



Naval and Nautical Vocabulary

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

“The Man in the Arena” - Theodore Roosevelt, 25th President of the United States

All tightly knit groups—clubs, friends, professionals, or anyone who works closely with others whose shared experiences and skills are often foreign to outsiders—have their own way of communicating, using words and expressions that are sometimes difficult for people outside of their close circle to understand. The United States Navy is no exception. Much of the nautical *jargon*—this specialized way of communicating—used by sailors in the 21st Century has its roots in the history and traditions of the 17th Century wooden sailing vessels. Many American sailors serving in the Revolutionary War first learned their craft in the Great Britain’s Royal Navy, where many of these terms and traditions first originated.

Though maritime and military technologies have experienced enormous advances over the past several hundred years, many of these old expressions are very much in use today. Why? For one thing, maintaining a common vocabulary assures that sailors can communicate with and understand one another—anywhere in the world—so they can do their jobs more effectively. Not only that, but preserving these traditional terms is a way of staying connected to and preserving the traditions of the past. It is a way of honoring the Navy’s proud traditions and history, and a source of pride and respect among sailors themselves. No matter where sailors come from or when they serve, these shared experiences and traditions forge a bond of deep pride and camaraderie among shipmates that few in the civilian world will ever know.

Common Naval/Nautical Terms and Their Civilian Equivalents

Above - Up	Deck – Floor	Hull - Sides of the ship
Aft - Toward the rear	Fantail - Round stern overhang	Keel - Bottom edge of ship
ASAP – As soon as possible!	Forecastle (or “Fo’c’sle”) - Raised deck at the bow	Ladder Well - Stairway
Battle Stations – Sailors’ assigned posts in combat	Forward - Toward the front	Mess - Crew’s cafeteria
Below – Down	Galley - Ship’s kitchen	Overhead - Ceiling
Bogey – Possible enemy aircraft	General Quarters – An alarm warning of battle or danger	Port - Left
Bow - Front end of the ship	Gunwhale - Railing	Porthole – Window
Breach – A break or rupture	Hatch - Door	Quarter – Stern area, either side
Bulkhead – Wall	Head – Bathroom	Rack – Bed or bunk
Chow – Meal	Hoist – Raise	Secure – Close or fasten tightly
Colors – The flag		Starboard – Right
		Yardarm – Horizontal mast spar

Okay! Let's Talk "Sailor"!

1. A voice comes on the 1MC (i.e., the intercom) suddenly and says, "All hands, General Quarters! Man your Battle Stations! What does it mean?

2. Once you're there, another voice tells you, "Gunners! We've got bogies off the port quarter!" What does it mean? And what should you do?

3. What would it mean if someone said the following: "Seaman, go above and hoist the colors up the yardarm line!"?

4. If a cranky officer were to say to you, "Chief, if Petty Officer Jones isn't out of his rack and up that ladder well in 30 seconds, you're both going over the starboard gunwhale!" – what do you suppose you'd want to make sure Petty Officer Jones does in the next 30 seconds? And why?

5. If your buddy said to you, "Man, I just passed the galley, and chow smells awesome! We'd better get down to the mess deck ASAP!" – what's he telling you? And what had you better do?

Catching on? Got it? *Great!* Now make up some of your own!

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Let's Talk "Sailor"! – Teachers' Key

1. A voice comes on the 1MC (i.e., the intercom) suddenly and says, "All hands, General Quarters! Man your Battle Stations! What does it mean?

Attention, everybody on board! Alarm! / Danger! / We're under attack / getting ready to attack! Go where you're supposed to be for battle!

2. Once you're there, another voice tells you, "Gunners! We've got bogies off the port quarter!" What does it mean? And what should you do?

Heads up, you guys on the guns! We've just seen enemy airplanes coming at us from the left rear of the ship! Get ready!

3. What would it mean if someone said the following: "Seaman, go above and hoist the colors up the yardarm line!"?

"Sailor, go up to the next level to the main mast – the one with the big cross "T" on it – and raise the flag!"

4. If a cranky officer were to say to you, "Chief, if Petty Officer Jones isn't out of his rack and up that ladder well in 30 seconds, you're both going over the starboard gunwhale!" – what do you suppose you'd want to make sure Petty Officer Jones does in the next 30 seconds? And why?

"Chief, if Petty Officer Jones isn't out of bed and up those stairs by the time I count to thirty, I'm throwing you both over the right-side railing!"

5. If your buddy said to you, "Man, I just passed the galley, and chow smells awesome! We'd better get down to the mess deck ASAP!" – what's he telling you? And what had you better do?

"WOW. I just went by the kitchen, and whatever they're cooking smells great! We'd better get down to the cafeteria right away!"