

Underway Journal

Day 1: Arrived in Cordova, Alaska after a very long flight. I immediately went to the boat and checked in with the OOD and then left with my Ensign sponsor. We went back to her house and I dropped my stuff off. We then proceeded to go to the ship's morale party where I got to meet a lot of the people who I'll be working with and interacting with these next few weeks. After the party my Ensign sponsor, Cori, and I went to her friends' house along with OPS¹, XO² and the other JO³, LTJG G. We had a good time, ate food, played Catch Phrase and in general I felt I got to know the members of the wardroom a lot better.

Day 2: We baked...a lot. Buffalo wings, bacon cupcakes (which for some reason actually work, don't ask me why, but they do) we made beer bread, and buffalo chicken dip and then we went out to see the town. It's absolutely beautiful. It was a little rainy and a little foggy, but it was still absolutely gorgeous. I touched Prince Williams Sound, saw a glacier (only from a distance) had one of the best milkshakes I've ever had and then ended up back at Cori's friends house for another evening of fun with the wardroom. It was a good time.

Day 3: Today I went into the boat. One of the things Cori and LTJG G. kept stressing to me was "if it seems like we're giving you menial boring work to do that you'll never have to do as an Ensign: you're wrong. We're giving you work that we would have to do if you weren't here. Work like that is half of what you end up doing your Ensign tour. The other half is standing watch." So coinciding with that line of thinking, my first assignment was the ships store⁴. Taking inventory of all the times we had in stock, reorganizing the locker, bringing in new items and adding them to the stock (including about 13 dozen shirts and hoodies) securing everything for sea⁵ so that when we hit the 8-10 foot seas that we're expecting, it doesn't all fall to the ground or get damaged, and finally organizing it in a manger, which makes it most efficient for the person who will be running the store over the next underway period: oh yeah, that's going to be me, too. I'm excited though, I got to meet a lot of people today and in addition, I enjoy doing work that has visible results. That's what I got today. After leaving the ship, I went out on the town while Cori stayed home. If I thought yesterday was amazing, today was absolutely spectacular. There were no clouds, everything was crystal clear and it was beautiful. I played in glacial run-off, I mailed out 16 postcards and I drove around every inch of Cordova. It was great!

Day 4: Today was interesting. We got underway this morning, so liberty expired onboard the cutter at 0830. I eventually found my way up to the bridge and helped

¹ OPS: Operations Officer

² XO: Executive Officer

³ JO: Junior Officer

⁴ Ships Store: A miniature store located onboard a ship which is traditionally run by the Morale officer and contains candies, toiletries and drinks.

⁵ Securing for Sea: Ensuring that everything is tied down so that when the boat rolls and rocks nothing falls.

to set up the ECDIS⁶ system with all the information that is considered “standard” for the special sea detail. We got underway around 1030 and made our way out of the harbor. I was the starboard side bearing taker⁷, and it was a lot of fun being on the bridge during special sea detail. After we secured I left the bridge and laid below to set up my bunk, I was originally rooming with BMC⁸ Keener, but do to space reasons I got moved and am now living with OPS. It’s a nice arrangement. Once we had secured from lunch I grabbed some sea-sick pills since we are expecting 16-18’ seas and then headed back up to the bridge in order for us to start some training drills. Low and behold, five minutes into the drill an actual casualty occurs! An MK3⁹ accidentally stabbed himself in the eye with a screwdriver when the boat took a roll. He was taken to HS1¹⁰ and in sick bay they patched him up pretty well as a temporary fix. We had to medevac him out to Anchorage, Alaska though via a CG 65’ rescue chopper. They picked him up from the fantail¹¹ and flew him back to Cordova, where they transferred him to a C-130 to get him to Anchorage. As of now we still haven’t heard anything back from them regarding his status. I was on the bridge for the entire evolution and have some great pictures of it. In addition, I finished about 80% of my helm and lookout (H&L) packet during the first watch: guess helping those 4/c study for boards and having already been H&L qualified on a previous cutter is helpful. After an entire day of being on the bridge, I’ve just secured, help close out the ship’s store for the night and am getting ready for bed. I’ve got the morning 0400-0800 watch tomorrow as well, so I’m going to try and get my H&L qualifications finished then so I can take the board tomorrow and start working on my JOOD¹² qual.

Day 5

Today we hit rough seas. I woke up at 0300 in order to make it up to the bridge to relieve at 0315. We were hitting 6-8’ seas. Nothing too bad, but still rough. As the morning and watch progressed, we didn’t see a single thing except for the waves slowly increasing in size. As I sit writing this now, the waves are around 10-12’ and we are rocking and rolling every which way. I got seasick for the first time today actually: it’s not a pleasant experience. Needless to say I did not forget to take my seasickness meds this afternoon. In addition to getting qualified on watches, I’ve taken to helping to sort out and categorize all the information for *Sycamore*’s usual ports of call. There is a lot of information to be sorted, organized and cleaned up so that it is legible. These folders basically serve as a means by which a person can quickly obtain numbers, mooring information etc. in order to schedule an arrival

⁶ ECDIS: Electronic Charting Display and Information System, An electronic chart, which helps us, plot our track lines, maintain fixes etc.

⁷ Bearing Taker: Person who during Special Sea Detail uses an alidade to take bearings to specific points in order to help determine the cutters exact location.

