

GRANDE ENDEAVOUR

By Bob Rtee



The Long Haul to a Royal Reception

Before I leave the ship in Victoria, Geoff informs me I'm on as crew to Hawaii and a letter awaits my return home saying that I'm confirmed all the way to New Zealand. This gives me a few weeks to set my affairs in order and then rejoin the ship in Vancouver, B.C. where my friends Kari, Rick, Trecin and JP give me a great send off. A new set of voyage crew members is assembled and given the standard briefing, and I'm assigned to the mizzen mast watch under the able guidance of Richard (Richie) who is the ship's most experienced captain o' top. This is good as we will soon be leaving the shelter of coastal waters and headed for the wild blue yonder. The first three days turn out to be a rough baptism for the new crew members since a low pressure area surrounds us with foul weather just when they are getting their first experience at furling sails on the upper yardarms. One of the new guys, Chuck, is soon christened Upchuck and escapes cleaning and maintenance duties for several days. Laura, his bride of two weeks, is an experienced sailor and does double duty on cleaning to help cover for him. What a honeymoon.

The mizzen watch is blessed with an outstanding cast of characters. Besides Upchuck and Laura there's Axel, a gentle German giant who lives in Switzerland and travels internationally for business and pleasure, Rob, a former junkie turned sagacious California surfer boy, Fran, who has known the ship since its inception and can bore you to tears with minutia, Terry, a metal sculptor and graphic artist, Jack, a musician, actor and story teller with a great sense of timing, Kristin, a nineteen year old who has all the maturity of a nineteen year old and is soon dubbed 'princess' by our watch mates, but who also has a tremendous potential for personal growth over the next eight months she'll be on board, and Vic, a maritime museum curator from Ottawa, Canada who shares a wealth of knowledge on James Cook, the Endeavour and various related subjects with terrific humor and insight. Finally there's Tom Jones, our very own supernumerary who pays twice what the rest of us pay to be on board and doesn't have to do any of the work. He is a historian teaching at a California college in Eureka, with whom I share a special interest in facets of Mayan culture. Tom presents a fascinating lecture from his thesis on the origin of the word shark in the English language as derived from the Mayan word for this formidable creature. He accomplishes this by tying together historical encounters between English traders and Mayan inhabitants along the Caribbean coast of Central America.

Following the initial days of motoring in bad weather lightened only by the play of dolphins at our bow and a congenial sense of camaraderie amongst the crew, the sun breaks through and puts a sparkle on the surface of the cobalt depths. Nimble fingers unfurl the sails, yardarms are braced around to the wind, bowlines are cast off, clews, bunts and reefs are eased and halyards and sheets hauled. The ship responds with grace and a palpable sense of pride as we set our heading at 190 degrees south by south-west. The ships seems like home now, but I can barely imagine the extent to which this must be true for the captain and many of the permanent crew who have been with her for years. Nevertheless, I now run into fewer cannons, winches and other obstructions as I walk the deck on moonless nights, and I fall asleep quickly whenever the opportunity arises.

On Saturday, and the end of the first week at sea, the voyage crew is subjected to a test of our knowledge of the lines. The test is conducted in the form of a competition called a line race wherein each watch is represented in heats by a single member of the group who must run as fast as they can to be the first among three to place a hand on the belaying cleat or timberhead of a named line, such as the clew line for the spritz topsail. If you can imagine a deck that has three different elevations and a maze of obstacles and narrow passages you might get an inkling of the chaos that ensues. To top this off we also compete to see who can tie the neatest gasket coil and accomplish the quickest single timberhead belay. Once we have thus demonstrated a modicum of competence the second week begins with a new twist. Each watch selects four people to serve sequentially as captain o' top for three day stints. I draw the third lot and although I've got the lines well memorized the effect of being on center stage in a command position is unnerving, to say the least. The frenzy of trying to hear, discern and relay the chain of shouted commands coming down from the captain, first mate and second mate can be intense if not disorienting. It's a heavy responsibility with the timing and sequence of the commands that you pass on to your watch crew being critical to the safety of the ship and all those on board. Laura and Jack draw the first two lots and with the support and team spirit of the entire watch we all manage to stumble through the experience without too much embarrassment. Since Jack's turn ends on Saturday night, Captain Blake issues us a "well done" award in the form of a bottle of Port. This lasts about as long as it takes us to make a few choice toast and to note that the libation comes from Australia and bears the name Blake's Port. Does the captain have a side business we didn't know about?

