Print

Irminger Sea: Oct 8
Bridges and Galleys by Dallas Murphy

The wind is down to 30 knots this morning. The temperature is hanging around freezing, it's snowing, and by any normal standards, it would be considered rough. By the standards of the Irminger Sea, it's a gentle day.

There's an iceberg the size of an office building in sight, and the officers report small chunks of ice called growlers. Bergs are no danger to the ship, because they show up on radar, but not the smaller chunks of ice. Here are a few of the wonderfully evocative words for ice that designate either its size or shape: growlers, bergy bits, brash ice, pancake ice, fast ice, frazil ice, grease ice, and more I don't remember.

Knorr is a highly specialized combination of hotel, heavy industry, world-class seamanship, and fine-tolerance measurements. We'll talk later about her unique technical, mechanical, and electronic adaptations, but all of it would be for nothing without her people. Let's talk today about these people, the division of labor and responsibilities designed to accomplish ocean research.

Though they have more formal names, let's separate the areas of responsibility into five "departments": 1) Science, 2) Bridge, 3) Engine, 4) Galley, and 5) Deck.

The science staff is led by a chief scientist, or "principle investigator." We're here in the Irminger because Bob is seeking to fill blanks in our understanding of its circulation and its significance to our climate. This is Dr. Bob's trip. However, he is quick to add, his study would not be possible without an expert staff of technicians and bright, avid students who actually gather and process the raw data on which his conclusions will depend. Work goes on 24 hours a day, so the staff is divided into three "watches." Bob does not give orders—only the captain does that—but he and the captain consult constantly to decide how to use the ship most productively.

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The bridge officers run and navigate the ship; the bridge is her brain. Captain Kent is in overall command. He has a staff of three: Chief Mate Dee, Second Mate Derek, and Third Mate Nathan. One of the mates will always be "on watch," and the captain, who stands no watch, "floats" between the watches as necessary, always on call. The science watches always report by radio to the bridge before they put any instruments over the side.

Chief Engineer Mike runs the engine room. Knorr has four Diesel engines, three with 16 cylinders, each producing 1,500 horsepower, and one eight-cylinder engine. Mike is also responsible for related systems such as those that generate electricity and make water. He tells me we've used 2,160 gallons of water in the last day, and made an equal amount by desalinating seawater. (We're encouraged to use water sparingly, but we can have a shower whenever we want—we're all reasonably clean.) So far we've burned 2,057 gallons of fuel, and we have 129,785 gallons remaining. Knorr has a range of 10,000 miles at 12 knots cruising speed. Like the captain, Mike "floats" between watches, always on call, while his three Assistant Engineers, Wayne, Piotr, and Irma share the 24-hour-a-day work. (I haven't seen the engine room yet, but I'll tell you about it when I do.)

Galley is nautical lingo for kitchen, and the "Steward," Bobbie, runs ours. Brendon is "Cook," and Tony is our "Messman." There are a total of 40 people aboard, and Bobbie and her team produce three (excellent) hot meals a days for 30 days. That's 1,200 meals on this cruise alone. The galley staff put in ten-hour days every day, but Bobbie and Brendon take turns cooking lunch and dinner. They bake fresh bread, muffins, cakes and pies as well. Bobbie, who's been cooking at sea for 30 years, the last 10 on research vessels, is responsible for ordering all the stores (food) before the trips, and also for all the housekeeping items, everything from cleaning items, to bedding, towels, pillows, napkins, and utensils.

In a tradition dating back centuries, the bosun (short for the antique word "boatswain") handles everything on deck. The bosun is a jack-of-all trades, and our bosun, Kyle, can do anything. He has to be strong, tough, and smart. He's responsible for loading and securing all the heavy gear that comes aboard at the beginning of every trip. If we need something special, he makes it. If something breaks, he fixes it. Without a bosun of his quality, the ship would not go far. Kyle and his mates were on deck all today repairing damage inflicted by last night's storm. We took a wave over the starboard side that dented a steel container and carried away a 2,000 pound mooring ball along with the stand it was mounted on. Now thanks to Kyle and his mates, we're shipshape.

There is one other department I forgot to mention that's unique to research vessels—Shipboard Science Support Group. Robbie and Amy are our SSSGs, and their job is to maintain and operate a range of electronic and mechanical equipment that remains permanently on the ship. Remember that our science group is transient. Another group perhaps with a totally different purpose will follow us. It's up to Amy and Robbie to coordinate the oncoming equipment with the ship's own equipment. They, too, have to be jacks-of-all-trades.

The mood on this ship is congenial and courteous. Everybody looks out for his/her shipmates; everybody is in good cheer and friendly

even when they don't feel very well in rotten weather. Speaking for myself, it's a pleasure and privilege to watch them work day to day.

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