⁸ BMC: Chief Boatswain’s Mate

⁹ MK3: Machinery Technician Third Class

¹⁰ HS1: Health Services Technician First Class

¹¹ Fantail: Rear of the boat

¹² JOOD: Junior Officer of the Deck

with the port, make a nav brief¹³, and prepare the ship to enter port. I'm essentially doing a lot of the leg work for them. It's fun though: I've already worked through the ports of Valdez and Yakutat. In addition we also did Abandon Ship drills, where we went outside and mustered by our departure area. I had to race a crewmember into a Mustang Survival Suit¹⁴: I won! Now I'm preparing to head up to the bridge for my last watch of the day. All I have left to do is to stand four more break-in watches before I can legally qualify as Helm and Lookout, since I already have the entire packet signed off. Now while I'm on the bridge, I'm going to be moving on to getting JOOD signoffs as well.

Day 6

Today we hit the worst part of the seas. The weather was horrible around 0930 this morning, so when I was on the morning 4-8 watch, we set Ho-Ro¹⁵ aboard the ship. It was nice because once I got off watch this morning I went straight back to bed. I woke up at 1345 in time to go to the all hands meeting at 1400 which talked about setting MCON¹⁶ about the ship and what our plans were during TSTA. I was told the cadet's job is typically to die during the drills, freeing up one more crew member to do actual work, but I was also told during some of the drills I would be on the bridge doing DC¹⁷ plate tracking, which is essentially to track what casualties/events happen when, and when we respond to them on a giant diagram of the ship. These DC plates are very important because they serve as logs and allow crews and evaluators to assess where the crew went wrong or missed something vital to our safety. I'm going to be reading up more on this form of log taking tonight. After that brief I went straight onto evening watch. I started working on JOOD sign-offs. Honestly I don't know if I'll be able to finish the JOOD quals before I leave because there are so many prerequisites and such which I also have to learn prior to being able to qualify. Well, I've got to get going, we've only got five or so more days til Hawaii, and I just found out that I'll be attending Fire School in Hono¹⁸. I'm super excited. More on that later, now onto some fundamental DC readings.

Day 7

¹³ Nav Brief: A navigational brief which outlines the procedures for entering port and mooring up in detail. Includes bearings and ranges, navigational hazards, routes, emergency anchorages and procedures, mooring instructions and ETA.

¹⁴ Mustang Survival Suit: A waterproof survival suit designed to help keep people alive who enter the water. Helps maintain a core body temperature longer.

¹⁵ Ho-Ro: Holiday Routine. A routine of the day where crew members can sleep and no work other than that which is mandatory for keeping the ship in good working order and safely running is required: i.e. standing watch

¹⁶ MCON: Radio Blackout mode. It's a plan in which any and all devices which emit any sort of radio frequency (laptops, radios, cell phones etc) are turned off in order to make the cutter undetectable by enemy ships using radio tracking devices.

¹⁷ DC: Damage Control

¹⁸ Hono: Honolulu, HI

Today was a great day. I stood my last break-in H&L this morning and took my board¹⁹ immediately following breakfast. I passed it and stood my afternoon 1600-2000 watch alone and qualified. It's a great feeling knowing that tomorrow I'm no longer on double 0400-0800 watches and I'll be breaking in JOOD instead. Hopefully I'll be able to finish it up before I leave. That's the goal anyway. In addition I'm going to be working the sound powered phones and recording damage control events on the DC plates. I'm going to be on the bridge acting as the go-between for the OOD and the DC crew in the DC Locker. So in order to prep for this, last night I read up on the DC signals and today during our preparatory drills I watched LTJG G. take the OOD and record the damage so I could get an idea of how it is done. I'm not going to lie, it's like learning a whole new language, but I don't think it will be too bad. I feel as though the most difficult part for me will be learning the frame numbers and locations of all the mechanical spaces onboard that I'll need to memorize. Well, tomorrow I have to start breaking in JOOD qualifications and finish up some more port of call sheets. I've already done six of them in my spare time. I'll attach the one for Yakutat Harbor to this journal when I send it off to be published. I've got to go hit the rack now but I'll see you later.

Day 8

I started standing double 8-12 JOOD watches today. Infinitely better than standing double 4-8 watches. I got quite a few sign offs this morning and have been learning a lot about the JOOD position, due to the amount of material you are required to know, you essentially become a miniature OOD in everything except for actually driving the ship. We did some more casualty drills today and I got to participate in them! We did a toxic gas leak in a main space drill and I acted as the damage control logger for the drill. I wrote down all the information on DC plates in the DC symbology as the event happened, made all the phone calls necessary in accordance with COMDNTINST²⁰ and SYCMORINST²¹ to notify personnel and I ensured that everything that needed to occur on the bridge for the OOD happened (taking accountability of personnel, tracking how long people had been on SCBA²² air etc.) so it was an exhilarating experience to say the least. Time literally stands still in those situations: which is a good thing since a million things need to happen at once. We had a morale night tonight, and we had a "wing-off" where members of the crew volunteered to make their own special chicken-wing recipes. We made it a contest and it was a lot of fun. I also learned how to write OPSUM²³s tonight and from now on they're going to be my responsibility. They're essentially a unit's nightly

¹⁹ Board: Prior to receiving qualifications a member must undergo a review board in which they are asked a series of questions and/or presented scenarios that they might face in their new duties. They must answer the questions correctly to receive the trust of command to be allowed to stand their position.

²⁰ COMDNTINST: Commandant's Instructions, a set of instructions from the Coast Guard Commandant governing essentially everything that happens in the Coast Guard, including the proper way in which to respond to casualty situations.

²¹ SYCMORINST: *Sycamore's* Instructions, a set of instructions issued by the CO of the USCGC *Sycamore* dictating how to respond specifically to casualties aboard *Sycamore*.

