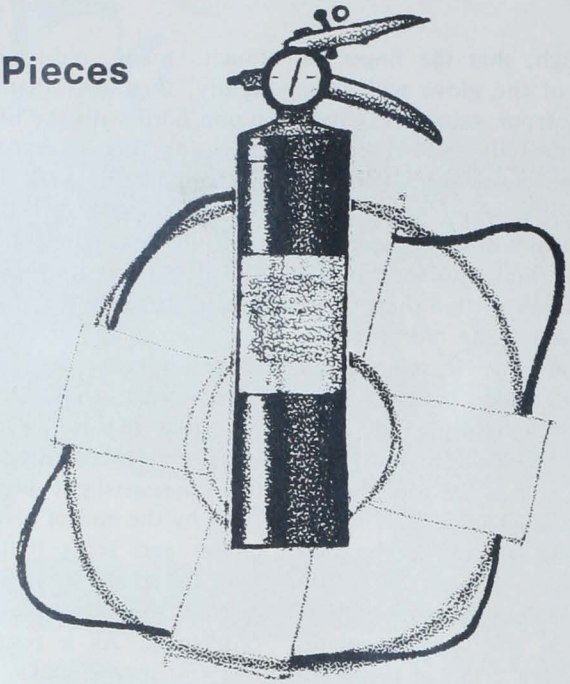
Bits and Pieces



You have now waded through quite a number of do's and don'ts. Nevertheless, scraps of information have, no doubt, been left behind. We'll see if we can pick up a few such bits and pieces.

Let's talk about your oilskins. They have, at times, been dubbed "the fisherman's uniform," a fit name and one of which no seafaring man need feel ashamed. Most work on deck is of such a nature that oilskins must be worn in order to keep reasonably dry. In point of fact, oilskins should be worn in all manner of deck work, wet or dry, because oilskins don't just keep you dry, they also prevent your fishing clothes from becoming too dirty too fast.

Besides, your oilskins protect you. A flying longline hook, or a "jagger" on an old wire rope can get a real good grip in your fishing shirt or pants. With oilskins on, you would stand a good chance of getting away from such an encounter scot-free. Don't wear too much clothing under your oilskins. A suit of oilskins conserves body heat very well. You should feel chilly when you first come on deck. It is time-consuming to remove the extra clothing when you begin to warm up from exercise.

If you go out in a dory or a skiff, whether for business, recreation, or salvation, wear your oilskins. You will be snug and warm when the fellow without oilskins is kept busy trying to control his chattering teeth. In case you should be forced to abandon ship, be sure to have your oilskins along when you make the final jump from the deck and into the lifeboat or life raft. Here is a case where your oilskin suit may well make the difference between your survival or your extinction.

There usually will be some provision for drying your clothing, which at the end of the watch on deck will be damp from perspiration and from condensation inside your oilskins. And those oilskins, along with gloves and wristlets (or wristers) should be washed before hanging to dry.

