



**AS THE SUN SET ON A BALMY NIGHT IN ATHENS**

last summer I was delighted to join the editor for a dinner of lobster washed down with some fine Perrier water. On our stroll back to Zia Marina we discussed the ever changing yachting scene and career opportunities and decided to indulge our conversation some more over coffee. Sitting across the way from the fine vessel I had command of, I felt pride at the admiration of the passers-by taking photos and just enjoying the glitter of such a fine yacht in port. Just by watching faces you could see people dreaming right there and then of working on, vacationing on or even owning a yacht. Apogee was secured serenely to the quay her underwater lights sparkling in the marina and setting up a welcoming glow around her.

We chatted about the presentation of yachts and crew. We reminisced on our days together on the 79 m motor yacht Massarah in the late eighties and the seemingly endless rules that were in place to organise and operate such a large vessel. The owners used her continually from May to September every summer. Colin asked me if I still observe the flag etiquette we both once so rigidly followed when I was a deckhand and Colin my chief officer. 'Of course' was my answer. In those days two deckhands went to the observation deck at ten minutes to flag time. One raised or lowered the courtesy flag of the country we were in, the other the owners flag and at the same time another deckhand in unison raised or lowered the main ensign in a timely manner, and at that time we were more than often the vessel in port that the others would take their lead from.

As the sun rose the following day it was to become the second time during my command that the watch-keepers on

**ETIQUETTE****OXFORD DICTIONARY:**

*Conventional rules of social behaviour*

**BY CPT. MARTYN WALKER**

board had a different regard for my passion for etiquette procedures than mine. To Colin's amusement my ensign was not up on time and without a radio call from me would not have been flying for quite some time there after I am sure. Much to my embarrassment and with ensuing text messages between Colin and myself he went on his way delivering magazines around the super yacht marinas in the Med, I hoped not repeating the story to too many people.

This got me thinking. The crew was somewhat baffled about my pre-occupation with having the flag raised and lowered on time. Why would they be? This is a time honoured tradition at sea. How much etiquette is being lost, or disregarded in today's yachting world and if so why? The boats are bigger, the pay is better and now it is a career job. Why should we be losing the etiquette values that have always been around? They can surely only be a good thing and help maintain some kind of discipline



onboard. All countries still fly their national flags with pride everywhere for all to see. Does crew see a Cayman flag different from their national flag, or that they are not flying their own national flag hence do not care about a Red Duster or a Marshal Island or Cayman Island flag?

In 1987 I embarked aboard the motor yacht *Massarah* as a deck hand. I felt I had the best job in the world and she was certainly one of the largest yachts in the world at that time. With a crew of 44 there was a very serious requirement for a 'conventional code of conduct'. That did not sit so well with me on a lot of things but rules were very necessary to operate at the level the boat was performing at. Some rules came straight from seafaring books I had read as a kid and were just plain traditions at sea, putting the flags up and down is one of those things. A few years later I was on the motor yacht *Eco* (now *Enigma*) when she was being handed over from Blohm and Voss shipyard to her new owner. I begged Captain John Clarke to let me be the first to fly the British ensign at the hand-over ceremony. He let me and I was proud. I remember the Brits on board and the Germans standing to attention at the ceremony as if this was suddenly one nation handing over to another nation. Was it just because it was an Anglo-German affair?

As my career moved forward I always had a naval approach

to running a yacht where it suited me. I did an apprenticeship under Commander Stan Antrim on *Ambrosia* in Hong Kong where my perceived British Navy traditions met the real deal from the US Navy. Captain Stan found me lacking in some areas on tradition but can never say I was not open to learn his way. I kept many of those ways. Still today I tell my crew that when the boat comes in and out of port the visual of our profile must look like a Navy ship sailing in. The crew must be presented on the decks. Evenly spaced, no talking or leaning on the capping rail and the smoking lamp is definitely not 'lit'.