²² SCBA: Self Contained Breathing Apparatus

²³ OPSUM: Operational Summary

summary of the operations that they conducted in a given day. It's something I'm definitely going to have to do as a junior officer, so it's something that's really good to learn this summer. We also switched TACON²⁴ today from D17²⁵ to CG PACAREA²⁶, which just means that we're that much closer to Hawaii! Well, I'm going to go get ready for my second watch now. I'll write more tomorrow.

Day 9

Today was Sunday and as such it was a holiday routine. Its important to note though, that just because you have a holiday routine, doesn't mean that you're not going to have to do anything. I woke up at 0645 in order to stand the morning 8-12 watch as break-in JOOD. Today we shifted from +8 Uniform to +9 Victor at noon, then again at midnight we switched again to +10 Whiskey. It meant that both of my watches were half an hour longer than normal, it wasn't too bad, the time changes made things interesting with everyone referring to things like "Second or first noon?" and should mid-rats²⁷ be served at second 1130? Other than that today was pretty uneventful, there was a morale skeet shoot off the fantail, and morale pizza for dinner. Its getting a lot warmer outside, we broke into the sixties today. I can't wait to pull into port. I'm getting excited to see my friends in Hawaii, and for TSTA to start!

Day 10

Today was a busy day. I woke up at 0645, the normal reveille time, so that I could relieve for the morning JOOD watch from 0800-1200. After our first round we set the training environment and we started doing drills for TSTA. We did several small engineering drills, which didn't require a lot from me on the bridge, but after a while we did a full Steering Casualty drill in which we simulated a loss of steering and had to maneuver via aft steering²⁸. It was pretty cool; I was on the bridge logging all of the events as they occurred. Then after lunch, we had a drill in which we set GQ3²⁹ and subsequently GQ1³⁰ under the pretense that a fishing vessel was attempting to ram and sink our vessel. We donned flash gear and GQ helmets. After that drill things calmed down for about an hour before we conducted a man overboard drill. It was intense, we sent our small boat out to pick up our dummy "Oscar³¹" but when the boat came back the seas had gotten so rough that it was almost impossible to get

²⁴ TACON: Tactical Control, essentially whose jurisdiction we fall under

²⁵ D17: Coast Guard District 17 headquartered in Alaska

²⁶ CG PACAREA: Coast Guard Pacific Area Command headquartered in Alameda, California.

²⁷ Mid-Rats: A meal served near midnight for those people going onto duty or coming off duty.

²⁸ Aft Steering: The location of the actual steering pumps that control the rudder, located near the engine. From her it is possible to take local control of the rudder away from the bridge in the event of a casualty.

²⁹ General Quarters III: After receiving knowledge that it is possible for an attack to occur, a vessel will go into General Quarters III in which they will be prepared for an attack.

³⁰ General Quarters I: When an attack is imminent. This is a more intense version of GQIII where guns are mounted, flash gear is donned, flak jackets and helmets are on and Zebra is set throughout the ship.

³¹ Oscar: Oscar is the name of the crash test dummy that cutters universally use for man over-boards. The name "Oscar" comes from the Nautical Flag "Oscar" which when raised above a ship indicates "Man Overboard" to other vessels.

our small boat back up. It took some finesse on the part of the coxswain and the conn in order to make it happen. It was quite impressive. I stood watch again tonight and did the evening OPSUM as well. Now with it being after midnight, I'm going to get some rest before the morning watch. Tomorrow's the last full day at sea before we pull into Hono.

Day 11

Today was the last full day before Hono. It was long. I woke up and was on double 8-12s again for JOOD. When I wasn't on JOOD today, I was running drills. Today was an at sea flooding and fire drill. I was on the SPP³² on the bridge connecting the Repair Locker and the Command team. In addition, I was responsible for creating the DC³³ plates upon which the casualties are recorded. It was tough! Not only did I have three people on the bridge asking questions through me (Conn³⁴, CO³⁵ and OPS) but I also had Repair Locker talking to me through the headset while I'm listening to the announcements and plotting. I wish I could have split myself into a million parts, but by the end of it, my plots weren't looking too bad. I'll post a picture of them so that you can see.

Day 12

Moored in Honolulu today. This morning I woke up and went up to the bridge. Cori and LTJG G pinned my new shields³⁶ on me since today is the day that the class of 2012 graduated. I was then promptly assigned to do the inbound navigation brief for Honolulu. It was a busy three hours as I prepped all the information we needed to moor up at Base Honolulu. Once that was done, I scarfed down lunch in five minutes then came up and actually gave the brief. It was intense, everyone from CO all the way down to the non-rates³⁷ were watching. Immediately upon finishing the brief we began to pull into port. It took us a total of 45 minutes. I was a bearing taker again, just like I was outbound of Cordova. It was interesting, because we hadn't ever seen the landmarks before, so it was difficult to tell what points were on our gazetteer. Once we finally got in and got the ship settled, we had quarters and then liberty was piped. I got out on the libo bus and hit up downtown Honolulu. It was pretty cool. I didn't stay out too long though because I wanted to come back to base, see one of my friends stationed on the CGC *Galveston Island*, and then go to bed. Reveille is at 0600 tomorrow in order to start oily water offload and then stores³⁸ on load. Should be a good time! TSTA starts Monday. Wet trainer on Monday and Fire School on Wednesday. Next week is going to be awesome, but busy.