Richie, having been temporarily retired as our captain o' top, is heavily involved in ship's maintenance along with other members of the permanent crew, but not to the total demise of his passion for fishing. Early on he catches a couple of blue fin tuna and later, as we get further southwest, he lands a Mahi-mahi that shimmers bright yellow on the deck until it quickly fades to a gray death. The prize catch of the voyage is an Ali measuring well over three feet in length. Jo prepares a visually delightful platter of sashimi for our day of rest Sunday Brunch. Sunday means we don't have to stow our hammocks away, nor engage in any of the regular cleaning and maintenance routines. This is a most welcome break for all concerned and a chance to read or just laze about on the sunny

There is nothing new in art except talent. Anton Chekhov

decks that normally challenge us to find new limits to what we think we are capable of doing.

We're into the second week and the wind gods have taken their act somewhere else. According to the weather maps received via satellite we escaped the Pacific Northwest just in time to avoid a major storm that's dumping high winds and rain on Vancouver and the Seattle area. Here, we have sunny days and starry nights, but no wind. So to lighten moods, dampened by the drone of diesel engines, we stage a show night wherein each watch and the idlers (scurvy curs and other permanent crew members) choose a costume theme and clash in heated competition of college-bowl-like questions and answers moderated by Dierdre and Dominique, both of whom are dressed in slinky dresses of dubious origin. My watch became the Mighty Mizzen Molly Mop Heads to acknowledge our reputation of excellence on cleaning detail. Early in the third week (when things become truly desperate as Rob, Axel and I spend days precariously perched on yardarms and the bowsprit sanding, painting and oiling) an evening is devoted to a "suds opera". That's Aussie for soap opera. Again each watch and the idlers don scraps of costumes conjured from now warped, but still fertile imaginations and proceed to make total asses of ourselves. The Idlers manage a rather contrived rendition (humor being a relative thing) of Star Wars, while we of the mizzen most performed a medley of oldies but goodies from the 50's, 60's and 70's with brand new nautical lyrics. Think about the tune to 'Maria' from 'West Side Story' and plug in 'Endeavour... Endeavour... I just met a ship named Endeavour'. That's the mild stuff. Much of the rest of our dubbed lyrics are unprintable in this "family" oriented journal. What may seem like hyper-silliness to land bound folks becomes perfectly normal behavior after a certain time at sea. No apologies made.

One positive thing about motoring in the middle of the Pacific is that you can shut the engines off on a whim and stop. If you're under sail it takes a lot of time and effort to come to a halt. So when the captain tells Wally to cut the engines and we drift to a stand still, everyone is a bit quizzical until he give the command loud and clear over the speaker system... "THE POOL IS OPEN." As everyone makes a dash for their lockers to don swimsuits the captain adds an after thought... "remember when you're out there swimming that the closest piece of ground is three miles below you, so stay close to the ship" For the next hour or so the world stands still while we dive and splash and frolic in Neptune's personal playground.

During the second half of the voyage our course sticks close to 210 degrees and this brings us right through the Alenuihaha Channel off the northern tip of the "big island", Hawaii, adjacent to Maui. For the last three days we have a strong favorable wind and the ship tops eleven knots as the mast and bow sprit strain and we set a new speed record for the Endeavour. Then rounding the northwest corner of the island we lose the wind and end up motoring down to Kealakakua

Bay. Here we anchor where the Coast Guard indicates we should, but we are soon confronted by local marine wildlife enforcement agents who threaten to cut our anchor line if we don't move away from the coral reefs. We oblige as quickly as possible and then the captain announces once again that the pool is open. It seems strange being so close to land. In the morning I join a party of five others in the zodiac to go ashore with wire brushes, paint brushes and buckets of paint to clean and dress up the Captain James Cook Memorial which is located a few yards from where the great explorer was killed in 1779. Meanwhile half the ship's company is shuttled ashore to attend a church service in the village, complete with hula dancing and traditional chanting. When the painting duty is finished we return to the ship to find it transformed. Local girls greet us with leis and the ship is crawling with dignitaries and Hawaiian Chiefs who are being feted to a lavish meal on board. I get to speak with one of the council of Chief members and his spiritual adviser. Their message is one of reconciliation and a hope for recognition of their hereditary rights to their lands and customs. I have mixed personal feeling about being perceived, by my mere presence as crew on the Endeavour Replica, as a representative of Cook's arrival, but this fades as Captain Blake and the Chiefs acknowledge each other with simple heart felt dignity, embraces and the touching together of foreheads. Once the hoopla is finished and the assembled VIP's and dignitaries have departed, the captain's voice rings out with the now familiar refrain... "the pool is open", and he dives overboard in his full white dress uniform. The rest of are close behind. Or so we can hope.

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Jules Renard

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