



**Your on the  
Water Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Cruising the Northern Mediterranean  
Getting Started**

## Cruising the Northern Med Report One: Getting Started

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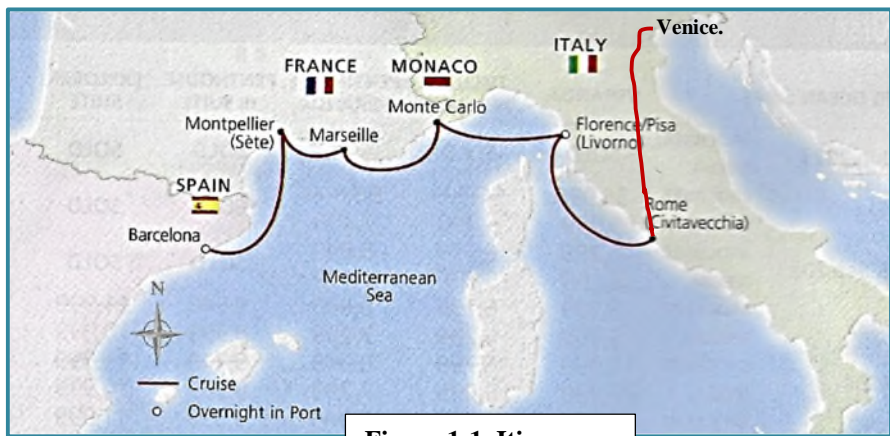
In the early 1960s, a few weeks prior to receiving commissions as Ensigns in the United States Navy, the officer candidates were allowed to select three positions (billets), in which they would like to serve. My first choice was the Underwater Demolition Teams (forerunners to the SEALs), deployed anywhere. My second choice was air, with a carrier in the Atlantic Ocean and deployments to the Mediterranean Sea. My third choice was destroyers, also deployed to the Med.

I suspected (correctly) if I were selected for UDT, I would likely end-up in Asia, and beach operations in Vietnam. But it was not a difficult choice, even though I had longed for many years to visit the Med. For many more years, I had longed to be a frogman. Still, the many movies I saw as a child and teenager convinced me that the Mediterranean Sea was meant for me. Eventually, that idea came true, but that part of my youthful dreams would have to wait a while.<sup>1</sup>

For now, at a time when I have considerably more years behind than in front of me, I wanted to take one more cruise on the Med and visit ports and cities that lingered in my fanciful memories.

Borrowing from Oscar Wilde: *Memories are diaries that we carry with us throughout life.* I wanted to reopen parts of my diaries and write some more pages before this book closed on me permanently.

The seven-day cruise entailed our ship docking one or two nights at a different port, as shown in Figure 1-1. The sailings would be at night and partially during the day. Each day would present opportunities to go on guided tours or go-out on our own, doing some exploring of cities and country sides. We also set up our trip to stay in Rome for few days and also visit Venice, traveling parts of Italy by rail.



- Day 1-2 Barcelona**
- Day 3 Montpellier**
- Day 4 Marseille**
- Day 5 Monaco**
- Day 6-7 Florence/Pisa**
- Day 8-15 Rome**
- Day 16-18 Venice**
- Day 19-20 Rome**

Figure 1-1. Itinerary.

<sup>1</sup> And it came about in 2006. I have chronicled this fanciful cruise on my blog at [blog.UylessBlack.com](http://blog.UylessBlack.com). Go to this site, and scroll down to the link, "24. Foreign Places." Click on it. The first entries have links you can click to download articles on the places we visited.



Figure 1-2. The Viking Sky.

We were traveling on the Viking River Cruises ship named, *Viking Sky*, as depicted in Figure 1-2. Viking's name with "River Cruises" in it is one the company took on years ago. It now offers ocean and other water cruises, one being the journey we were taking.

### **Air Trip: From Spokane, Seattle, and Frankfurt to Barcelona, Spain**

Our departure port was Barcelona, Spain. We chose to fly first class, which is a term for business class on the airplane in which we were passengers. Some airlines/planes offer first, business, premier, and coach categories for seat purchase.

**A Short Diversion.** Permit a short diversion that is needed to offer context to some episodes in these reports: my bodily maladies. My back and hip injuries from many diving mishaps in my youth and Navy times, worsened by old-age arthritis, have relegated me to the handicapped citizenry...and first-class flying.