³² SPP: Sound Powered Phone

³³ DC: Damage Control

³⁴ Conn: Conning Officer

³⁵ CO: Commanding Officer

³⁶ Shields: The colored shields on a cadet's uniform indicate their rank.

³⁷ Non-rates: E-3 and below

³⁸ Stores: Food and materials necessary to run a ship

Day 13

This morning I reorganized the ship store. After eight days underway in some pretty rough seas, it was a mess and it had to be cleaned up in order to make way for new merchandise. That took up a good majority of my morning, and after lunch when liberty was piped, I made my way over to meet up with three of my classmates stationed on the smaller boats out of Base Honolulu, *Galveston Island*³⁹ and *Kittiwake*⁴⁰. We walked about two miles off Sand Island to catch a bus to downtown Honolulu and Waikiki. We spent the evening on the beach; we ate dinner, watched the sunset and just talked. It was a really good time with friends. I've said it once and I'll say it a million times again: classmates are what make the Academy amazing.

Day 14

Woke up at 0600 today. I updated all but the last two of the port folders, I created a TAD⁴¹ Check-In Packet for the boat, and I totaled up the debt owed to the Ship's Store, did a new inventory log, catalogued how much of each item was sold over the past underway period, reorganized the tally sheet check off list and then made recommendations to Cori on what items to stock up on before the ship sets sail for their next underway assignment. It was a busy day! Around 1700 when I finished, I headed over to the Pearl Harbor NEX⁴² and got a few items that I needed. I finished up the day by watching the Avengers. It was a great movie. Tomorrow I'm going to be headed off to see the USS *Arizona* Memorial and the Pearl Harbor memorial. I can't wait!

Day 15

I went to the USS *Arizona* memorial today. I really have no words to describe it. There's such a sense of respect, awe and in reality responsibility. It reminds me of why I joined the service in the first place. After that I came back to the ship and hung out for about an hour. Then my friend Gina who is stationed on the 87' next to me picked me up and we drove down to Waikiki. We had dinner at a place called Cheeseburger in Paradise and then proceeded to come back to the boat for an early night's sleep.

Day 16

I slept in today and spent most of the day around the boat. I walked to the exchange and then did a load of laundry. I cleaned my half of the room for our TSTA inspection tomorrow and then I spent most of the day bumming around base not doing much of

³⁹ USCGC *Galveston Island*: 110' Cutter out of Honolulu, HI

⁴⁰ USCGC *Kittiwake*: An 87' Cutter out of Honolulu, HI

⁴¹ TAD: Temporary Active Duty

⁴² NEX: Naval Exchange

anything. I smoked a Pre-TSTA cigar and now I'm going to go to bed. I'm going to Wet Trainer tomorrow. I'll keep you posted on how it turns out!

Day 17

This morning I woke up at 0525 in order to make the bus at 0545 this morning. We drove over to Pearl Harbor Navy Base and proceeded to report in at 0630 for our Wet Trainer course. Our Wet Trainer course was a navy course that sought to teach us basic dewatering, flood control and DC practices for shoring⁴³. The first three hours involved classroom work: determining which dewatering pumps we have on board, where they are located, how they work, what the proper pipe patching options are for a ruptured pipe, how much water pressure can they withstand, which ones are okay for JP5⁴⁴, for gasoline, what is an investigators job, how to set proper primary boundaries, secondary boundaries, etc. It was actually all really interesting information. Once the morning session was done, we proceeded outside and fired up a P-100⁴⁵ dewatering pump in order to see how it worked. The final event involved entering a mock up of a ship, which was designed to flood. It was two stories, the lower mimicking a mechanical space and the upper mimicking a berthing area. Inside a faulty watertight door would spring a leak which needed to be shored, a pipe would rupture... twice, a crack would appear in the deck which would have to be covered and shored, and the water would have to be dewatered. You then enter the space, get soaking wet and proceed to fight the flooding and dewater the space. The final task was to escape out of an overhead scuttle⁴⁶ while water is gushing down onto your head from the flooding space above. It doesn't seem like a difficult task, but when you're waterlogged and heavy and the water is just pounding down on you, it becomes a little bit more difficult than one might initially imagine. It really was a great experience and it's a qualification that will last me my entire career. When we came back to the boat we immediately had quarters. It was passed to us that the first day of TSTA had been a success on the boat as well, and that we were on the track to acing it. At quarters our OPS got pinned, as an LT. It's an impressive achievement and one that was cool to witness. Tomorrow we'll be doing ATFP⁴⁷ drills.

Day 18

Today we practiced our ATFP drills. We woke up early and set our training environment at 0800 and began covering Mainspace Fire Doctrine (MFD) training. We sat on the mess deck for just over an hour discussing the finer points of the MFD, and then we broke up and went to our assigned areas for further debriefing. It lasted for a while. After that was done I proceeded to work on my port folders a bit

⁴³ Shoring: the practice of using wooden or metal beams to reinforce bulkheads, QAWTD, decks or overheads.

⁴⁴ JP5: A type of fuel typically used for Helo Ops

⁴⁵ P-100: A dewatering pump that is capable of pumping 100 gal/min of water. Often used as an auxiliary to the fire main in order to fight fires as well.

⁴⁶ Scuttle: An opening in the deck through which a person can enter or exit different levels of a ship, a hatch.

