

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

abaft: to the rear of, after.

abeam: To one side of a vessel, at a right angle to the fore-and-aft line.

aft, after: Near or at the stern.

aids to navigation: Markers on land or sea which are located to enable navigators to avoid danger and fix their position; buoys, lights, beacons, radiobeacons, daybeacons.

all slack: the line is taken off the pin and allowed to run free.

amidships: In the center, the center portion of a vessel.

astern: Behind the vessel.

athwart: At right angles to the centerline.

backsplice: A splice in which the strands are reversed and interwoven, to make a rope end.

backstay: A stay supporting the mast, running from the masthead toward the stern.

baggywrinkle: A form of chafing gear, on a stay or shroud, made by wrapping old rope yarns.

batten down: To close all openings such as hatches, and fasten all loose gear, in heavy weather.

beam: (1) One of the principal dimensions of a boat, the width; (2) the direction at right angles to the centerline of a vessel, as "the lighthouse is broad on the beam."

beam reach: Sailing with the apparent wind blowing at right angles to the boat's fore-and-aft line.

bearing: The direction of an object (vessel, buoy, etc.) from an observer.

beating: Sailing against the wind, in alternate tacks.

becket: A loop or eye made in the end of rope or wire; a rope handle.

belay: To make a line fast, by making turns around a cleat, post or pin.

belaying pin: A vertical pin to which halyards and other rigging lines are fastened, or belayed.

bend: One of several types of knots, a combination of turns and tucks, used to fasten a line to a spar or another line; to fasten by means of a bend or knot.

bend on: To prepare a sail for hoisting, to rig.

berth: A position, as a place to sleep.

bight: The middle part of a slack rope; a loop.

bilge: The lowest point of a vessel's interior hull.

binnacle: A compass box or case, or a stand, usually illuminated at night.

bitt: A strong post of wood or iron, similar to a Samson post, on deck in the bow or the stem, to which anchor, mooring, and towing lines may be fastened; bitts are usually in pairs.

bitter end: Inboard end of an anchor rode, the extreme end of any line.

block: A wooden or metal case for sheaves (wheels) or pulleys on which ropes run; the entire assemblage of shell and sheaves.

block-and-tackle: Arrangements of blocks (pulleys) and line to gain a mechanical advantage.

bollard: A strong vertical fitting, usually iron, on deck or on a pier, to which mooring lines attach

boom: A spar used to extend the foot of a sail.

bosun: A boatswain, a person in charge of hull, rigging, and sail maintenance as well as deck operations; other phonetic spellings are bos'n, bo's'n, bo'sun.

bosun's chair. A seat, sometimes a rigid plank, sometimes made of canvas, used to hoist a person aloft to repair rigging; pockets for tools are often included.

bosun's locker. A shipboard storage area for deck supplies, paint, rigging fittings, and tools.

bow: The forward part of a boat.

bowline: The "king of knots," used to make a loop in a line; this knot is simple, strong, virtually slip-proof, and easily untied.

bowsprit: A fixed spar, projecting from the bow, to which forestays and/or the headstay are fastened; also useful for anchor handling.

braces: running lines from the yards to pins on the main shrouds used to pivot yards on foremast.

bulkhead: A transverse wall in the hull; creates the interior compartmentalization of a vessel.

buoys: Floating markers (“aids to navigation”) showing channels or otherwise indicating location, rocks, and other obstructions.

can: A cylindrical buoy, generally green.

cast off: To loose, unfasten; to undo all mooring lines in preparation for departure.

chain locker: The wooden box in which the anchor chair is stowed.

chafing gear: Cloth, tape, or other material fastened around a line or other rigging to prevent wear.

Charlie Noble: A stovepipe fitting in a cabin top or deck, the “chimney” for the galley stove.

charts: Seagoing maps showing depths as well as buoys and other aids to navigation.

clew: The lower, after corner of a sail, to which the sheet is attached.

come up: Command to drop the line. Used when hauling yards or main and mizzen gaff.

companionway: A hatch or entrance, from deck to cabin.

compass: Navigation instrument showing magnetic north

compass card: A card, with magnetic needles or bars attached, which floats or pivots in a compass.

compass course: The course to be steered by use of the vessel’s compass.

daymark: A large geometric shape atop a pile or dolphin, to mark one side of a channel or an obstruction such as a submerged jetty.

day shapes: Special markers, such as black balls, cones, cylinders, or baskets, hung aloft to indicate a vessel’s type, occupation, or state; one black ball means “at anchor,” three means “aground.”

dead ahead, dead astern: Directions exactly ahead of or behind a vessel.

donkey engine: The engine that powers the windlass.

dolphin: A small group of piles, in the water, generally used for mooring or as a channel marker.

downhaul: A rigging line used to haul down, or to hold down, a spar or sail.