Who says being handicapped means living a handicapped existence? For many years I flew coach class. Like the present, the coach seat is excruciatingly small and jammed toward the forward seat so closely, it is almost impossible to even cross one's legs. Twelve hours of air time undergoing bodily contortions in coach-class seat? At these later days in my journeys, if I am to air-travel, I'll pay a call to my IRA and make sure those days of close quarters are behind me.

Fact is, much of my travel is also behind me. I am informing my friends and loved ones that it is probable I will not attend their funerals, in the off-chance they might invite me. Well, not they, themselves, as they would not be sending "Come to my wake" invitations. Others would send this RSVP.

By the way, while on this subject, I dislike funerals so much I am hesitant to attend my own. But I recognize I will have no choice in this matter. Wakes are a part of the Black family heritage.

Along with an ever-present cane to keep my body vertical. Various doctors have said nerve damage to my hearing "system" is the reason for my balance problems and another reason for the steadying cane.

Isn't America great? Uncle Sam presents me with a generous VA disability check each month, because Uncle gifted me with Agent Orange heart problems, plus irreparable ear nerve injuries and an injured back. ...But I make light, as many other countries are far less generous to their war veterans.

**Flight to Barcelona.** Lufthansa has designed its first-class passenger seats in a first-class fashion. The most important part of this design is the ability to lay down the seat, making it a complete bed---a narrow bed, but a head-to-toe out-lay for its customers to lay-out. Food and drink for the asking at any time. A down comfort spread to insulate oneself from a deliciously

cold cabin. If I am fortunate enough to make it to heaven, I hope the Heavenly Gate keeper will fly me first-class...Lufthansa would fill the bill nicely to get me to the entrance.

One of the “perks” of growing old is the nearly incessant need to visit the toilet. In the middle of the night on the flight to Barcelona, I arose from my comfortable but admittedly close-quartered bed to head to the head. The cabin was dark, with lights on the floor to show the way along the passage way. The seat areas were unlit.

Making my way back to my seat, it was impossible to discern one row of seats from another. (A suggestion to Lufthansa: a small flashlight in your complimentary bag of toiletries.) Hm, I thought our seats were in the number three row. Counting as best I could in the dark, I detected my home seat, the window-side, with Holly on the aisle. I commenced climbing over Holly’s body to reach my seat/bed.

Lo and behold, someone was sleeping in my bed! I bent down to get a closer look at the interloper. It was a woman. I bent down to get a closer look at the person next to her. It was a man. As best I would tell from the dark, both were looking up at me.

Thankfully, they did not scream or make any other protest. The woman calmly offered, “You’re in the next row.”

Chastened by this patient woman, I climbed over her man again, made it onto the passageway to row three and to my designated slot for the night.

The next morning when passengers were stirring from a luxurious slumber, I left my seat again. In doing so, I glanced down at the passengers in row four, who were glancing up at me. I offered, “Madam, my apologies for trying to get in bed with you last night.”

One of the many benefits accruing to a half-cripple is being able to ride a wheelchair through, around, and (on relatively rare occasions) over walking passengers. Poor blokes, they don’t know what they are missing by not being handicapped.

Nonetheless, scores of people make it a point to move suddenly when they detect my approaching wheelchair. Polite, deferential, and courteous, even when they are almost run over by my wagon master, the wheelchair driver.

I am impressed and pleasantly surprised by the kindness shown to me by just about everyone when they see me with my cane. I expected nothing from others when I started using a cane. Instead, I have received universal thoughtfulness.

The distances between our arriving-departing gates in Seattle to Frankfurt and Frankfurt to Barcelona, took us through several terminals and subway trains. I felt sorry for Holly. She is a hardy and healthy woman, but I hoped she was not getting tired from the long walks.

It seemed a substantial proportion of the population was becoming handicapped. Perhaps because I was now using wheelchairs, I noticed there many such vehicles wheeling around. Like all passengers, the wheelchair occupants collected around their boarding gates. At our gate, we waiting to be the first allowed to board (that handicapped handicap again), a long line of wheelchairs was queued up, me included. There I sat...in a wagon train of invalids, waiting for yet more handicapped favors...all with gratitude.