



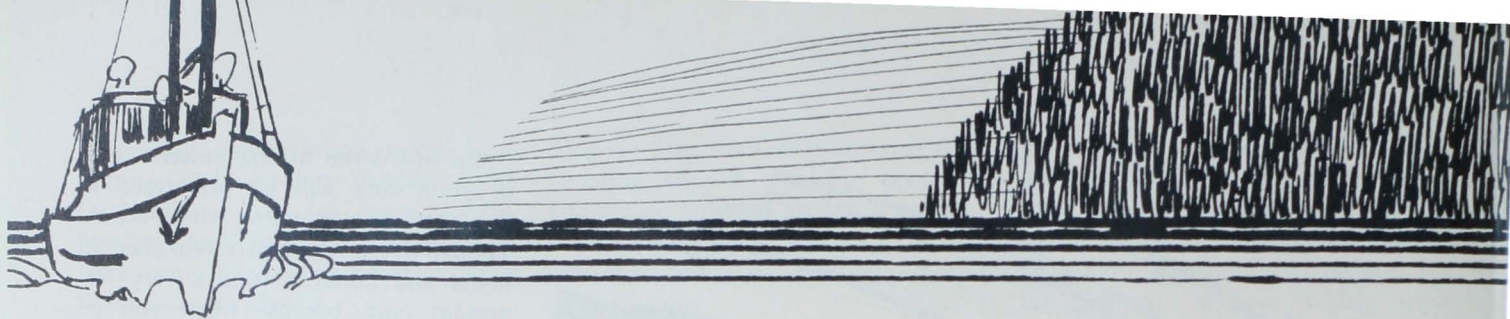
On Duty in the Pilothouse

On board the fishing vessel a part of your duty will be performed in the pilothouse: standing wheel watch. Though it's a small part reckoned in hours and minutes, it is a very important part, because when you go on wheel watch you are assuming a rather serious responsibility. Your watchfulness and your reactions before a dangerous situation develops could determine life or death for yourself, your shipmates, and your vessel.

Your experience probably will have to be gained in many pilothouses, under many skippers. Each will have his own rules or method of operation; each will have personal traits you may or may not like. It will be well to remember that you and your shipmates also have your quirks and your foibles. But in the tight little floating community of which you now are a member, everyone must learn to get along with everyone else. Each of your paychecks must come out of that load of fish you are trying to get on board. First and foremost, you must learn to get along with your skipper.

Each time you enter the pilothouse these first months at sea, take half-a-second to remember that you are indeed a novice—a "greenhorn" in fishermen's vernacular—with practically everything to learn in this new and strange occupation. You cannot learn all you need to know from this article, or from any number of books, for that matter. The knowledge you must acquire in order to become a competent and dependable all-around fisherman/seaman, fully trustworthy anywhere on board, including the pilothouse, must be learned in the only way possible—by experience. And that is just what you are now trying to do—gain experience. Still, it will do you no harm to know, even before you enter the pilothouse, some of the things you must or must not do when you make your debut to take your first "turn at the wheel."

The first thing you must learn is to obey orders quickly and without



backtalk. That you must do on deck, too, of course, but it is still more important in the pilothouse. Bear in mind that perhaps one day *you* will be the one who gives orders. We have an old and very true axiom which tells us that "one must learn to *obey* orders before one can learn to *give* orders."

The skipper will specify where or when he wants to be called, and this order should be strictly observed. In addition, you must call the skipper if and when you are uncertain about any item relevant to the safety and well-being of the vessel such as a course change, on which side to take an on-coming vessel, cross-traffic, sudden loss of visibility due to fog, rain-thick, or snowfall, sudden or violent increase in wind, or if you think that you must make an unscheduled change in speed. In short, when in doubt as to the proper course of action, call the skipper.