This all stems from my interest as a kid of seafaring traditions and my unrealised childhood dreams of joining the navy. Maybe, as a friend of mine with twenty two years in the Royal Navy told me, I am just a 'frustrated matlo'. Where ever it came from I did what sailors did. I got an anchor tattooed on my arm with the words 'homeward bound' because that was what sailors did. I swapped my loafers for deck shoes, I bought some Ray Ban sunglasses, then I got a crockie to hold them on. I drank Heineken and far surpassed my daily tot of Mount Gay rum because that's what sailors did. This was all my calling and I embraced the traditions and a 'conventional code of conduct'.

Are the crew of today like this? Were the deckhands in my day really like that or do I just remember it like that? I know we



all had a loyalty to each other and pride in the yachts we worked on. Our yacht was the cleanest, the biggest, the fastest and the shiniest. The crew were the coolest, prettiest, richest or all of the above. We were a bunch of organised vagabonds somehow running away from conforming at home only to finally conform on board. I remember being out and about at work or play and the looks we gave at motor yacht 'My Gail's' tender passing or being told that's the crew from motor yacht 'Paraiso' were the best paid crew in yachting. When Eco reached the Med on her maiden voyage we thought we were the elitist crew ever to be formed. Actually we were. We were called EGO not Eco and that was just fine with us. We had lessons from the captain on throwing heaving lines before we left the yard dare anyone ever mess that up. Motor yacht 'New Horizon' would send a man to 'Coventry'(not talk to them) if they missed a heaving line throw. Southern Cross had a competition to throwing lines in Monaco of which I dare not repeat the rules. We walked around like feathers fluffed up about what boat we worked on. It was a ritual on the docks and in the bars, you were the boat you worked on.

I hope that the crew still gets to fluff their feathers up in front of each other socially today. Professionally they get plenty of chances. Yacht presentation goes from flag etiquette, gangway etiquette, tender driving etiquette, fender etiquette, guest etiquette, service staff etiquette, general crew etiquette, security etiquette, 'who owns the boat' etiquette, all the traditional codes of conduct that were out there are for some reason appearing to disappear fast on some yachts.

I was docked on the outside wall in Monaco harbour last summer. Monaco is for me the Cream of the Cream of the world's harbours for style. My wheelhouse faced out to the immediate entrance to the port and I was amazed to note how many beautiful yachts sail in and out with fenders over the side. I saw unevenly spaced fenders, different coloured fender covers and the worst for me fenders at different heights. Boats leaving port oblivious to knowing fenders are still over the side. Crews were leaning on the rails smiling and laughing, fenders meantime were getting washed up and down by the motion of their own headway. Does the story go on from there? Once tied to the dock does that same boat with disorderly fenders then not have a smart gangway watch, not follow flag etiquette? Does that same boat not have a crew who like to strut their feathers in front of each other and compete for the title of best boat in the port? Monte Carlo is Travel Channel material. You work on one of those private yachts that sail into Monaco as seen on the movies. Surely a boat not having it right with presentation in Monaco will never have it right.

How deep does that run through the yacht when the visual part is lacking in the high profile ports of the world. How does the boson's locker look, how does the boson's bathroom look come to



think of it, on Massarah cabin inspection included checking the tops of doors for dust!

We, in yacht crewing, work in a very high profile world never knowing who is watching us. The person on the next door sundeck could be our next yacht owner employer. My crew once and only once sat to drink beer on the dock at the IYCA behind the boat and I asked them would they drink outside the owners house on the street after work. Probably not. I believe that the traditions of etiquette are part of the foundation that anchor us. Without this code of conduct passed down over years from seafarer to seafarer part of the act of being a seafarer is lost.

I urge everyone to embrace some tradition and etiquette for the sake of keeping that moral unwritten code between seamen alive. Let us keep etiquette as part of the building block of the crew way of life.

Watch in English Harbour Antigua just how many of the crews are waiting to lower the ensign at sunset. It is a model harbour for that and maybe is that because of all the seafaring tradition that surrounds you in that particular port? Is Nelson's presence enough to spur crew into that act in that port alone?

It is not the act of actually raising and lowering the flag that is the point here. It is the act of etiquette and traditions that have been built on for many years. Yachts are getting bigger and more high tech by the day but they all have flag staffs on the aft and halyards up the mast. Obviously flags are not going away anytime soon. Neither should the etiquette.

God Save the Queen and God save us all that we should not perish in a sea of sloth devoid of traditions. >||

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