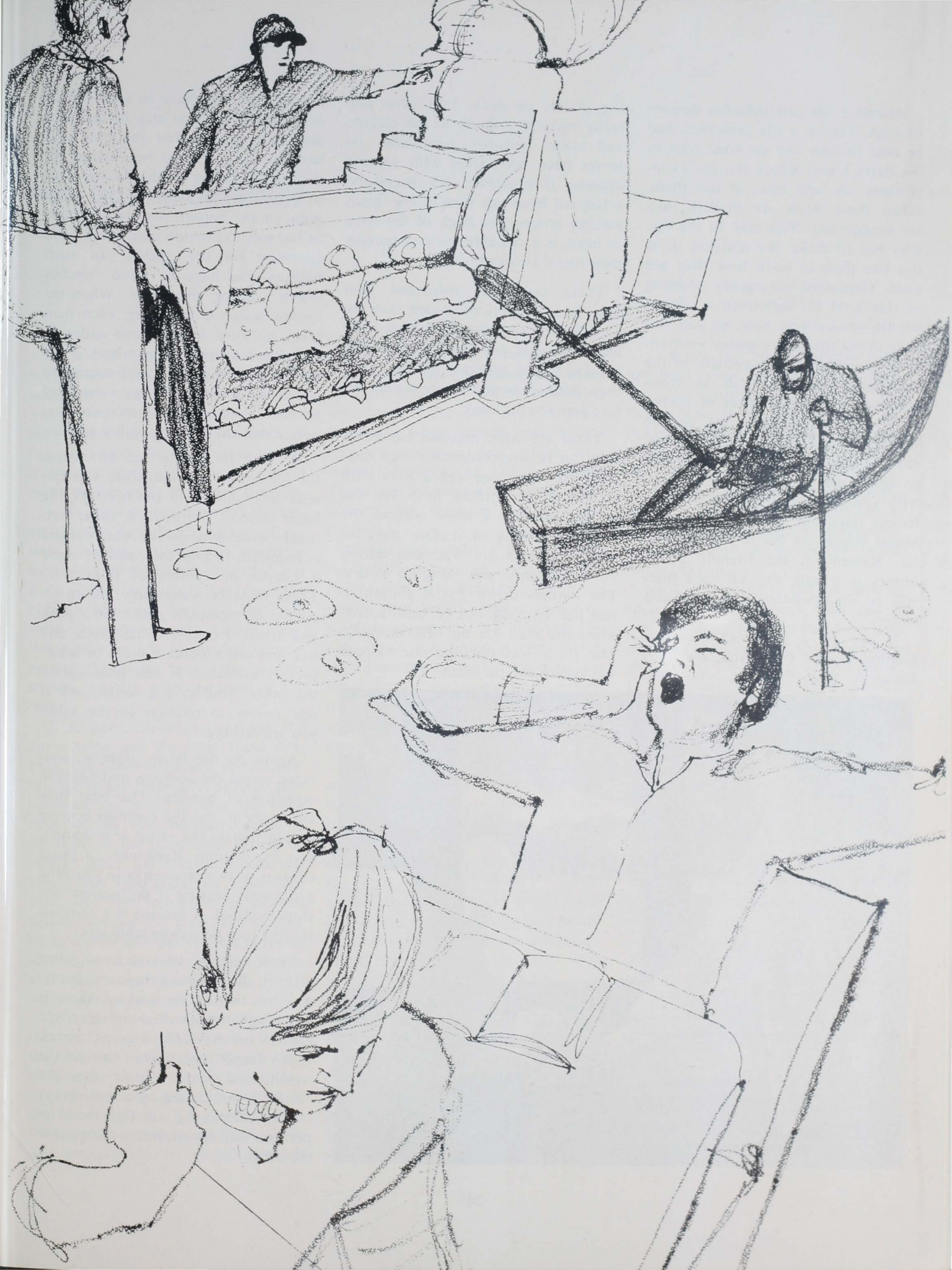
Drying wet, heavy fishing clothes can be quite a problem on a fishing boat, especially on a smaller and/or older one. No cook worth his salt will tolerate drying clothes around his galley range. This is not meanness; it's common sense and entirely proper, because the range and its vicinity is where the food is prepared. But exceptions may be made at night when food is not being prepared.

Some engine rooms are roomy enough so that the engineer will let crewmen use certain parts of it as a drying room. Many engine rooms, however, are forbidden territory, for good and valid reasons. If you do get permission to hang your wet clothes in the engine room, you must, of course, hang your things in the spot which the engineer (or skipper) has pointed out to you and nowhere else! A garment of whatever kind, hung in the wrong place, may be sucked into an air intake, caught by a belt or a turning shaft, and cause all manner of damage to the engine or to other machinery, to say nothing of what happens to your clothes.

What if you should be really unlucky and get a big tear in your fishing shirt or fishing pants? You can't just toss it away and get a new one because the nearest outfitting store may be hundreds of miles away. So what do you do? You mend it, that's what. You have your sewing kit and plenty of woolen yarn. A herring-bone stitch with heavy (double or more if needed) woolen yarn will make a very respectable repair job. With a little practice you'll be able to make it a very neat job, too. For more elaborate mending or patching there are plastic menders on the market.

