

Irminger Sea: Oct 16

A Day's Routine by Dallas Murphy

It's snowing again, but the seas are flat. For now. I'm not to talk about the weather lest I jinx us. Superstitious lot. The crew is taking advantage of the calm to catch up on outside work. Second Mate Derek is atop the mainmast doing something with the radar receiver 80 feet above the deck. Chief Mate Dee just came down from the foremast after replacing a light bulb. Bosun Kyle had to stop welding new stanchions on a piece of the bulwarks (side rails above the deck), "hot work," they call it, because of the snow. *Knorr* is due for a full-on inspection when she returns to Woods Hole, so there is a lot of painting, rust chipping, and general repairs going on. This 40-year-old ship requires constant attention and care. For the crew and officers, it doesn't much matter where we are, except for weather; their work goes on perpetually, and they patiently pause to answer my questions. Chief Engineer Mike is giving me a tour of the engine room after lunch. I'll tell you about it.

The science staff has just completed CTD cast number 159, 10:30 am ship's time, October 16. With the cruise a little more than half over, the rhythm of shipboard life is firmly fixed. Dr. Bob is working at his computer parsing CTD and ADCP data, as he does about twelve hours a day. Everyone is happy with the uncharacteristically calm weather.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner punctuate the daily routine. Today's lunch menu offers a choice of roast beef with grilled onions or mushroom ravioli with marinara sauce. The three-member galley staff turns out three hot meals every day, and not only is the food uniformly excellent, the menus are surprisingly creative and elaborate. The other night we had mahi-mahi with a macadamia-nut crust. Obviously, everyone looks forward to mealtimes, first for the food, but also for the social occasion when everyone convenes.

I stroll up to the bridge every morning after breakfast during Second Mate Derek's watch, along with other visitors, to listen to the nautical talk, which is almost a foreign language to land people, look at the radar screens—there's an iceberg away on the starboard beam—and watch the state of the sea. There's always a crewman on lookout (AB Larry in the mornings) along with the officer on watch. *Knorr* has a generous "open-bridge policy," which is to say we can go up there anytime we wish. It's the visitor's job to stay out of the way, though there's plenty of opportunity to "talk nautical" with the smart, friendly officers. (By the way, AB stands for "able bodied seaman," in an age-old traditional language referring to an experienced sailor. The newer crewmen are "ordinary seamen." But some of the crew *women* are women, including Third Engineer Sasha. And Dee, Chief Mate, is a woman.)

There are about 30 "science berthing" cabins aboard, and since our science staff of 16 is relatively small, most members have private cabins. The cabins can accommodate two people with bunk beds, duplicate metal cabinets, drawers and lockers for personal gear and clothing. Most of us share a head (bathroom) with our next-door neighbor. You'll find a photo of a typical stateroom in Dave Wellwood's slideshow.

Well, lunchtime is rolling around again, so I'll get back to you in a while....

LOUD. That's the first thing you notice about the engine room, never mind our ear plugs. The second is the *power*. You can feel it in your bones as you pass beside the 16-cylinder "big," even when it's nowhere near full power. Chief Mike, who generously led our tour, pointed to the ballast pumps, two types of freshwater makers, generators, enormous exhaust manifolds, about five other kinds of pumps, mouthing their names under the noise. Fat pipes with their white-jacket insulation and hundreds of unidentifiable electrical conduits snake up the sides of the room and across the overhead. The place was spotless. He showed Nick and I the control room where he and his team monitor each move their engines make, as well as fuel and water and tanks, positions of the thrusters, and about everything going on aboard, except the choice of movie in the ship's lounge.

Then he led us to the hatch and vertical ladder, which happen to be located in the movie lounge, leading down to the bow thruster room. I hadn't understood exactly how large the machine actually is. The thruster was retracted now up into the hull, and the shaft itself, thick as a mature tree trunk, towered overhead. We were standing almost in the vee of the bow well below the waterline, and we could feel the chill of the sea just on the other side of her steel plates.

Earlier in the trip, I passed the Chief in the galley and asked how his work was going. "Well," he said, "the lights are still on." I laughed, but then thought about it. Yeah, I take for granted that when I flip the switch in my cabin, the light will come on. Everyone knows of course that there is an engine room somewhere below, but it takes a visit, actually see the intricacy and complexity of the machinery, to appreciate the work these people to do, without which we'd be dead in the water.

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Oct 16 engine room photos by Nick Miller

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Hmm, it's 3:00 now, raining, and the wind is getting up, grey murk overhead, and the latest weather report is predicting—no, I won't speak of it.

Ulloq allatulli ulloq by Nick Møller

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