

NAUTICAL TERMINOLOGY

Term	Meaning	Featured in Song Number
Advance Note	A note for one month's wages issued to sailors on their signing a ship's articles	
Aldis Lamp	A Signal lamp pioneered by the British Royal Navy in the late 19th century	99
Aloft	In the rigging of a sailing ship. Above the ship's uppermost solid structure; overhead or high above	Various
Aweigh	Position of an anchor just clear of the bottom	Various
Bar	Large mass of sand or earth, formed by the surge of the sea. They are mostly found at the entrances of great rivers or havens, and often render navigation extremely dangerous, but confer tranquility once inside	26
Barbary Coast	or Berber Coast, was the term used by Europeans from the 16th until the 19th century to refer to much of the collective land of the Berber people, what is now Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya	
Barque, Bark	A sailing vessel of three or more masts, with all masts but the sternmost square-rigged, the sternmost being fore-and-aft-rigged	58, 65, 91, 106
Belay	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To make fast a line around a fitting, usually a cleat or belaying pin To secure a climbing person in a similar manner An order to halt a current activity or countermand an order prior to execution 	31,33,76
Belaying Pin	Short movable bars of iron or hard wood to which running rigging may be secured, or belayed	
Bilge	The compartment at the bottom of the hull of a ship or boat where water collects and must be pumped out of the vessel	106
Blackball Line	Trans-Atlantic packet shipping company	26,32
Block	A pulley or set of pulleys	33, 42
Blood Boat	Before the days when ships had large refrigerators, a duty cutter was sent ashore daily (usually in the early hours of the morning) to draw fresh meat. This boat, which often sailed or pulled many miles to complete the trip, was nicknamed the "Blood Boat" - later more generally known as the beef boat	32
Bobstay	A stay which holds the bowsprit downwards, counteracting the effect of the forestay. Usually made of wire or chain to eliminate stretch	27
Bosun, Boatswain	A non-commissioned officer responsible for the sails, ropes, rigging and boats on a ship who issues "piped" commands to seamen	Various
Bowline, Bowlin'	A type of knot, producing a strong loop of a fixed size, topologically similar to a sheet bend. Also a rope attached to the side of a sail to pull it towards the bow	28

Broadside	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One side of a vessel above the waterline. 2. All the guns on one side of a warship or mounted (in rotating turrets or barbettes) so as to be able fire on the same side of a warship. 3. The simultaneous firing of all the guns on one side of warship or able to fire on the same side of a warship. 4. Weight of broadside, the combined weight of all projectiles a ship can fire in a broadside, or the combined weight of all the shells a group of ships that have formed a line of battle collectively can fire on the same side. 	72
Bulgine	American slang term for a railway engine	60
Bullies, Bully boys	Bully boys, a term prominent in shanties and poems, means in its strictest sense, "beef eating sailors." Sailors of the Colonial Navy had a daily menu of an amazingly elastic substance called bully beef, actually beef jerky. The item appeared so frequently on the messdeck that it naturally lent its name to the sailors who had to eat it.	Various
Bumper	A drinking vessel filled to the brim	20
Bunting Tossler	A signalman who prepares and flies flag hoists. Also known in the American Navy as a skivvy waver	99
Cables Length	A measure of length or distance. Equivalent to (UK) 1/10 nautical mile, approx. 600 feet; (USA) 120 fathoms, 720 feet (219 m); other countries use different values.	11
Cape Horn, The Horn	Southern most part of South America	Various
Capstan	A large winch with a vertical axis. A full-sized human-powered capstan is a waist-high cylindrical machine, operated by a number of hands who each insert a horizontal capstan bar in holes in the capstan and walk in a circle. Used to wind in anchors or other heavy objects; and sometimes to administer flogging over	63, 75
Captain's Daughter	The cat o' nine tails, which in principle is only used on board on the captain's (or a court martial's) personal orders	45
Cat Stopper	Anchor	20
Chains	Small platforms built into the sides of a ship to assist in depth sounding	36
Chicken on a Raft	Egg on Toast	3
Clew	the "free" corners of a square sail - see Clewgarnets	
Clewgarnets	'Clew lines' are ropes attached to the clews, and 'clewgarnets' or 'cluegarnets' are the tackles attached to clew lines. These lines and tackles are used to 'clew up' the 'courses' of a square sail (i.e. to pull the clews up onto the upper yard or the mast in preparation for furling the sail).	20
Clipper, Clipper Ship	A very fast sailing ship of the 19th century that had three or more masts, a square rig, a long, low hull, and a sharply raked stem	Various

