

HINTS ON LIVING ON A BOAT

by J. E. Randall, Jr.

Living on a small vessel, either when underway or while in port, presents problems quite new to the uninitiated. Some of these problems are concerned with the operation and maintenance of the vessel and will not be considered here. Others, however, are personal or individual in nature and arise largely from the closeness of the association of all persons on the vessel and the necessity for a strict, scheduled sort of an existence.

The following, in brief, are suggestions for the carrying out of a cruise on a small vessel. Some of these suggestions may not be pertinent if a large boat is utilized.

One, and only one, man should be chosen as captain of the vessel. He should be capable and experienced. He should be placed in a position of total responsibility for the operation of the vessel. He will make all important decisions which concern the vessel or its disposition at sea, and such decisions should not be disputed.

The stowing of gear before departure should receive very careful thought and planning. All items which could become detached when the boat is in motion should be lashed securely. Canned goods or any items which could be damaged by contact with salt water should be stowed in a place which is known to be dry or should be wrapped in waterproof or water repellent bags. It would be wise to place all extra clothing and bedding in such bags even when it does not seem likely that they will get wet. Also noteworthy of mention is the covering of mattresses with zippered plastic covers.

All items of equipment necessary to the handling of a vessel must be kept consistently in the same place. This is especially true of things like tools which will often be needed in a hurry and at some unexpected time. This point is sufficiently important to warrant explanation to all members of the crew at a time before the vessel has set sail.

When underway, a strict schedule should be enforced as to the duties which must be performed. The delegation of duties must be carried out before the vessel has left port. With the exception of the cook, every man should stand watch if capable. The duration of the time at the helm should be talked over and decided upon beforehand and provision should be made for a rotation in time so that one man will not have watch at the same period or periods every day.

Great care must be taken to see that vital jobs like the winding of chronometers, inspection of engines and other items of equipment are executed at the correct time each day. One man should be held responsible for each task of this nature throughout the voyage.

The greatest danger at sea is falling overboard. All steps should be taken to minimize such a hazard. An adequate railing should be erected all around the vessel. Life rings should be readily accessible and never lashed in such a manner as to delay their prompt procurement. Water lights should be available. These are waterproof lights which should be thrown overboard at night with the life ring. They contain a mercury switch and become lighted when floating vertically in the water. They serve the purpose of guiding a person to the life ring and, in turn, enable the vessel to locate the person who has fallen overboard.

It may be wise to trail a sturdy line astern which a person can try to grasp if he has fallen overboard. Such a procedure is vital if a person is standing watch alone. In heavy weather the helmsman should always fasten a short line from himself to the boat.

Fire hazard on a boat is a very real danger. This is accentuated if a gasoline engine is used or if gasoline is stored anywhere on the boat. Certain safety regulations concerning the location of tanks, etc. must be met by all boats with gasoline engines, but a hazard still exists. If gasoline is stored on the boat the fittings on the lines should be inspected every day. Such fittings have a way of coming loose from vibration and this results in a dripping of gasoline into the bilge. It is just this sort of thing which causes the disastrous explosions on power boats so often read about in news items. No gasoline-burning stoves or lanterns should ever be used on a boat. Other potential sources for a fire at sea often exist in butane, kerosene or alcohol stoves, kerosene lanterns, electrical wiring, and smoking. No one should attempt to light a stove or lantern without proper instructions. Electric wiring should be frequently inspected. Smoking should be eliminated. Since this is practically impossible to achieve, the best alternative is to designate a specific safe place on the boat for smoking.

Every vessel must be equipped with a specified number of fire extinguishers. These should be inspected before departure. CO₂ fire extinguishers are superior to the pyrene type, and at least one of these should be on board and very accessible. A very desirable type of fire extinguisher to have is a built in CO₂ system in the engine room which operates automatically when a certain high temperature is reached.

The restricted use of fresh-water by all members of the crew must be emphasized. Unless a very large supply is present, water should be utilized only for drinking, cooking, shaving, and limited washing purposes. It may be necessary to wash clothes and dishes in salt water. Ordinary soap under such conditions is useless. Salt water soap, in general, is not too good. A detergent such as Dreft seems to be the best agent for washing with salt water. An emergency water supply should be maintained in a tank separate from the regular water line. Inspection of water tanks for possible leaks should be made periodically.

The scourge of any cruise is seasickness. In a rough sea and in a small vessel very few persons are completely free of nauseous sensations. Each individual usually finds a set of conditions which best alleviates his distressing symptoms. Generally, if sickness has come on while below in a confining cabin, going on deck in fresh air is very helpful. A recent drug, dramamine, has proven to be amazingly effective in preventing seasickness. It must be taken before sickness ensues or it is not effective. If a person knows that he is very prone to sickness at sea he should take dramamine a half hour before departure, and continue dosage every six hours. The drug has a pronounced somnolent effect. For this reason, the dosage recommended by the physician may be experimentally lessened so that the minimum amount necessary to prevent sickness is obtained. Dramamine can be procured only by doctor's prescription; it is considered very dangerous to persons with low blood pressure.

Sleeping in a vessel which is underway is an art in itself, especially in rough weather. Most individuals will sleep only intermittently during their first few nights at sea, but gradually will adapt themselves to the unusual motion. Narrow bunks are often preferable and the sides of the bunks should be equipped with bunk boards or some similar arrangements to prevent the sleeping individual from falling out. The sides of the bunks should be well-padded with extra bedding.

A cruise at sea, especially if it is a long one and on a small vessel, presents an environment of close quarters and unpleasant living conditions which is usually quite unexpected to those who have not experienced it before. And the knowledge that there is no escape from this environment until the cruise is terminated may make these conditions even more difficult. It therefore behooves all members of the crew to make constant effort to be congenial, to do at least their share of the work, and to be as considerate as possible of their fellow crew members.

There are a few points worthy of mention regarding living on a vessel which is lying at anchor or tied to a dock. First, there are often very distracting noises which arise from movements of the vessel against fenders on a dock or alternate tightening and slackening of mooring or anchor lines. Many of these noises can be eliminated, and effort should be made to do so before turning in. A breast anchor can be taken out from the side of the vessel away from the dock and pulling in on this line will prevent contact with the dock. On anchor or mooring lines pieces of elastic cord or inner tube can be incorporated to reduce the sudden jarring effects which the boat transmits to the lines. This saves wear on lines as well as eliminating the noises which occur when the lines tighten on boat fittings.

Adequate ventilation presents another problem. Frequently one can create a current of air through the boat by erecting a funneling arrangement on the back side of hatches facing the wind. An elevated hatch cover may serve the purpose or a more elaborate affair may be constructed from a large piece of canvas.

Usually there is no provision for preventing the entrance of flies, mosquitoes, or other insects into a boat. Pieces of mosquito netting over hatches and the cutting of round pieces of screen wire to fit into port holes will help materially. Aerosol bombs should be on hand as well, however.

Since space on a boat is so limited, cooking or bathroom odors are generally a source of annoyance. Airwick is a big help.

While in port and in hot weather, decks tend to leak due to the drying out and consequent opening up of deck seams. The best preventative is the wetting of decks at least once a day. Salt water should be used for this, for constant wetting with fresh-water promotes dry rot in a vessel.