

EAGLE Seamanship - 4th edition.

Revised by CAPT Eric C. Jones USGC and LT Christopher D. Nolan USCG

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Reviewed by Richard Pomeroy *

EAGLE Seamanship is most decidedly a manual and not a reader. The book sets out to distil the complexities of square rig sailing into a concise, instructive 'pocket book' and to some extent enable cadets to develop their leadership skills.

Though didactic and understandably military in style, the enthusiasm of the authors comes through from the beginning. An interesting first chapter on the history of EAGLE describes the work and eventual fate of the six previous vessels so named. As with all sea stories this is readable and engaging especially to those with an interest in the sea, an alien environment to many. The rest of the book is split into three basic parts: the mechanics and operation of the vessel; the procedures and techniques involved in 'working' the ship and emergency situations and responses to them.

The first section plunges straight into detail and depth with a description of the vessel's construction and a series of accompanying diagrams of compartment nomenclature. This is where it becomes clear that the book is indeed a manual designed to accompany the cadet or trainee on board. The system of nomenclature is well explained but committing each space designation to memory for reference in an emergency would be testing indeed and realistically could only be achieved by constant exposure to the vessel. The chapters on the rigging and sails are no less detailed but unfold rather more digestibly. Each section of description is illustrated with clear annotated line drawings. The processes, though detailed and sequential, are not difficult to follow and the accompanying commands augment the descriptions as well as demonstrating at least the knowledge aspect of the leadership roles required of the cadets.

The chapters on working the ship are similarly well illustrated and accompanied by command structures. The section inevitably begins with an explanation of aerodynamic forces that form the main driving force of the vessel. Such explanations appear in just about every 'how to do it' sailing book that I have read. Although they seem to be a necessary precursor to the treatment of sail setting and trimming concise coverage is very difficult as the inevitable parallel with the aircraft wing doesn't tell the whole story. That aside the principles of how the basic forces and resistances work together to move the vessel forward are well laid out in this book. Though the Foreword suggests that the book may be used by sailors of other square rigged vessels the particulars of the manoeuvres described will only apply to similarly rigged vessels. A brigantine cannot be boxhailed, for example. The detail of these manoeuvres is complex and the point made throughout about the necessity for crew to operate in harmony and for a complete understanding of their part in each demonstrates the real value of the book as a manual on board.

The theme of safety punctuates the book throughout and is realised in the final chapter on emergencies. Those of us who have spent time at sea appreciate the importance of such an inclusion. It is the least vessel specific chapter and therefore the most widely applicable, which is probably why it is read with detailed attention even though, as the authors rightly

suggest, the actual response in any emergency situations is going to depend on the specifics of the situation, the prevailing conditions and the consequent decisions of the officer in charge. There is good 'standard' advice and procedure described for most square rig vessels and, though not overtly described, the authors' chill at the prospect of some situations is well communicated to the reader.

Even the glossary is worth a browse through. Square rig vessels are idiosyncratic beasts. Add to that cultural variations in the use of nautical language and there is always something to learn.

EAGLE Seamanship is a comprehensive and worthwhile manual well aimed at cadets, trainees and other junior ranks on the vessel. It has some applicability to other vessels but will find its utility greatest with its target audience once familiarised with EAGLE herself.

As a training manual it will serve as a preparation for action and a review and consolidation of learning. I suspect it will also find a wider readership in those square rig and ex-square rig sailors whose time at sea will enable them to follow and imagine the specifics of sailing EAGLE, enjoying the idiosyncrasies of her rigging and 'tweaking' techniques compared with other square riggers they have known.

The authors are to be commended for their clarity of explanation and straightforward coverage of a subject that many may consider to be a 'black art'. Visitors to tall ships around the world cast their eyes upwards to the baffling network of rigging that surrounds them. EAGLE Seamanship unpicks it, describes it and illustrates it. The authors' enthusiasm for the task is apparent throughout. This manual will surely find its way to the bookshelves of others who share that enthusiasm for tall ships.

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