Comic Cuts	Personal Record of Service	3
Crapaud, Johnny Crapaud	Pronounced crappo. A Frenchman, so called by the English sailors in the long Napoleon contest. The ancient Flemings used to call the French "Crapaud Franchos." In allusion to the toads borne originally in the arms of France	75
Crimp	A man who forced others to serve aboard ship, often by trickery or violence. (archaic); as in: "Only a fool would let a crimp buy the drinks."	100
Dabtoes	New Sailors, or deck hands who got their feet wet	3
Dead Horse	The Dead Horse was a ceremonial shanty sung at the end of a sailor's first month at sea. It was to celebrate the end of the sailor's debt to the ship - when he started working for himself.	
Dolphin Dolphin Striker	A structure consisting of a number of piles driven into the seabed or riverbed as a marker A spar mounted downward under the bowsprit over the end of which the bobstay is fastened in order to increase its bearing angle on the end of the bowsprit. The purpose of the dolphin striker is exactly the same as the spreaders in the mast rigging. The name is derived from the dolphin's habit of leaping under the bows of a vessel under way.	86
Donkey	A Donkey Engine, used for loading and unloading Cargo	4
Duff	A stiff flour pudding boiled in a cloth bag or steamed	49, 73
Dustman	Stoker	3
Essequibo River	Largest River in Guyana, border River between Guana and Venezuela	5
Fathom	6 feet or 1.82880 m	
First Mate	The second-in-command of a commercial ship	Various
First Mate	The deck officer who is second in command after the captain.	
Fore, Forward, Foreward	Towards the Bow of the Vessel. Forard, and often written for'ard	Various
Forecastle, Fo'c's'l	Pronounced Folk'sl A compartment forward of the mast where the seamen have their berths. The foreward most compartment in a sailboat.	111
General Talor	Zachayr Taylor (November 24, 1784 - July 9, 1850). 12th President of the USA, He achieved fame leading American troops to victory in the Battle of Palo Alto and the Battle of Monterrey during the Mexican–American War.	8,78
Grey Funnel Line	Royal Navy	107
Grog	Watered-down pusser's rum consisting of half a gill with equal part of water, issued to all seamen over twenty. (CPOs and POs were issued with neat rum) From the British Admiral Vernon who, in 1740, ordered the men's ration of rum to be watered down. He was called "Old Grogram" because he often wore a grogram coat, and the watered rum came to be called 'grog'	86, 98

Groggy	Drunk from having too much Grog	
Halyard or Halliard	Originally, ropes used for hoisting a spar with a sail attached; today, a line used to raise the head of any sail	30, 132
Hawser	Large rope used for mooring or towing a vessel	120
Heaving the lead	A lead weight hollowed out at the bottom is fitted to a lead line, so that it may be armed with tallow, this allows the nature of the bottom to be ascertained when a lead line is used by a seaman to find the depth of water when a ship is navigating in restricted or shallow waters	36
Heaving to	Stopping a sailing vessel by lashing the helm in opposition to the sails. The vessel will gradually drift to leeward, the speed of the drift depending on the vessel's design	
Helm	1. The wheel , tiller or device which is used to steer a ship; as in: "A man can be tired after standing a four-hour watch at the helm." 2. The position in the wheelhouse where the steering device is located.	111
High Barbary	See Barbary Coast	72
Hog Eye	A Hog Eye is a kind of a barge, popular in (but not exclusive to)the canals during the 19th century	49
Holystone	A chunk of sandstone used to scrub the decks. The name comes from both the kneeling position sailors adopt to scrub the deck (reminiscent of genuflection for prayer), and the stone itself (which resembled a Bible in shape and size).	125
Hong-ki-kong	Referring to Sampan girls who retailed sexual favours to sailors aboard ships in the harbour	4
Hove	Past tense of Heave - see Heaving to	20
Jack Tar, Tar	A sailor dressed in 'square rig' with square collar. Formerly with a tarred pigtail	82
Jimmy	Executive Officer (Second in Command)	3
Kanaka	Kanaka was the term for a worker from various Pacific Islands employed in British colonies, such as British Columbia (Canada), Fiji and Queensland (Australia) in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They also worked in California and Chile. The word "kanaka" originally referred only to native Hawaiians, called k ā naka 'ōiwi or k ā naka maoli in the Hawai ʻ ian language	14, 17
Killick	A small anchor. A fouled killick is the substantive badge of non-commissioned officers in the RN. Seamen promoted to the first step in the promotion ladder are called 'Killick'. The badge signifies that here is an Able Seaman skilled to cope with the awkward job of dealing with a fouled anchor	99
Larboard	The port side of a vessel. Archaic and not used anymore, probably because it sounds too much like its opposite, starboard. The left side of a vessel when seen by someone facing the bow;	111
League	The league originally referred to the distance a person or a horse could walk in an hour.At sea, a league was three nautical miles (about 5.6 km)	20
Leeward	From or toward the side of the vessel that is away from the wind	106
Letter of Marque	A warrant granted to a privateer condoning specific acts of piracy against a target as a redress for grievances	11

