasickness?

Seasickness starts in your inner ear. It is caused by the rocking of the boat at sea and, from my own observations, I believe that each boat has a certain rocking motion that is unique to itself and that each sailor has a unique tendency versus that. I have seen sailors on multiple configurations of boats, multiple sizes and various sea-states who get seasick without any predictability versus these mixes. Of course there is the person who gets seasick at the dock as they get out of the car. While they are genuinely sick, they are not sick from the motion.

They are sick from '*e-motion*.' They are convinced that they will get sick; they fear that; they get sick as soon as they slam the car door shut. I know of one sailor who only gets seasick in the English Channel. Of course, the first time he was there was during the Normandy Invasion and he crossed it sitting with plenty of other soldiers also getting seasick all over each other. To a sailor who gets chronic seasickness, it is like being in a cold, wet, rolling jail cell plus the chance of drowning is never too far away, at least in their minds.

First, don't get seasick. This means keeping your eye on the horizon as best you can. Watching the boat itself rock around is like reading in a car. It is going to cause problems because your mind and inner ear can't process all those rapid little motions. If you start to get the least bit queasy, stand up or lie down but get out of that chair. Having your innards pressing on your stomach, which is reacting to the signals from your inner ear, is a recipe for projectile emissions.

Second, if someone around you starts to turn green, get away 'at speed.' If it is your wife, throw her a bucket and your best wishes\* you will rapidly follow the leader if you don't. Resist the temptation to have them or you avail yourself of the 'puke deck', i.e., evacuating over-board. Your internal balance system is shot. One bad jibe by the boat and you will be following your lunch into the drink. But be aware of this. If you have gotten seasick, and you haven't started preventative measures the night before you set sail, pray that you can fall asleep. There is nothing you can do if you haven't started preventative measures well prior other than letting nature take its course. See above about those \*round the world sailors.

### **How Do I Prevent It?**

There are plenty of over-the-counter remedies (and I use remedies with a small 'R' because, for some people, they are just palliatives, not fixes) that come in pill or patch form – Dramamine, Marezine, Bonine, Scapolamine (ear patches), etc. If you are going to try one, you might want to start with Marezine, since it is the least likely to cause drowsiness. Scapolamine is probably the most effective and its effects also last the longest, about 72 hours. It can have some strange side effects, however, and requires a doctor's prescription. Phenergan, a suppository, can also be purchased over the counter.

A natural aid is ginger. You can stock up at the Japanese restaurant or just buy the tablets (or the cookies.) Many people swear by it and I have seen it work with my kids. But start the night before! One of the more 'esoteric' types of remedy is the wrist bands. They are supposed to work on your acupuncture point that is about an inch and a half above your inner wrist. Hey, if it works for you, use it.

I am not a doctor. I am a sailor and a keen observer of the obvious. If it works for you, use it because seasickness is really a malady. One day a few years back, when transiting through the Montauk Rips with a good number of friends and family aboard, everyone (except me of course) got seasick, including my wife Jo and my youngest daughter Mariel. My wife got the bucket and said 'here, use this.' Marie got a bucket, a warm towel and me holding her hand. My wife said, 'Sure. It figures!' between gasps. I said 'of course it does. She's only 9! It was a cold night for me that night. Aargh!