



**Your on the  
Water Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Cruising the Northern Mediterranean  
Montpellier-At Sea**

## **Cruising the Northern Med Report Three: Montpellier – At Sea**

**August 6, 2023**

What if you knew it was going to be your last time to experience something that had been part of you for most of your life? Seeing a sunset, a dawn? Holding your loved one? Sailing the seas?

I suppose we all ask these kinds of questions, but we seldom know the self-queries of others. They live in their own skins and thoughts. We do the same.

Of my thirty-three months on a US Navy ship, at least half of that time was spent on a ship that was underway in the Western Pacific. From those times of youth, it never occurred to me that I would someday no longer ride a ship that ploughed the seas. Perhaps, subconsciously, I just assumed I would always have this joyful experience in my life. I am not suggesting this ocean voyage is my last, but I do know there are not many nights sailing on salt waters left in my travels.

My handicaps have recently become a factor. I often cannot take tours of the ports and the places around the ports. Too much walking is required.

But I know I will be content taking a cruise, solely to be on the seas. It might come about that I will not be able to take land excursions during a cruise. In the long run, that is secondary to my wanting to do be on an ocean or a river. I've seen enough crumbling castles and mossy tombstones.

Just as long as I have a balcony from my cabin where, at any time, I have the solitude to watch and hear the water against the hull and listen to the wind passing by ...especially at night...that will be enough for me.

I am paraphrasing some thoughts from my book *A Swimmer's Odyssey: From the Plains to the Pacific*. They are memories I had and have of some of those times on Navy ships.

While at sea, if I were not on watch, after dinner, I spent most of the evenings away from my stateroom. My favorite place was the deck above and overlooking the admiral's bridge. It was the highest deck on the ship and contained a small space housing electronic gear.

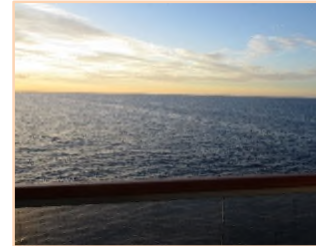
Rarely did the ship's personnel come up there in the evenings. So, I had my own private balcony. During this time, I spent hours watching the fleeting aspects of the translucent water as the ship made its way to the next port.

The water's reflections appeared to be glowing from the reflected moon beams. Yet the water also took on a strange light that appeared brighter than the moon itself. But for only a second or so, then the reflection would disappear and the water would return to an aqueous prairie of black waves---possessing immense power, symbolic of the ocean's force and depth.

From this height, the only sounds I could occasionally hear were the waves falling alongside the ship's bow. If I turned my head at a slight angle, I could also hear the wind passing by. Even more pleasant was the breeze generated from the ship's movements. The Western Pacific air was warm, but the breeze cooled my body and bolstered my spirits.

Someone once said, “Things are beautiful if you love them.” I suspect this quote could be uttered about almost anything. At this time, the quote pertained to the Navy and the opportunity it gave me for this experience. I loved this part of my life. It was beautiful.

And to the present: At sea, once again, with a view from our balcony:



Because of high winds and rough seas, the ship was unable to dock or anchor at Montpellier. We spent the day and night slowly sailing, preserving fuel no doubt, as the ship made its way to Marseille, as shown in Figure 3-1.



Figure 3-1. Bypassing the weather.

**A Floating Museum.** As I walked around the ship and began to understand the layout of its decks, it became evident the Viking Lines owners were proud of Norway’s history of the country’s explorers of the Arctic and Antarctic parts of the world, as well as many aspects of Norway’s culture.

Throughout the ship are photos, paintings, books, and sculptures that celebrate Norway’s history, several shown shortly.

I am an admirer of Norway and the extraordinary history of its explorers. And they were not the run-of-the-mill adventurers. Some of these men, such as Roald Amundsen and Fridtjof Nansen, performed feats of bravery and cold-climate surveying that are recognized as some of humans’ most famous and dangerous world voyages.

At the bow of the ship is an entertaining and educational museum about this history, as seen in Figure 3-2. The exhibits include original logs of journeys, numerous books, equipment used on the treks, study areas, and scaled replicas of some of the ships used in their expeditions.

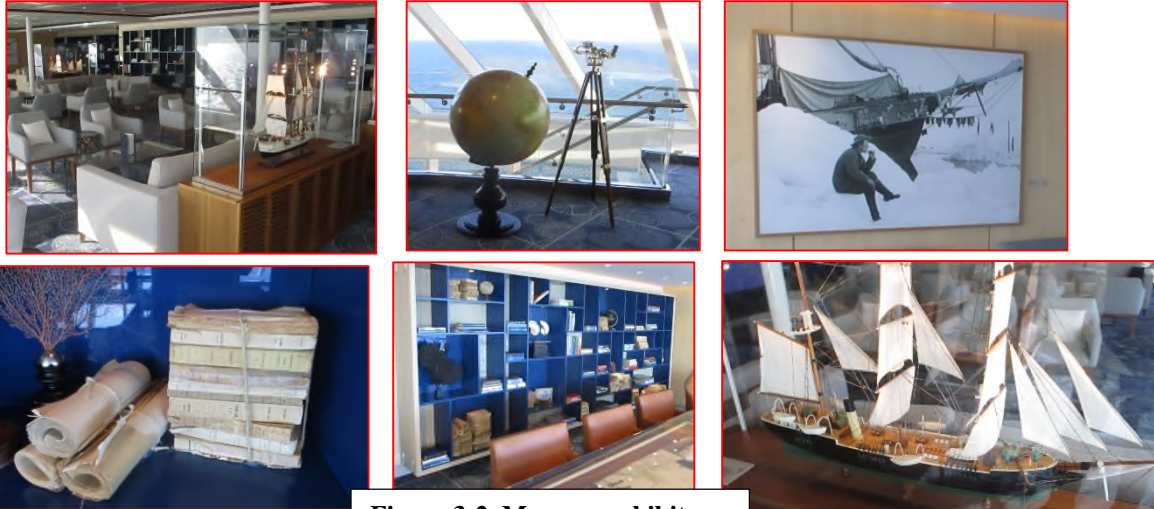


Figure 3-2. Museum exhibits.

As mentioned, throughout the ship, one can come across many museum pieces and other artifacts of the Norwegians' pioneering spirit, as seen in Figure 3-2.

And no casinos, for which I thank Viking. I like playing Texas Hold'um, but there is a time and place for gambling. Cruise ships are not one of those places. I suspect unwary tourists fall prey to card sharks who sign on to cruises or the purpose of fleecing them. One could ask, so what? The same thing goes on in Las Vegas: predatory gamblers. Fine, but abetting this kind of behavior is at odds with what a cruise line is supposed to do: Provide for the entertainment and security of its passengers.

**Ship's Décor.** The Sky Viking vessel's passenger areas have been artfully designed and tastefully decorated. One example is shown in Figure 3-3. The stairway (in navy jargon, ladder) connects two decks where many of the ships' community areas are located. The silver emblems, on the wall facing a stairwell, depict some of Norway's history.

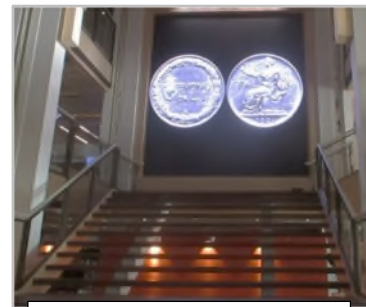


Figure 3-3. Ship's décor.

It was time to move on. Next stop: Marseille.