⁴⁷ ATFP: Anti-Terrorism Force Protection

more, knocking out another one before I heard them pipe a HS⁴⁸ training and decided to sit in on it. It covered a lot of basic shipboard battle injuries and how to quickly care for them. When that was over we began doing ATRP drills. They announced that a group called **C**limate **R**escue and **A**ssistance **Z**ealous **Y**outh for the **H**ypocritical **I**mplementation of **P**rogressive **P**rograms **I**mmediately and **E**ffectively like **S**eriously, or **C.R.A.Z.Y. H.I.P.P.I.E.S.** was staging a protest against the Coast Guard in Hawaii and we moved to FPCON-B⁴⁹ then once they specifically targeted our base we moved to FPCON-C⁵⁰, then they called in that they had placed a bomb on board and we had to evacuate the ship. During all of this, I was on the bridge ensuring that any minor things that needed to get done got done: running binoculars to people, monitoring radio stations, etc. Once we completed the ATRP drills we secured from our training environment and liberty was granted. I met up with three of my classmates from the smaller cutters and Sector Honolulu at the All-Hands club on base and we had dinner and talked. Tomorrow morning is Fire Training so I'm going to get some rest before I have to get up!

Day 19

This morning we had to wake up at 0425 because we had Fire School this morning. We left the boat at 0500 on the nose with a set of coveralls and a pen each. We drove over to the Navy Base, same as Monday and filed into class and received two hours of instruction on basic fire fighting, PPE⁵¹ donning, different kinds of fire extinguishers and the chemical reactions they cause, etc. Afterwards we went outside and learned proper hose handling techniques before we were brought into a large mock-up of an air hangar. They lit a fire with propane tanks that burned well over ten feet into the air and had us fight the fire for ten minutes or so in just flash gear⁵². Once it was done we exited the space and proceeded to don full fire fighting equipment and head over to another mock simulator. This room was built to resemble a machinery space: complete with a class B⁵³ fire. We were responsible for getting into the space and fighting the fire. Words can't describe how hot and how dark it was in that space. The smoke was thick and black and it was nigh on impossible to see anything after a few minutes in the fire. When it was finally put out we debriefed and went back to the cutter. Liberty was granted immediately upon our return and I headed to the NEX to buy a few souvenirs including some Hawaiian coffee. I returned to the boat and still had some daylight to kill, so I went to the beach armed with my underwater camera and some goggles and had some fun in the sun for a few hours. I came back and then went out to dinner with all the

⁴⁸HS: Health Services

⁴⁹ FPCON-B: Force Protection Condition Bravo, a step up from FPCON-A where a known threat exists and security measures are put in place such as recalling all personnel and securing the boat to all tours, visitors and military personnel not assigned to the cutter.

⁵⁰ FPCON-C: Force Protection Condition Charlie, a step up from FPCON-B where armed security personnel roam the ship, prevent all entrance to the boat, and secure the pier.

⁵¹ PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

⁵² Flash Gear: Basic PPE which includes a hood which covers the neck and 90% of the face, long gloves, long sleeves and a helmet.

⁵³ Class Bravo Fire: A fire in which the fuel source is flammable liquids

JOs on the boat to celebrate LTJG G's birthday. It was a good time and by the time I got back to the boat I was utterly exhausted.

Day 20

Today was a busy day filled with drills and duty. This morning we woke up at 0600 and began setting the training environment at 0730. We ran several drills today, the first and major one being a Mainspace Fire Drill where the MMR⁵⁴ caught fire. I was once again SPP talker and the DC plate recorder. It was a good drill and overall it went very well. We then did some ET⁵⁵ drills and finished up with setting GQIII and doing EMCON⁵⁶. It was a busy day to say the least. We finally finished up with drills around 1500 or so and they piped liberty. I unfortunately was on the duty section on double 4-8 watches again breaking in as Import Watch Stander. So from 1600-2000 last night I stood on the quarterdeck learning the basics of the watch. I'm going to bed now because tomorrow morning I've got to be up at 0330 on the bridge to stand my second watch of the section.

Day 21

This morning was all about drills again. I was the SPP talker again (surprise, surprise) but my DC plates were nearly perfect. It's getting a lot easier to both talk on the phone and record everything and keep everyone informed, just because of so much I practiced it. Drills were actually done really early this morning, around 1100, so we got liberty piped early. I took my computer and my new task over to the All Hands club on base for lunch and to work. My new tasks include balancing the budget for the Ship's Store, figuring out where to buy new product and what the ship's store most needs for its upcoming 21 day voyage north of the Arctic Circle. I got most of the budget done prior to heading back to the boat around 1550. Once there I spent a few minutes prepping my tropes before I left for the CGC *Rush* COC⁵⁷. It was a nice ceremony with one of my former teachers assuming command and my new Commandant of Cadets being relieved of command. When it was all over, I met up with RADM Rendon who used to be the ASUP⁵⁸ at the Academy and we had a nice discussion. It was good to see him again. Ended the night with Lydia over at the All Hands club for dinner. It's a lively place on Friday nights.

