

## Meditation for Friday, Dec. 11, 2020

My first two years of sea time as a Navigation Cadet were spent on Great Lakes bulk carriers. It was a lonely existence, and often after completing the 8pm to midnight watch, I would take a walk before retiring to bed. How do you take a walk on a ship you might ask? On a 730-foot ship, that is not a problem. At that late hour on a calm evening, all was quiet except for the hiss of water as it slipped past the ship's hull; my way was lit by the stars, and often the moon, and I was left in peace to reflect; reflect on Wendy back in our hometown, reflect on the day's problems, or just have a discussion with God as I paced the deck by myself, surrounded by God's peace.

It was not always so peaceful...during my third year at marine college, I wrote some Transport Canada exams and qualified for my Watchkeeping Mate's licence. Shortly after, I was assigned to a deep-sea tanker, and after a period of deep-sea time, I wrote more Transport Canada exams, and returned to the ship, with my Foreign Going Ocean Navigator's licence. Gone were those innocent days as a cadet.

One early winter's night, we were about 40 miles offshore, approaching Halifax from the open sea. Large ports like Halifax are laid out like airports, with three designated corridors (runways), with inbound and outbound lanes oriented in three different directions. There is even a control station (control tower) with a powerful radar system and radios to direct ship traffic. There is also a system called RACON, that sends out a Morse Code signal that is visible on the ship's radar display. At the outer end of each traffic lane is a floating buoy, and when a ship reaches that buoy, the ship's officer checks in with the control station and states his intentions.

It was raining when I took over the midnight to 4am watch...it doesn't really rain on the east coast; the heavens send down a solid wall of water. Our radar screen was totally opaque; the wall of water was blocking any indication of other nearby ships. The officer I was relieving informed me he had not been able to determine the ship's position for almost three hours....in short, we were lost; here we were, somewhere near Halifax, totally blind, surrounded by ships going in all directions, and I was now in charge. I was terrified.... My back was to the wall and there was nobody to turn to; I should have called the Captain, but he would be in the same position I was. But there was somebody I could count on; God, my friend with whom I had conversed on other ships. My mind went back to my marine college classes, and I fell back on one of the oldest methods of navigation that is still used today, Dead Reckoning. I checked the navigation chart for the last position fix my predecessor had made, checked the direction the ship was steering in, and the speed it was travelling, and determined how far we had travelled and approximately where we were now. I refined that by checking the tide tables to see how far off the tide and wind may have pushed the ship. My position showed we should be near the reporting buoy for our inbound lane, so I made a blind call to Chebucto Head control, and they confirmed our position. At almost that same instant, the rain eased and I could see the RACON signal from Chebucto, also confirming our position. I collapsed into my chair from sheer relief, and thanked God for remembering me as the young cadet he had conversed with in earlier years, and giving me the skills get myself out of a very tight situation.

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