Your job in the pilothouse is not just to steer the boat. It is, first and foremost, to keep the skipper informed, to be his eyes and ears when he is away from the pilothouse, whether in his bunk or in the galley. The skipper must be kept informed; once he knows the problem, he will do his own thinking, make his own decisions, and take full responsibility for the consequences of those decisions. He will tell you how much responsibility for decision in the above situations he expects of you.

A second and very important thing to learn right away is how to slow down the engine and disengage the clutch if the need arises. Your skipper or engineer (if there is one on board) will show you how. If they forget

or neglect to do so, ask to be shown. Here is why: if and when you collide with a log or other fair-sized piece of driftwood, you must throttle down the engine and disengage the clutch in order to prevent the debris from getting caught by the propeller. There will be no time to "think it over." Your action must come quickly—*instantly*—upon your hitting the object if you are to prevent damage to your propeller. You must know beforehand which movements to make, so that your hand can reach for the throttle while your other hand goes to the clutch control lever.

A log, or even a not-so-large piece of driftwood, can do a great deal of

damage, such as bending a propeller blade or the propeller shaft. Damage to either one is a costly affair, not only for the vessel's owner who pays the bills for dry-docking and repairs, but perhaps even more costly for the crew because fishing days, maybe the trip, are lost. This brings us to a fact worth remembering: lost time, whether hours or days, cannot be replaced.

When taking over the wheel, the man you relieve will give you position and course, and you must repeat after him, so that he may be sure that you hear and understand what he says. There is no legal form for conveying this information, but here is one that is useable. "We are in A-



strait, passed B lighthouse at 1933, course is SW by W one-half W. She has been making close to 9.5 knots on my watch." You must repeat what you hear in order to guarantee that you received the information correctly. If the skipper should give orders for a change of course, be sure to repeat after him, always.

There will be a logbook in the pilothouse. On inside runs, keep the logbook up to date! Write down each point of reference, the exact time of having it abeam, and the course up to the next point of reference. Don't erase! There must be no erasures in the logbook; an erasure will discredit the logbook so that it may not be accepted as evidence in a court of law. If you do happen to make a mistake, draw a straight, thin line through the entry (so that it still may be read), then rewrite on the next line below. Double check each entry in your logbook; erroneous information is worse than no information at all.

Eyes front! Keep a sharp lookout, especially when on inside waters, such as the inside run from Puget Sound to the open ocean.

Most fishing vessels have an automatic steering device on board. It was nicknamed "Iron Mike" years ago and remains so named to this very day. "Mike" is indeed a great labor-saver and an excellent helmsman, who will steer most courses better than any human hands. Still, "Mike" has his shortcomings. For one thing, "Mike" does not know how to think for himself and must depend on you to do the thinking for him. He does not hear the order to change course. You must hear for him. For another thing, "Mike" is unable to look up ahead, and so he must depend on your eyes. In very bad weather hand steering may be better under some conditions.

Learn how to operate the "Iron Mike." Several systems of automatic steering are in use, and they are not all alike in every respect. On some types one must disengage the "Iron Mike" clutch when altering course,

on other types not. Become familiar with the one you have on board so that you will be able to change course on short notice.