Day 22

Today was a lazy day. I didn't have duty and I didn't have work that needed to be done immediately, so I took the day off. I met up with some old family friends who drove me around Oahu. I climbed Diamondhead, which is the remnants of an extinct volcano, which offers an amazing view of the island, I visited the National Cemetery

⁵⁴ MMR: Main Machinery Room

⁵⁵ ET: Electronics Technician

⁵⁶ EMCON:

⁵⁷ COC: Change of Command

⁵⁸ ASUP: Assistant Superintendent

of the Pacific at Punchbowl two days before Memorial Day and it was absolutely beautiful. I took time to find every single Coast Guardsman whose name was listed on the wall of KIA⁵⁹ whose bodies were never recovered. After the cemetery, we went over to Turtle Beach on the North Shore, which aptly earns its name because there were six turtles lying on the beach. You could get within a few feet of them and I got some really amazing pictures. Finally, they took me back to their house on the Army base for a great dinner. I came back pretty late, had a long conversation with OPS about a variety of things, and then I had a late night cigar on the fantail and called my parents. One thing struck me in particular about my conversation with OPS. He told me a story about his time on the Polar Roller⁶⁰ where he was in charge of a division. Part of the work they did was tag polar bears for scientist conducting research. I jokingly asked him if he ever touched one. He said “no, our division had the opportunity to, but there wasn’t enough seats for everyone in my division, so I rotated them all out to get them a chance to touch a polar bear.” He said it so nonchalantly but it stuck with me. He gave up a once in a lifetime opportunity that was offered to him for his division. Honestly I hope I can grow up to be a leader like him one day. Tomorrow’s a duty day though so I’m going to turn in now.

Day 23

Today was a duty today. I got a lot of work done around the boat, including organizing and updating about a quarter of the movie locker titles and helping prep them to be sent back to NMPS⁶¹. I also got just about the last of the ship’s store budgetary stuff done. In addition I stood four hours of duty up on the bridge and then did Advanced DCPQS⁶² on the mess deck with Doc, Cori, MK2⁶³, and a SN. It was a pretty normal day overall: nothing really out of the ordinary. Tomorrow is Memorial Day and we’re getting underway for most of the day in order to do TSTA drills.

Day 24

Woke up at 0330 for the morning QWS⁶⁴ watch. Immediately following the conclusion of my watch, we got underway. We did a ton of drills today at sea, including Mode II⁶⁵, Loss of Visibility, Loss of Steering, Flooding and Fire. It was amazing how much work we managed to fit into one day. We did really well on all our drills with only four of the 20 drills not being 100% and the lowest scoring one being only an 86%. It was impressive, but by the end of the day at 1909 when we pulled in, the only thing I wanted to do was grab some chow and go to sleep, but

⁵⁹ KIA: Killed in Action

⁶⁰ Polar Roller: Nickname for the Polar Class of Cutters

⁶¹ NMPS: Naval Movie Picture Service

⁶² DCPQS: Damage Control Personal Qualification Standard

⁶³ MK2: Machinist Technician Second Class

⁶⁴ QWS: Quarterdeck Watch Stander

⁶⁵ Mode II: A navigation drill in which we simulate that the ECDIS has gone OOC (Out of Commission) and we navigate solely based of GPS fixes, LOP (Lines of Positions) to Gazetteer Points and

before I could get out on liberty I had to send out the STATCHNG⁶⁶ and the OPSUM for the day. I finally crawled into bed around 2300 and I need to finish writing this now, because we're getting underway tomorrow at 0745 again in order to do some more drills, including a GUNNEX⁶⁷. Overall, it was a good way to spend a Memorial Day: at sea, doing the job you signed up to do.

Day 25

Today's exercises were a bit different from yesterday. We got underway just after eight o'clock this morning, just like yesterday, but when we got out to the harbor we had to send our small boat back to the base in order to pick up some of the ATG⁶⁸ riders who were late for movement⁶⁹. After that, we proceeded to head out to sea to the area which had been cleared for us to use as a range. Once out there we set GQ1 because we had "reports" that two separate fishing vessels owned by nefarious New Jersey Mobster Smatrick Smorkis had targeted our vessel. When the F/V *Evel Kenevel* was in sight, we shot warning fire. When it did not respond, and continued to advance with its intent to ram *Sycamore* we shot disabling fire and when the vessel open fired on us, we returned fire and the vessel sank. In retaliation the second vessel, F/V *Motly Crieu* preceded in the exact same manner as its sister ship and it too, after warning and disabling fire, was sunk. It was a pretty cool drill to run and really cool to see the .50 cal's up and running. After we began our transit back to port and three hours or so later, after doing some setting of material condition Yoke drills, we pulled into port. I did the OPSUM and the STATCHNG and after our debrief I headed out to the All Hands club where I am writing this for some late chow and hopefully an early rack time. Longer day tomorrow but it should be the last really long one and last really hard day for a while. Only a few weeks until leave!

Day 26

Today has been possibly one of the longest days in my life. Woke up at 0545 again after going to bed around 2300 last night. We got underway at 0745 and did over 20 drills today including a towing evolution, astern refueling, precision Anchoring, Mode III transit, four man overboard evolutions (two during the day, two at night), not to mention the DC drills that were conducted. We literally moved from evolution to evolution the entire day. I spent about 18 hours on the bridge. I'm so tired right now I can hardly write this. I'm going to bed.

Day27

Reveille was at 0800 this morning; we got a bit of a lie in because we were out so late last night. Did more drills this morning including personnel casualties and a

⁶⁶ STATCHNG: Status Change, a summary like an OPSUM that is sent out whenever a boat changes status from being underway, being in port, or being in a maintenance period to any of the other statuses.

⁶⁷ GUNNEX: Gunnery Exercise

⁶⁸ ATG: Afloat Training Group

⁶⁹ Movement: Naval terminology for when a ship gets underway from the pier.

toxic gas drill. We got liberty at 1300, and I immediately went to sleep for a few hours. I woke up and headed out with the liberty van and saw the new Men In Black III movie. I caught a ride back with some of the guys from my cutter and got back and am getting ready for bed now. The last few days really took it out of me. Tomorrow is HoRo, so it should be a pretty laid back day.

