




"Sabby the Lingo?" Maritime Language - III

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As noted prior, each discipline has a language and that language conveys competency to the listener. This column, like its predecessor, is about making sure we come off competently and correctly... and tracks how our everyday language is anchored in the sea...

From the Sea to the Land

Continuing the examination of words that were carried into everyday language due to its colorfulness or its "economy of expression" - maximum information in the minimum amount of words....

Aloof

It started with the Dutch, the old Dutch that is... To be pointed towards to the wind, i.e., to windward, was to be "loef". In particular, this described a ship pointing her head as high to windward as possible while traveling along a "lee shore" (a bad place to get pushed down onto for a sailing vessel.) "Loef" became anglicized to "aloof" and describes someone who holds themselves apart, with perhaps their noses pointing up...

A Blind Eye

In the Battle of Copenhagen, between the English and Dutch Navies, Admiral Nelson was told that his superior officer was signaling him via battle flags to disengage from the battle. He took his telescope, put it to

his blind eye and said, "Can't see a thing! The smoke must be too thick!" and went on to one of the most famous victories of his career...

By and Large

This term is often used in conversation and comes directly from the sea. When a sailing vessel is having a difficult day making progress because the wind is coming from where they want to go to, this is called "sailing by the wind." When they are having a good day of sailing because the wind is blowing to where they want to go, they use their biggest sails to make the most way and are "sailing large."

Chew the Fat

On sailing ships of old, brine was added to barrels of meat as a preservative. This had the effect of hardening the fat within the meat. The meat was still edible, but took a great deal of chewing to soften up. So, to "chew the fat" took on the meaning of sitting around and talking, hopefully without your food in your mouth.

Filibuster

The Spanish name "filibustero" was what pirates were called that seized islands along the Spanish Main to be used as bases for their buccaneering. This had the effect of limiting passageway between the islands as mariners became aware of these acts. The word came ashore to mean some-

one who seeks to obstruct the passage of a bill through government by endless speechmaking.

Government

In Roman galleys, the rudder was called the "gubernaculum." It has come down through the ages to mean "the one who steers" - government.

Lassie

During WW-I, a German U-boat sank the HMS Formidable, the first British battleship to be sunk in the conflict. British fishermen took the bodies ashore. Covered with tarps, a number of the bodies came to await the funeral wagon in a local bar called the Pilot Boat Inn. At some point, the innkeeper's dog pulled the tarp off one of the bodies and started licking the man's face. Eventually, he was aroused - he'd been alive but unconscious all the time. Eventually, many years later, Hollywood heard the story and the dog-hero was borne - named after the sailor she saved. John Lassie.

Posh

This was the preferred way to sail to and from England and India. Being the preferred way, it was the most expensive - Port side, Outbound; Starboard side, Home...

Quarantine

From the Italian word "quaranta",

meaning forty. This was the time that the ships, suspected of carrying diseases, would be required to lay at anchor before being permitted to tie up and off-load their cargo and passengers. Today, a sailing or motor vessel entering a new port in a foreign land must raise their "Q" signal flag to signal that they request clearance from the port authorities to make landfall.

So-Long

A seaman's farewell, borrowed from the East Indies - "salaam." Very common ashore but it started at sea.

To Wallop Someone

During the reign of Henry VIII, French raiders were continually wrecking havoc on the English coast. So, King Henry ordered his admiral to sail across the English Channel and give the French some of their own. The English raiding party set 21 towns afire and left many ports demolished. The admiral's name? Sir John Wallop...

So, we'll do more of these, with an emphasis on nautical words themselves in nautical settings.

BTW, if you are interested in being part of USCGA Forces, email me at JoinUSCGAux2008@aol.com or go direct to Lisa Etter, who is in charge of new members matters, at PSO-PS@emcg.us and we will help you "get in this thing..."