



Responsibilities

The crewman of a fishing boat has responsibilities other than being a fisherman, knowing about gear, and standing watch. He is also a seaman. This means that if a coil of line drops from the shrouds, he coils it back in place. It is not left to the other fellow. Running rigging is not knotted to the belaying pins, but the rigging is hauled tight and several turns passed on the belaying pins, then a hitch to hold in place, and the balance of the line coiled in the rigging and the end passed around, and with a couple of hitches, tied into a neat bundle.

Keep an eye about you for rigging that is chafed, or is rubbing against a stay and will get chafed, or is

slack when it should be tight. With modern synthetic lines, running rigging generally remains taut. In the days of manila and hemp it was routine to slack rigging when it got wet and to take it up snug again after a dry spell, because vegetable fibers absorb moisture and swell, shrinking the rigging length. At times rigging that was too snug got so tight that some of its rope strands parted.

Besides general responsibilities of caring and accounting for your share of the fishing gear, as time goes on you may be elected a representative of the crew (called a delegate in some fisheries), or take on the job of being the cook or the chief (the engineer).

By that time you will know what special knowledge these crew members need and the responsibilities they have. The delegate is often a deck boss, who may oversee the maintenance of the gear, besides sitting with the skipper and going over the bills before a settlement. If there is a union, he is its representative. Even when there is not a union, there is generally a group leader on deck through the tacit understanding of skipper and crew.

The cook and the chief have their separate domains of responsibility and prerogatives. Observe these and their privileged relationship with others: they will not be posted as a watch bill of do's and don'ts in the galley or fo'c'sle.

The simple act of making fast to another boat, or to the dock, or of letting go, though it seems so smooth and effortless, is also an act of seamanship. In time you will note the habits (and shortcomings) of the skipper's style in coming alongside the dock, another boat, or the sequence usually followed when letting go. Anticipate the need for fenders over the side. Know where they go and how far to let them down. Only under very special circumstances will the stern line be made fast before the bow line. Learn to check the way of the boat smoothly, keeping your hands clear.

God help the man who takes a turn on the cleat with a knot first! With a severe strain on modern nylon line, cutting the line is the only way out of that dilemma. Put turns only on a deck cleat—no hitches.

Know about the use of spring lines, how a boat can be warped around the end of a dock, or sprung out from the dock so the vessel can back away without scraping the dock or an adjoining boat. In close quarters, be ready to fend off from another boat with the fender, and keep the skipper informed of any other boat that may suddenly move into the way but out of his line of vision.

In the Seattle, Washington area,

most fishing vessels must transit a set of locks, either coming from or returning to sea. Depending on the tide level, the drop from the ship canal to sea level varies from 12 to 24 feet. When tied to the lock wall, there are special problems that require constant alertness when tending the lines.

When rising or falling, lines must be taken in or let out constantly, with enough tension maintained to keep the boat close to the wall, but without parting the tie-up (or mooring) lines. Other complications are that water turbulence from the lock pumps makes the boat bounce and sometimes the lock chambers are crowded with other boats.

The lockmaster gives the orders here—where to make fast, when to let go—but make certain the skipper also "gets the message." These and others are skills that become second nature—a set of understandings between you, your shipmates, and the skipper. In all aspects of operation, either around the dock or at sea fishing, one of the noteworthy characteristics of a well-run boat is the lack of orders, or instructions that pass between skipper and crew. This characteristic has been noted by observing people many times, when they first come aboard a fishing vessel.

Another job is to get stores aboard just before leaving town. Everyone helps get the groceries aboard and usually the cook puts them away. Taking aboard ice at the chute may involve only one or two men or more if bait also comes aboard. Memorize exactly where the bait goes in the hold, how much ice is stored in each side-pen and in the slaughter houses.

Icing fish at sea has to be done in a particular sequence, since the hold is nearly full of ice and bait. Oh, the misery of work that results when too much ice is put in the wrong place! Whether there are 10 tons or 20 tons aboard, it will all have to be moved at least once, either with a scoop or a shovel, before the hold

is iced full of fish. If there is a ton or two in the wrong place, that will have to be moved twice with a shovel and a sore back, and this does indeed make a man very ob-servant when taking ice the next trip.

Lube oil, fuel, and water will be taken aboard at the fuel dock. Know which deck flange is for oil, which is for fresh water. You will be instructed by the chief or the skipper. Keep a sharp eye on the hose nozzle, so that you don't overfill and find oil spouting all over deck and yourself. Grease the deck flanges before screwing them back in place. Make them snug, but don't use a hammer on the wrench. If oil is spilled on deck, clean it up. Ordinary dish-washing detergent is an excellent oil cleaner. Scrub in the detergent, then rinse off with hose. Repeat if necessary.

Let's talk about that deck a little bit. It is both a working platform and a roof over your head in the fo'c'sle, the hold, the engine room. Most fishing vessels still have wooden decks and caulked seams. You will also note that in most cases they are tarred or oiled for protection and preservation of wood. A knife, splicer, or other sharp instrument stuck into the deck pierces the tar film and forms an entry for water and possibly the beginnings of dry rot. If the deck is damaged by accident, let the skipper know so he can treat it.

A fishing boat works in a running sea, and this may loosen the caulking in time. Also in hot dry weather, the wood and caulking shrink, so that water may drip through below, sometimes onto your bunk. Eventually under wet conditions this will stop. If it doesn't, again let the skipper know.