Day 28

Today I learned a very important lesson, one that I will convey to you shortly. This morning I slept in because it was a Holiday Routine. I woke up early in order to pick up my room because I had been contacting the current CO of *Rush* one of my old instructors and asked her (while we had been at the Academy together) whether she might be interested in visiting me while I was in Hawaii at the same time. I got an email yesterday saying she was free today if I wanted to show her around my ship. I responded affirmatively. I went looking for the XO and Captain but they had left for the day. I proceeded to give *Rush* a tour of the boat and then when she had left, I went to the All Hands club to get some work done. Around three o'clock Captain shows up and starts talking to me telling me how by inviting *Rush* to the boat I had broken a lot of different protocols, things that I haven't even thought of. I hadn't thought of the implications of inviting a CO to our boat without informing our own CO, I hadn't thought that he should be the one to greet her. I didn't intend to usurp anyone's authority or prerogative, but in inviting the *Rush* over, I had done just that. I feel horrible right now, not because I got told off, but because I completely disregarded military courtesies, something I'm loathe to do. I didn't realize at the time what I was doing. I'm really lucky that Captain is letting me take this as a "lesson learned," honestly I could completely understand if he had taken more offense to it, or had reprimanded or punished me in some other way. I have begun taking note of "lessons learned" that will hopefully help me keep my nose clean in the future, and that's definitely one that's highlighted and bolded on my list now: "when they're higher ranking than you, find someone higher ranking than you and get their permission." I'm taking that to mean for anything, not just for inviting someone aboard. I'm going to leave today at that. It was a bad day, but I'm going to take and learn from it. It's the only thing I can do, learn from my mistakes.

Day 29

Spent all of today on duty... duty driving. Our Operations Officer had a Whetting Down⁷⁰ last night. So from 1530 on until 0230, I was doing continuous runs from our base over on Sand Island to the base at Barber's Point. During my second to last run around midnight, one of the guys on the boat puked in the GV. Prior to making my last run, myself and Cori cleaned up the van. It just goes to show you, officers can and will get down and dirty too. I did it more to ensure that I earned the respect of the crew. Remember this for when you eventually make your way out to summer

⁷⁰ Whetting Down: A tradition amongst Naval Officers wherein they spend the difference between their old monthly paycheck and their new monthly paycheck on liquor for the crew of the ship.

assignments: earn the respect of your crew. Even if you do nothing else over the summer, you've done well.

Day 30

After duty driving til the wee hours of the morning last night, I spent a good deal of today sleeping and resting, most of it on the beach, but I did take time to go see another movie at the theater. More importantly today is a story I wish to relay to you that perhaps captures the essence of leadership more than anything else I've seen in my four years at the Academy. I cannot discuss the details surrounding the actual event because it involves classified materials, however what I can do is discuss the outcome of that event. Essentially what happened was that two people in OPS division were slated to be in major trouble for an error that occurred. It was their fault that the error had occurred but it was not malicious in nature, it developed from an honest mistake. The consequences of that mistake however, if processed for either of the two members of the division could drastically impact their careers. Instead of citing the two of them, OPS took full responsibility for the incident on the grounds that since he was their superior, their mistakes derived from his lack of supervision and leadership. To shorten a longer story, he now faces a mast and possible separation from the service as the severest punishment. He willingly took the blame in order to prevent the other two from getting in trouble because, in his words "one has a family to think about, and one has a brand new career lying in front of them." A key thing to note here is that he isn't trying to be a martyr. He honestly and truly believes in his heart that their failures are his own. *That* is the true measure of a leader. When they take to heart every one of their subordinates failures as one of their own, yet pass their successes on back to them. I hope that one day I can be half the officer that this man is. Furthermore, as if he needed anything else, he asked me to keep this information from the two individuals. He didn't want them knowing that he had taken the fall for them. He's not looking for recognition, which is one of the reasons I think he's such a good officer. I honestly stand in awe of him at some times. I hope all goes well for him and that the two individuals realize how lucky they are to be working with a leader who cares for him as much as he does.

Day 31

Last night LTJG G. asked me if I wanted to go spend today in a bridge simulator over on Ford Island at the Navy Base. I agreed and six of us headed over there this morning at 0700. Class started at 0800 and for the next seven and a half hours we spent time in a bridge simulator. It was a lot like the simulators at the Academy; it was a full wrap around screen, an entire room modeled to look like a bridge. It had a radar system, an ECPINS⁷¹, a helm control station, a lee helm station an alidade for shooting bearings and the works. We went through about five different scenarios including pulling into and out of Pearl Harbor, Guam and Tokyo and we rotated

⁷¹ ECPINS: Electronic Chart Positioning Integrated Navigation System

through the bridge systems. It was really cool because the detail that the system went into regarding the way the boat moves in currents, the side forces acting upon it and even the way the wind affects the yaw of the ship were all accounted for in the programming making it a very good electronic adaptation of the bridge of *Sycamore*. When we came back from the simulator, I went out on liberty to the All Hands club, to write my brag sheet⁷² so that my supervisor can begin the process of writing my CER⁷³. It's hard to believe that I have just shy of a week left here before I head home for leave and then back to the Academy to begin supervising Swab Summer '12.