Do you know how to use a pair of oars? To row a boat, that is? If not, go rent yourself a 14- or 16-foot skiff, or better still, borrow an old dory, and practice rowing until you learn how to handle a pair of oars effectively. A fisherman/seaman who is unable to propel a rowboat by means of the oars if and when the conditions demand, is a pitiful sight to behold and a most foolish looking one to boot. Learn to use a pair of oars. That ability might save your life, if you should suffer a shipwreck.

It may not be probable, but it is possible, that at some time in your fishing career you may have to use a small boat to survive, or an inflatable life raft, or a life preserver, or a fire extinguisher. Take a good hard speculative look at these items and ask some questions. Don't take "no" for an answer; it's your life that you're concerned about.



Attend a life raft inflation demonstration. Try on a life preserver, and be able to find one on your boat in the dark. Know where the fire extinguishers are and how to use them. When these items are needed, they are needed fast. You may be the one who has to make the decision. It is too late then to learn how they are used. Organized emergency training of this kind for fishermen is almost wholly non-existent now, so you will have to put the facts together yourself.

In some fisheries, especially in the year-round fisheries, such as otter-trawling, a certain number of harbor days are unavoidable, due to the weather on the North Pacific coasts. Do you enjoy reading? If so, be sure to bring plenty of reading material with you when you go to sea. Long harbor days will seem ever so much longer if you run out of reading matter. Remember, the friendly public library is a long way off, and there will be no newsstand close at hand, either!

If you are a fisherman who uses reading glasses only, you are more fortunate than the man who must use glasses on deck. Fog, rain, and spray make it difficult to see clearly, and many anti-fog treatments on lenses have been tried with varying success. If eyeglasses are necessary, a lanyard from one bow to the other, passing around the back of the neck or head, is a valuable assist to prevent their loss if knocked off.

There are other fishermen who have eye corrections which can be remedied by contact lenses. This is an ideal answer if you can use them, but it adds to the personal chores, since they must generally be removed before going to the bunk.

There are other personal handicaps that can be overcome. One such happened to be a one-legged man with an articulated artificial limb. He was on the boat for a week without the skipper knowing of it. One day, his leather harness got wet, and during the off-watch it was hung up to dry. The harness dried, but it shrank so that the leg could not be "reinstalled" when the man got up next morning. The truth was out and the skipper was speechless, for once.

You may well have to seek shelter in an anchorage that may be far from safe as a harbor, but the only one within reach. It may be exposed to the wind blowing at the moment, or to a measure of ocean swells, or to both; or the bottom may be too hard or too soft to provide reasonably good fastening for the anchor. In such harbors you have to stand "anchor watch" during the night. When an anchor watch is necessary, each man takes his turn in the same order as he takes his trick at the wheel. Your job on anchor watch is, of course, to watch out for drift of your vessel and to call the skipper the moment you notice that she is dragging her anchor.

If there is a radar set on board, the job is easy enough, since you can read any change in position off the radar screen. Without a radar set, much more wide-awake watchfulness is required. In that case, pick yourself a couple of "points of reference." These must be somewhere abeam. A couple of mountain peaks, or a peak and a hill, a couple of tall trees, one tree and one mountain peak, or whatever is available. If one lines up on the other, you have a *range*, and if one moves in relation to the other you are drifting.

Again on the beam, sight a landmark across the compass and note the direction of bearing. The boat may swing about, but the compass bearing should remain the same. If it doesn't, you are drifting. Remember, a range consists of two landmarks in line (and a compass bearing if the nearest one is quite close). A bearing is a compass reading on a very close landmark.

These telltales let you know when the boat drifts. Check them constantly. Another telltale, on rocky bottom is a sliding anchor which telegraphs a rumble up the cable when it moves. Don't forget, check the wire on the winch, and make certain that the "drift" is not caused by a loose brake —the wire paying out. Call the skipper over any uncertainty—the quicker the better.