



21st Century Seamanship

By Witherby Publishing Group

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The term 'seamanship' is much misunderstood by those who are not required to practise the art. Seamanship is also hard to define succinctly as the breadth of knowledge, skills and experience the term encompasses take many a lifetime to acquire. When I arrived aboard my first ship a little over forty years ago, the ships that made up the world's merchant fleets, the technologies employed on board and the regulations that governed the industry, and indeed the seafarers themselves, bore little in common with today. However, despite all the technologies that connect ship and shore and keep communications links open at all times, the fact remains that, once a ship puts to sea, it is primarily dependent upon the actions of the master and crew to safely and efficiently execute the voyage, bringing profit to the owner whilst making sure all aboard return safe and well on completion. All must depend on each other, in a variety of circumstances; the ability to perform the broad range of tasks required safely and efficiently, whilst being fully aware of the associated hazards and mitigating measures, is in the broadest sense 'seamanship'. The technological advances seen today have led to the launching of more and more specialist ships, all requiring equally specialist knowledge to operate them. There is a danger that the rate of technological advance outpaces the ability of the industry to train competent mariners to operate the increasingly complex ships on which they serve. The need for continued professional development for mariners is inarguable, but this can be difficult to achieve when many ships cannot provide access to the online references enjoyed by most other industries, a problem that has yet to be universally solved. That said, traditional knowledge and skills are still required as it is a stark fact that mooring accidents, lifeboat launching and enclosed space entry continue to kill and injure the unwary, as they have for many decades.

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