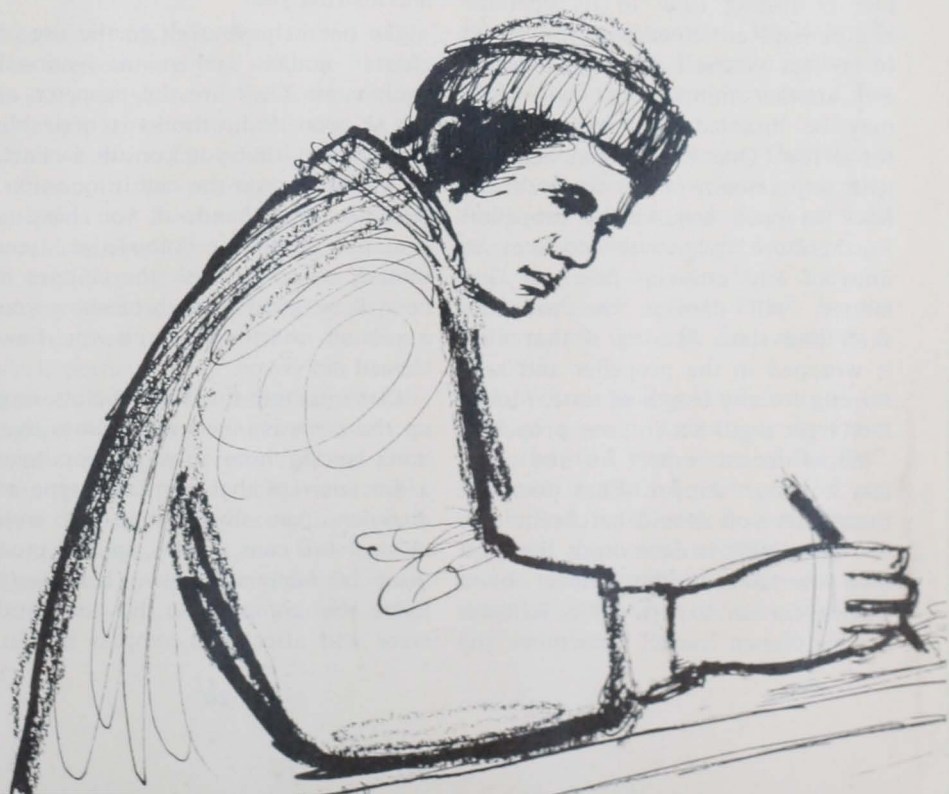
Now, "Iron Mike" keeps your vessel on its course for you, which leaves you free to devote your full attention to looking ahead. A sharp scrutiny of the waters right in front of your bow is very important, because every one of the 900-odd nautical miles between Puget Sound and Cape Spencer is richly endowed with driftwood: logs, large and small, and much other debris that can do great damage to your propeller and propeller shaft if given the chance. Furthermore, once you have passed Petersburg, Alaska, you may well meet small flotillas of icebergs, too many of which are large enough to sink your boat in a collision.

Learn to "box the compass," that is, to read the compass rose by points, half-points, and quarter-points. Some skippers (and mates) give courses in degrees, but a good many still use the point system. In any event, a sea-

faring man must know how to receive orders either way; hence he must know the art of "boxing the compass."

Do not read on your wheel watch! In later years since "Iron Mike" has been pressed into service as helmsman, much monstrous recklessness with other people's lives and property has been practiced on certain fishing vessels, sometimes with the skipper's permission, one hears! Be that as it may, the fact remains that a man who will read a story while he is supposed to be on lookout, and indeed is responsible for the safety of vessel and crew, is unfit to be in a pilothouse. The skipper who consents to such reckless behavior is also lacking in good judgment.

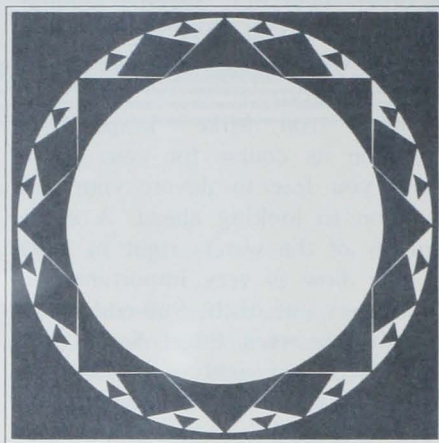
When running at night, step outside the pilothouse once or twice on your watch, especially if you see the running lights of an oncoming vessel up ahead, and make sure that your running lights are burning. A burnt-out bulb in one of your running lights can easily be the cause of a collision, especially on inside waters.



