



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Sailing the British Virgin Islands:  
First Night Aboard**

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## **Sailing the British Virgin Islands Report 2: First Night Aboard**

**October 19, 2008**

After the initial meeting of the crew members and our briefing on the man overboard drill (ok, the person overboard drill), we walked back to our boat. The craft was now ready for our 13-day residence and 12 days of sailing. We loaded gear and provisions, after which we were given a three-hour briefing about the boat by the boat owners.

Speaking of the crew, the boat was designed with four passenger cabins (each with a separate head), a small sleeping space and another head for hired sailors. We had no hired hands, so four couples made up the crew:

- Crew couple one: Steve and Connie, known as Skipper and Skipperette.
- Crew couple two: Joe and Suzi, known as One Tack and Sweet Sea.
- Crew couple three: Blayde and Launa, known as Chief Bosun and Double Duty.
- Crew couple four: Reporter and Reporterette, known as Swabee and Red Hook.

The briefer was an Aussie named Bruce. He warmed to us as he began to learn that Skipper and One Tack were knowledgeable sailors and that Chief Bosun was a quick study. He also told us he was very fond of Americans. He said we were, “friendly sorts” (his words). Also his words, “If it weren’t for you, we’d all be Muslims.”

It was good to hear something positive about us. As you know, during this time, I am also writing about a trip into the Baltic Sea area, and in that part of the world, the views on Americans are not quite as positive.

### **Sail Me to the Moon and Let Me Fly across the Sea**

Bruce was a seasoned sailor and told us his sailing time (distances) was akin to twice-going to the moon and back. I recalled from my 8<sup>th</sup> grade science days that the moon is about 238,000 miles from earth. Thus, Bruce has sailed almost a million miles (238,000 miles x 4 = 972,000). Consider that a relatively straight line sailing course (not to include tacks) from New York to England is around 3,000 miles; or from Australia to California is about 7,000 miles. That’s a lot of time devoted to sailing.

Assume a sailboat moves through the water at, say, 9 miles per hour. Bruce has sailed for 108,000 hours (972,000 / 9 = 108,000); about 642 weeks; just over 12 years! And as mentioned, that is straight line sailing, which does not include *tacks* (moving at angles from a straight path to take advantage of wind direction).

If tacks are included, Bruce has sailed in distances akin to twice going to the most distant galaxy in the universe and back.

The briefing was important. I had trouble absorbing much of the information because I had made the mistake of not taking the time to learn about basic terms associated with sailing. And for this

omission, I paid the price throughout the first week. As examples, in my notes I have the following shorthand scribbles, "...Bruce---leech and luff lines...??); and ...Genoa lines...??"

My boatmates nodded their heads to show they understood Bruce's advice and instructions. I did, too, as skipper warned us (me) not to appear too stupid as Bruce might not rent us the boat. Fat chance. Skipper and No Tack knew their stuff, and Chief Bosun organized (tied-up) yards of electrical cable during our embarkation that even impressed Bruce. I thought of bragging that I knew how many GPS satellites rotated around the earth, but I kept this abstraction to myself.

### **The *Pleiades***

The *Pleiades*, shown in Figure 2, is a large sailboat with two hulls, which is called a catamaran. This craft was amazing. It had two freezers! Not to mention a frig, TV, DVD, stereo, GPS, and...thankfully, air conditioning. Red Hook and I occupied the stern cabin located on the port side of the boat. We had the luxury of a double bed (berth) and as mentioned, a private head.



**Figure 2. The *Pleiades*.**

### **Talk Sailor, Hoss!**

For you landlubbers: Restrooms, johns, bathrooms, or toilets do not exist on a ship or boat. They are called heads. Beds are called berths. And regardless of the fact that on large ships, you may walk up and down stairs, they are not stairs. They are ladders. In my navy days, when on temporary duty aboard an aircraft carrier, a very large set of stairs connected two of the main floors (that is, decks). But no one called them stairs. They were ladders.

Do not even think walls. They are bulkheads. Left and right? Nope. Port and starboard. To the rear? Nope. Aft. In front? Forward. Kitchen? Mess. Stop? Avast. Secure the windows? Batten

down the hatches. Steering wheel? Helm. Hallway? Passageway. Please stand aside? Make a hole! Forget what I just said? Belay my last!

### **Stop Leeching, you Miserable Luff**

Here is another recommendation for new sailors: Arrive early on the boat in order to memorize the functions of about a dozen lines that are attached to the main sail. If you are suddenly ordered to, “Take in the leech!”...Don’t take it personally. The skipper is instructing you to tighten up a line attached to the part of a sail that is farthest from the mast.

Why is the skipper shouting this order? Because a few seconds ago, he directed you to “Let out the luff!”...which is a line attached to the front edge of the sail.

What I discovered about sailboat lines (which will be included in my new book, “Ten Easy Steps to Becoming a Happy Sailor.”) is: There are usually two separate lines for any one action. The purpose of one line is to recover from the incorrect use of the other line and vice versa.

About my new book. Here’s a preview:

- First step: Hire a crew.
- Second step: Drink Cuba Libres.
- Third step: While watching the crew members luff and leech to their hearts’ content.

In the next report, we put to sea. Destination? Norman Island, also known as Treasure Island, where I will clue you in on more steps to take toward sailor happiness.

Athwartships mates! I heard the word during the briefing. It means across the boat (ship) side to side. That much I know, but imagine, I spent almost three years at sea aboard five different U.S. Navy vessels, and I could not sail a rubber sailboat in my bathtub. The term *sailor* has lost its meaning in the Uncle Sam’s Navy. But never mind, I am no longer in Uncle Sam’s Navy. I’m in the navy of Captain Steve and Commodore Connie.