Day 32

Today I was on duty, so I woke up this morning and went to morning muster and stuck around for watch relief. I then finished the final inventory of the onboard movies and wrote out our discrepancy sheet. We only had one drill left to do this morning for the entirety of TSTA that was going to be graded: Mass Conflagration. In this drill everything happens at once. People die, spaces flood, fire erupts, smoke fills spaces etc. I ran up to the bridge as soon as I heard the collision alarm and immediately started plotting. I raced to put on my flash gear and simultaneously set up comms with the repair locker. The first few minutes were extremely hectic and confusing: as they were designed to be. CO and one of our MKC⁷⁴s were declared deceased, XO became the new CO, and from there we began to deal with the problems of personnel casualties, people stepping in to fill new roles, etc. The whole drill lasted about an hour, and overall went pretty well. After the drill the day was basically over, spent a few hours on watch and OPS and I finished out the night by watching the Season 7 finale of HIMYM⁷⁵.

Day 33

This morning we had a few drills, most of them of little importance, however, the main point of the day being that today we had our last graded drill of TSTA which goes into our raw score. Upon completion, we discovered that we had indeed won the Battle E⁷⁶, which indicates that in five separate categories including Damage Control, Navigation, and Medical, we scored above an average of 90%. In fact, our overall average was 98% cumulative. Now the only drill we have to do is a fun one called FET⁷⁷ where everyone dies, and lower ranking people take over control of the ship in an emergency situation. That should be happening Friday. After the morning drills, I went on liberty to the NEX and got a few necessities and then came back to

⁷² Brag Sheet: A list of accomplishments made over the grading period for your CER which aids your supervisors in knowing what you have done and why they should give you good marks.

⁷³ CER: Cadet Evaluation Report, an evaluation of each cadet made during each marking period; fall semester, spring semester and summer.

⁷⁴ MKC: Chief Machinery Technician; It is important to note how to call chiefs. You always start out with the rate "MK" or "SK" or "BM" etc. then it is followed by their rank C for chief CS for Senior Chief or CM for Master Chief. Hence a BMCM is a Master Chief Boatswain's Mate, and a MSTCS is a Senior Chief Marine Science Technician.

⁷⁵ HIMYM: How I Met Your Mother.

⁷⁶ Battle E: A ribbon awarded to a unit that successfully completes TSTA with an aggregate score exceeding 90%.

⁷⁷ FET: Final Evaluation Training

the boat. At 1810, I met up with three of my other classmates and we proceeded to head to ADM Rendon's house for dinner. He had invited my shipmates and me the night of *Rush's* COC, so we had been looking forward to it for a while. It was a great dinner and we got to hear a lot of old sea stories, plus get some information on what was happening with changes to the Coast Guard. It was good to see him again, after he had left the Academy Assistant Superintendent position, we were not sure when we would be seeing him again. I'm getting ready to hit the rack now, I've got a '65 flight out at Barber's Point in the morning.

Day 34

I left for Barber's Point around 1200 today and my flight left at 1315. I'm not going to lie, it was my first time having a real Helo⁷⁸ flight, and I have to admit it was pretty cool. It was two hours long and we went up around the Island of Molokai and another tiny island in the chain. The views were fantastic, and the pilots who I rode with were extremely helpful, answering all my questions, and offering up some ideas I hadn't even considered about aviator life. I got to hang with my feet out the door at 500' up going close to 100 knots through the air and I got to see a Leper colony from the air, and some really awesome cliffs. It was pretty breathtaking. I don't think I'm ever going to become an aviator, and I am definitely going afloat my first tour, but I may keep the idea in the back of my mind. It's always an option I suppose. The rest of the day was duty, and nothing too exciting occurred. I'm going to bed now because tomorrow is my last full day aboard USCGC *Sycamore*!

Day 35

We got underway this morning at 0745, and made our way out of the harbor with the ATG guys with us. Our FET drill was pretty intense; it included a fire in crew berthing, a fire on the fantail, several injuries, two man overboards, three deaths (including the CO). It's important to note that just like with the presidency, the *Commanding Officer* never dies. The moment he is rendered incapacitated, unable to function in his or her responsibilities or dies, full power and authority is transferred from him or her to the highest ranking person on the boat. Thus, when LCDR S. fell overboard during the drill today, the commanding officer became LTJG G. since the XO and OPS were both pretending to be on leave. It was really cool seeing the ship come together to fill the empty voids left by some of the higher ranking individuals and they really did a good job saving the ship. We pulled in and received our score for FET, a 90%. It's impressive considering the drill is considered generally "un-passable" by the fleet at large. After drill we immediately got liberty and myself and the JOs, including Cori, LTJG G and OPS headed out for one last dinner. We ended up going to a place called Dave and Busters (or Buster Douglas' if you sailed *Sycamore*), which is essentially Chucky Cheese for grown-ups. It was a lot of fun and a great way to spend my last night with the wardroom. I'm going to miss those guys, I learned a lot from them. I'm not sure if they even realize how much.

⁷⁸ Helo: Helicopter

Day 36

This morning was my last time on *Sycamore*. The crew got underway around 1300, and I was left at the pier. I'm flying out of Hawaii tomorrow to begin two weeks of leave before I head back to the Academy, just in time for the start of Swab Summer. I would be lying though if I said I wasn't more than a little sad at leaving the *Sycamore* this morning. The Coast Guard is truly the greatest service in the world: I wholeheartedly believe that, and the reason it is so magnificent, is the men and women who I have the chance to serve with. I will never forget my summer on *Sycamore*, nor her crew. I hope I get to meet up with them in the future: It is, after all, a small Coast Guard.

I hope you all have enjoyed my daily thoughts and reflections about my five weeks aboard USCGC *Sycamore*. I hope you learned something, and maybe realizing just how awesome our summers are, will have convinced you to at least consider the USCGA as a choice as you start looking at colleges.

As always, if you have any questions for me, if anything was unclear, or you just want to talk, feel free to contact me.

Semper P.
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