If you have to travel inside waters during the gill net season, you will more than likely have to travel through waters where dozens, even hundreds, of gill net boats are fishing. Here you must be "extra-extra" careful. It is not only a question of looking ahead and of seeing all those lights, it is also a question of judgment, of trying to decide for yourself which light represents the gill net boat and which one the tail end of his gill net! And even worse, which taillight belongs to which boat? On the bridge or in the pilothouse of a larger fishing vessel your eyes will be some 12 to 20 feet above the waterline; from that height it can be extremely difficult to judge the difference in height between the stern light on a gill net boat and the light on the tail end of the net. A sharp lookout, coupled with a wide-awake watchfulness, is of the essence! If ever in doubt, call the skipper and get his help.

If you do run across a gill net, your ability to quickly throttle down your engine and disengage your clutch will be of great importance. Do not try to back up. A gill net in the propeller is something to be feared like the plague. For one thing, the net may be greatly damaged, causing loss of fishing time to its operator and perhaps an appearance in a court of law for yourself and your skipper. For another thing, your own vessel may be disabled, and have to call for a tow. One cannot run very far with any amount of gill net web and lines wrapped around the propeller. Furthermore, nylon web and lines, or lines of any artificial fiber for that matter, will damage the propeller shaft and stern bearing if that fiber is wrapped in the propeller and kept turning for any length of time. Moral: Don't get a gill net in your propeller!

Show decent respect for and courtesy to your skipper. That does not mean that you should be obsequious, or "crawling"; it does mean that you owe the skipper the respect of a novice for an expert—of a follower for his chosen leader. Remember, the



skipper is your leader in your work as well as in your general living while you are on board his vessel; he is also the expert upon whose knowledge and skill your earnings depend, as well as your safe return to dry land.

Leave the electronic instruments (sounders, radar, loran, ship-to-shore telephone, R.D.F., etc.) strictly alone, except upon orders from the skipper, of course. The instruments belong to the vessel, not the crew, and the skipper (not you) is responsible for their use. If the skipper wishes you to use any of them he will tell you so, and instruct you.

Do not help yourself to the use of charts and/or other navigational equipment. They are the property of the skipper. If he thinks it desirable or necessary that you consult a chart, he will show you the one in question. On the other hand, if you have a genuine thirst for knowledge, you should, of course, ask the skipper if he will be good enough to show you a certain chart and teach you how to read it.

Don't get into the habit of cluttering up the compass shelf with things that don't belong there; most skippers take a dim view of that particular type of disorder. Any object made of iron or steel (tin cans, knives, splicer, etc.) must be kept at least 3 feet away from the compass so no magnetic error will affect the compass needle.

Photographic light meters and cameras with built-in light meters must also be kept at least 3 feet away from the compass; the same is true of flashlights. In short, keep the compass shelf uncluttered, and never place any iron or other material nearby which will affect a magnetic compass.

When your wheel watch is over and the next man comes to take the watch, remember to give him course and position. Don't force him to ask you for it. See that he repeats the information back to you correctly. Was your relief prompt, and did he appear in the pilothouse on time or was he 5 minutes behind the clock? By the way, did *you* take over the wheel on the stroke of the hour, or were you a few minutes late? Remember, your trick at the wheel starts on the stroke of the hour, not 5 or 6 or 10 minutes after the hour. It is customary to be a few minutes early, get the watch data from the man being relieved, and then relieve him when the clock strikes the hour.

If you have fish in the boat, be sure to pump out the fishhold before going below. All fishing vessels have a hand-operated pump on deck; many boats have one or more pumps installed in the engine room. These may be electrically or mechanically driven and may, on some vessels, be started from the pilothouse. If you use the hand-operated deck pump for pumping out the hold, count the strokes each time you pump. This will tell you if the ice is melting normally: an unusually large number of strokes will warn you that your vessel may be taking in water; that a small leak has developed somewhere below the water line, in hull or in stern bearing.

The deck pump may have to be "primed" in order to pick up the water from the bilge. Use the draw bucket; a single bucketful will do the trick. If you use a power-driven pump, look at your watch when you start the pump and again when you stop it. If you find that the water in the bilges appears to be on the increase, notify the skipper at once.