ease up: When hauling a yard or the main and mizzen gaff, the command to take a step forward while holding the halyard so a wrap can be taken to the pin.

eye splice: A fixed loop in the end of a line, made by intertwining strands of rope or by tucking an outer core of doublebraid rope back into itself.

fair-lead: When a line leads smoothly and directly without chafe.

figure-eight: A knot, usually in the end of a line as a stopper, to prevent the end of the line from passing through a block or fairlead.

fore: Located at the front, as of a vessel.

fore-and-aft: From stem to stern, from front to back, oriented parallel to the keel.

forecastle: (fo'c's'le) The forward portion, below decks, of a vessel.

foredeck: The forward part of the main deck of a vessel.

forward: Aboard a vessel, the direction to the front, to the bow.

furling: Folding, rolling, or gathering a sail on its boom or yard when it is not in use.

gaff: A spar holding the upper side (head) of a four-sided sail.

galley: The kitchen on a boat or ship.

halyard: A line used to hoist a spar or sail aloft.

hanks: Irons around the stays to which the jibs and staysails are attached.

hand-bearing compass: A portable compass, used primarily for sighting or taking bearings.

harbour furl: The sails furled in the neatest possible fashion.

hatch: A deck opening providing access to the space below-hinged or sliding.

haul away: Command to pull on a line.

hauling: Pulling on an anchor line, halyard, or a rope or line.

hawsepipes: Fittings in the hawseholes through which dock or anchor lines may be run, and, in larger vessels, in which the upper part of the anchor may be stowed.

hawser: A large rope, generally with a circumference of 5" or more, used for towing and for docklines.

head: The bow or forward part of a vessel; the upper end of the vertical part, such as rudder head; the upper corner of a triangular sail; the upper edge of a four-sided sail; the toilet aboard ship.

heading: The direction in which a vessel is pointed at any given moment.

heave: To pull strongly on a line; to throw a line.

helm: The tiller, wheel, and other steering gear.

hitch: A knot attaching a line to an object, such as a cleat, ring, spar.

hold: Cease whatever you are doing, stop pulling immediately and standby for further orders, or that section of the ship forward of the engine room and aft of the heads once used for cargo.

in irons: Wind not filling the sails and vessel unable to maneuver (During a tack, if the bow of the vessel does not come through the wind quickly enough, the sails will not fill on the other side sufficiently to continue making way. The bow of the vessel stays pointed toward the wind, the sails tuff, and no way is made.)

Jacobs ladder: A rope ladder, lowered from the deck, as when pilots or passengers come aboard.

jibe: To change direction, when sailing with the wind aft, so that the wind comes on a different quarter and the boom swings to the opposite side; an accidental jibe can be dangerous.

king spoke: The topmost spoke of a steering wheel when the rudder is in a centered position.

knot: (1) Unit of speed, one nautical mile per hour; (2) a general term for a hitch or bend.

lazarette: A small storage compartment at the stern.

lee: The direction toward which the wind blows; an object sheltered from the wind is “in the lee.” A lee shore is the coast lying in the direction toward which the wind is blowing.

let go and haul: The command to slack the downhaul and haul on halyard to set a sail (or reverse)

life preserver: A flotation coat, vest, ring, or cushion; PFD or Personal Flotation Device in the US.

lights: Lighthouses or beacons; fixed aids to navigation equipped with light sources having prescribed characteristics.

line: A rope in use aboard a vessel; laid line is formed by twisting three (sometimes four) strands; braided line may be single or braid over a core.

LOA: length over all; the maximum length of a vessel’s hull.

lubber’s line: The index mark inside the compass, by which the course is read and the vessel is steered.

luffing: When the sails are not filling correctly and flutter.

make fast: To secure to a pin using three figure-eight turns

marline: Light two-stranded line, formerly made from hemp, tarred or untarred, used for lacings, whippings, seizings, and servings.

marlinespike: A pointed steel tool for splicing line.

mast: A vertical spar, the main support of the sailing rig in sailboats.

masthead light: A white light, at or near the masthead, used under way by a vessel under power at night; the range of visibility required varies with the size of the vessel; the arc of visibility is from dead ahead to 22.5 degrees abaft the beam, on both sides, depending on the applicable rules.

MAYDAY: A radio distress call, from the French m’aidez (help me); SOS in Morse code.

mizzen mast: to a ketch or yawl, the aftermost mast; the mizzen sail is set on this mast.

monkey fist: A special and fancy knot, used to weight the end of a heaving line.

mouse, mousing: Turns of twine or wire, taken across a hook to prevent accidental unhooking or around pin of a shackle to keep it from loosening.

nautical mile: 6076.12 feet, or 1852 meters, an international standard; (A statute mile is 5280 feet.)

nun: A type of cylindrical buoy, tapering toward the top, used in the American system of aids to navigation; typically nun buoys are red and are identified with an even number.

outhaul: A line, tackle, or geared mechanism used to tighten or adjust the foot of a sail on a boom.

overall length: The extreme length of a vessel, excluding spars or rigging fittings. See LOA.

painter: A topline or tie-up line for a dinghy or other small boat.

pay out: To release line in a controlled manner, as an anchor rode.

