

Some of John Lazier's remaining memories aboard CNAV Sackville in 1960-61

The most uncomfortable meal

Of all the maybe 1000 meals I consumed at sea over 40 years the most uncomfortable was the first. That was the first supper on my first trip aboard Sackville. We were sailing out of Halifax and just starting to feel the swell when dinner began. An officer led conspiracy managed to sit me tight against the bulkhead with no escape when the greasy pork chops arrived. The mix of the grease the heaving ship and the confined space made me want to be up-top in the fresh air but the squeeze from the left made it clear that obviously wasn't going to happen without a struggle. So I sat and tried to eat while thinking about fresh air – took forever - maybe 15 minutes but stays in the memory forever.

Station keeping in the Bay of Fundy

The ship was obtaining a series of bottom-grab samples along a line in the Bay of Fundy. After the grab had been brought aboard the sample was bottled and labelled. The ship was then directed to steam to the next station. Unbeknownst to the scientific staff the tidal current was too strong for the ship's station keeping ability. On one memorable occasion the chief officer hollered down to the foredeck that the ship was already passing the next station so hurry up and put the grab over the side or we'll miss it. The poor geologist would never have accurate positions for the samples he obtained.

RMS QE at sea

We were south of the Gulf Stream about an hour before sunset. To the north of us RMS Queen Elizabeth steamed westward toward the sun. We were close enough to see the bow wave – a majestic sight. Another unforgettable sight that day was being within a large group of Humpback whales swimming about with great enthusiasm and jumping vertically out of the water then falling back in a great splashes.

Frightening night lights

Chatting on the bridge at night while sailing between stations on the Scotian Shelf there was, without warning, a frightful burst of bright white light in the sky ahead of the bow. During a chorus of 'what the hell?' some of us even went down on the deck to avoid whatever it was. Within seconds we heard the roar of the fisheries aircraft that patrols the waters and checks the identity of ships it encounters. Someone on the bridge thought they heard the aircrew laughing.

Marking Whales

Dave Sergeant, with the Arctic Biological Station, specialized in marine mammalogy and completed important studies of pilot whales, belugas and harp seals. He sailed on

Sackville with a special gun that fired arrows into the flesh of whales. It was expected that someday some of these arrows would be returned to him giving him information of the animals' movements. When he sailed on Sackville the ship was to chase any whales it saw and David with his gun would stand right at the bow and fire into the whale. On the day I remember the weather was grey, cold and windy. The ship moved toward the whales – the bow and David went up and down and tried to aim at one of the whales. After a length of frustration he finally fired the gun. There was no bang from the gun but we all saw the arrow fall out of the barrel and plop into the sea - a tough way to do science. David was not amused but we were.

Sinking ice

One night in a cabin someone passed me a glass of rum in which the ice sat on the bottom rather than floating on the top. It doesn't take long to learn to stay clear of extra potent over-proof booze.

Avoiding the roller coaster

Our bunks were in the fo'c's'le. When the sea was rough the vertical accelerations were hard to take. It took some time but eventually I found a place that was quiet enough in the middle of the ship to allow some reading.

The engine

I loved the engine – a triple expansion steam engine. It was a wonderful thing to see in operation – huge metal crank shaft connecting rods and pistons moving up and down and round and round. Originally the ship was fitted with two boilers but one was removed to make room for a scientific lab - a relatively calm spot.

Signs of a warship

When I first sailed on the Sackville there were still signs of its original function as an antisubmarine escort. On the foredeck there was still the base for the bomb throwing Hedgehog and along the exposed decks aft there were the remains of the old style depth charge throwers. Also along those exposed after decks were overhead cables running from the galley, midships, to the engineers mess near the stern. Short lengths of rope terminated with a monkey fist knot suspended from the cable provided the engineers something to hang on to with one hand while they carried their dinner aft on the open deck to their mess. These ropes were also useful for young scientists on an evening stroll in a rolling sea.