

## Heave! Ho! Then Off to Leave We Go! (Continued)

*Eagle* is a training ship, so the question I asked myself throughout the trip was, what great, big lesson should I be taking away from this experience? What leadership lessons are there to learn? And the big question (that is actually from one of the tour signs): *Why a sailing ship?*

The first two go together. The big lesson was that there isn't just *one, big* lesson to learn (sort of a paradox...), but instead there are numerous little lessons from each day or each week. Of course there were the hands-on operational lessons we learned, but there were also those moments of leadership development. Strikingly, one doesn't always have to be in a leadership situation to learn a lesson about her/himself as a leader. Furthermore, as one of the first class cadets pointed out to me, the first class cadets on *Eagle* are the ones learning about leadership and how to be officers, and we, the third class cadets, are there to learn as much as possible by following directions. I realized that it was important to observe the leadership of the first class cadets and learn from the follower's perspective as well.

According to the tour sign, the answer to the third question—why sails—is that when under sail, a vessel is completely under the influence of natural forces caused by wind, waves, and current. The sign continues to explain how such operation of a vessel requires a more disciplined approach to navigation and weather observation. I agree that this is a good point, but I am still left wanting more. More from my entire time onboard the *Barque*, really.

I could have worked longer and harder to get qualified in a more advanced watch, but I don't think that would have satisfied that need for this something—whatever it is. My perspective and understanding of the Coast Guard has changed over these past eleven weeks away from the Academy. I smile at how naive I was at this point *last* summer (yet I thought I knew so much!). My appreciation for the long blue line has certainly grown as well as reshaped itself as I've observed the members of the Coast Guard at work and in times of recognition and celebration. It seems I've seen about every career change there is in the Coast Guard. During my first phase assignment, I saw a non-rated enlisted member choose a rate and be accepted to "A" School, I celebrated with new chief petty officers at a chiefs' initiation ceremony (neat traditions there!), and congratulated a newly frocked chief warrant officer. Aboard *Eagle*, I witnessed the relief of a junior officer after her promotion, I attended a change of command ceremony, and even watched a career come to a close as an officer retired after twenty years in service (another ceremony with exciting traditions).

I, too, had a significant career change. I went from a braced-up fourth class cadet to a third class with fleet experience. I'm headed off to a busy three weeks of leave (summer break), but I am ready and excited to begin my second year at the Academy and my continuing training to become an officer. To conclude, however, I actually look back on the past—*Eagle's* past. There is a very exciting connection to the past I felt while aboard. *Eagle* has been a training vessel for cadets like me since 1946; that is 76 years of cadets who have lived and learned on the same cutter. Those cadets went on to become officers and have shaped the Coast Guard into what I know today. The name *Eagle* has been the name of a Coast Guard vessel since the formation of the Revenue Cutter Service (precursor to the modern Coast Guard) in 1790. Additionally, by *sailing* on a tall ship, I also share a connection with all mariners of old, those who transited the seas before steam or diesel power. It's humbling to think of the immense amount of work it took/takes for the upkeep and navigation (did I mention that we used sextants to navigate using

the sun and other celestial bodies?) of the ship—and we had modern conveniences, too! This year, *Eagle* shared another special historical connection – the War of 1812; 2012 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War of 1812. Our port calls were in locations of importance to the war, and the Barque *Eagle* shares the name of a Revenue Cutter *Eagle* which participated in the War of 1812. This commemoration of the War of 1812 reminds us of the men who fought for our country along the nation’s coast. I hate to sound sappy (bear with me, I’m going somewhere with this), but I am grateful for their service. They knew what it meant to serve their country.

As I continue toward graduation and my eventual joining of the fleet, I confront these questions: How am I serving my country now? And, what does it mean to be a member of the Coast Guard?

I wish I had an answer for you, but quite honestly, I’m still in the process of discovering the answers.