PFD: US official terminology for life preserver; personal flotation device.

pier: A structure, usually wood or masonry, extending into the water, used as a landing place for boats and ships.

piling: A structure of piles.

preventer: A line or block and tackle used to keep a boom in position.

rail: A protective edge on deck; also a solid bar on supports, similar to a lifeline.

reef knot: The knot used to tie in a reef; a square knot, also useful for tying around an object but not good for fastening two lines together.

reef points: Tie lines, placed at intervals horizontally on a sail, used to reduce sail area when they are tied around the foot of the sail.

rigging: The wire rope, rods, lines, hardware, and other equipment that support and control the spars and sails; standing rigging is semi-permanent once set up; running rigging is continually adjusted as the sails are hoisted, doused, trimmed, or reefed.

roll home: bring the furled square sail up on top of the yard before gasketing.

rolling hitch: A knot useful for attaching a line to another line or to a spar.

Rudder: The control surface, usually aft, by which a boat is steered.

running lights: The required lights, called Navigation Lights, which a vessel shows at night or in poor visibility, to indicate position, course, and occupation.

running rigging: The adjustable lines used for the control of spars and sails.

sailing by the lee: Sailing with the wind from astern on the lee side. The closest point of sail possible without jibing.

sailing by the wind or sailing full and by: Adjusting helm to keep the sails as full as possible.

Samson post: A single bitt forward used to fasten dock lines.

screw: A propeller; sometimes called a wheel.

sea cock: A through-hull valve, a shut off on a plumbing or drain pipe between the vessel's interior and the sea.

sea furl: A furl, while underway, meant to secure the sail safely and quickly. Neatness is not the first priority

seizing: Binding two lines together, or a rope to a spar and so on, using light line.

serving: Covering and protecting a portion of a line, to prevent wear.

shackle: A metal link fitting with a pin across the throat, used to connect lines to an anchor, fasten blocks to a spar in rigging, or a line to a sail.

sheave: A grooved wheel or pulley over which rope or rigging wire runs, used to change the direction of force; often sheaves are parts of blocks.

sheet: A line used to control a sail's lateral movement, either directly or by limiting the movement of a boom or other spar.

sheet in: Haul in on the sheet of the sail.

sheet bend: A knot useful for bending a line to an eye or to join two lines of different sizes.

shrouds: Fixed rigging on either side of the mast.

skin: A section of sail used to encase the rest of the sail to create a sausage-like furl.

slack away: The command to let out on a line.

small stuff: Cordage such as marline, sail twine, primarily used for whippings and servings.

sole: The cabin or cockpit floor.

spars: Masts, booms, gaffs, and poles used in sailboat rigging.

splice: To join two lines, or make an eye, by tucking strands of rope.

spring line: Dock lines used to control fore and aft motion of a boat made fast to a pier or float.

square knot: Another name for the reef knot, useful for tying two ends of a line together, as around an object; not a good knot to fasten two lines where the strain will be intermittent.

standing rigging: The permanent stays and shrouds, as well as some other rigging parts, used mainly to hold up the mast and take the strain of the sails; although necessarily somewhat adjustable the standing rigging is not continually changed as is the running rigging.

starboard: The right hand side of a boat when facing forward; the direction to the right.

stays: Rigging, generally wire or rods, used to support the masts in a fore-and-aft direction and to carry some sails.

stern: The after portion of the boat.

tacking: The sailing maneuver in which the direction of the boat is changed, often with rigging adjustments, so that the wind is coming from the other side of the vessel.

take up: haul

that's well: stop hauling or slacking

throat: The forward upper corner of a four-sided fore and-aft sail.

topsides: (1) The sides of a vessel above the waterline; (2) on deck as opposed to below deck.

turnbuckle: A threaded, adjustable rigging fitting, used for stays, and other rigging

underway: In motion, en route, not at anchor or aground

upwind: To the windward of

VHF radio: A Very High Frequency electronic communications and direction finding system

way: The movement of the vessel (leeway: movement to lee, under way or making way: vessel moving)

weather side: The side of a vessel upon which the wind is blowing

weighing anchor: Bringing the anchor up

wheel: (1) The steering wheel; (2) the propeller

whipping: Twine wound around a line, as on the end or at an eye splice, to add strength and prevent fraying or abrasion

windlass: A special form of winch, a rotating drum device for hauling a line or chain

windward: The direction from which the wind is blowing

yard: A spar, crossing the mast, on which square sails are fitted

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