Limey, Lime Juice Sailor	A British sailor, so called because their ships were supplied with limes on long voyages to prevent scurvy.	32, 75
Luff	The forward edge of a sail.	128
Main	Deep oceans. The high seas As in Spanish Main	Various
Main Yard	Yard on the Mainmast - see yard	20
Main-truck	On a wooden mast, a circular disc (or sometimes a rectangle) of wood near or at the top of the mast, usually with holes or sheaves to reeve signal halyards; also a temporary or emergency place for a lookout. "Main" refers to the mainmast, whereas a truck on another mast may be called (on the mizzenmast, for example) "mizzen-truck".	11
Man-of-War	A warship from the Age of Sail	72
Mate	A subordinate deck officer on board ship. When the captain is not on the bridge, the command responsibility is turned over to the mate or some other highly qualified deck officer.	65
Maui	Second Largest Island of Hawaii	14
Mingulay	is the second largest of the Bishop's Isles in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland	19
Mizzen Peak	the top of the mizen mast	86
Molly Del Rey	The Battle of Molino del Rey was one of the bloodiest engagements of the Mexican-American War. It was fought in September 1847 between Mexican forces under General Antonio León against an American force under General Winfield Scott at a hill called El Molino del Rey near Mexico City.	8
Mollymauk	The mollymawks are a group of medium sized albatrosses	134
Months Advance	See advance note	75
Mulatto	Is a term used to refer to a person who is born from one white parent and one black parent	29, 129
Navvy	navigator (or pilot) OR people that worked on the inland waterway systems and canals in the UK were known as 'navvies' because they worked on the (inland)'navigations'	49
Nelson's Blood	Legend has it that grog aquired the nickname "Nelson's Blood" after Trafalgar (1805). To preserve Lord Nelson's body, it was placed in a barrel of rum. Legend has it that when the sailor's learned of this, they drank the rum. From that time on, grog was also known as "Nelson's Blood."	25
Orlop (deck)	The lowest deck of a ship of the line. The deck covering in the hold	48
Packet, Packet Boat, Packet Ship	1. Originally, a vessel employed to carry post office mail packets to and from British embassies, colonies and outposts 2. Later, any regularly scheduled ship, carrying passengers, as in Packet Trade	Various
Pawl	A stop that falls into the teeth of a windlass to hold it from turning backward	75
Poop Deck	A high deck on the aft superstructure of a ship	106, 111

Press, Press Gang	Formed body of personnel from a ship of the Royal Navy (either a ship seeking personnel for its own crew or from a 'press tender' seeking men for a number of ships) that would identify and force (press) men, usually merchant sailors into service on naval ships usually against their will.	70
Privateer	A privately owned ship authorised by a national power (by means of a Letter of marque) to conduct hostilities against an enemy. Also called a private man of war	11
Prize	A property captured at sea in virtue of the rights of war, as a vessel	70
Prize Crew	Members of a warship's crew assigned to man a vessel taken as a prize	
Prize Money	See Prize	37
Purser, Pusser	The person who buys, stores and sells all stores on board ships, including victuals, rum and tobacco. Originally a private merchant, latterly a warrant officer	3
Pussers	Anything issued or supplied by the Navy	3
Quartedeck	The upper exposed deck at the stern of a vessel, the province of the ship's officers, and usually the location for ceremonial functions and for disciplinary hearings	75
Quarter	1. The stern part of a vessel on either side of the rudder 2. Mercy or clemency, especially when displayed or given to an enemy	72
Quarterdeck	The aftermost deck of a warship. In the age of sail, the quarterdeck was the preserve of the ship's officers.	111, 127
Reef	1. To temporarily reduce the area of a sail exposed to the wind, usually to guard against adverse effects of strong wind or to slow the vessel 2. Rock or coral, possibly only revealed at low tide, shallow enough that the vessel will at least touch if not go aground	57
Rigger	A crewman expert in the arts of sewing, splicing, whipping and knot tying, and who makes and maintains the ropes and sail attachments.	93
Rigging	The system of masts and lines on ships and other sailing vessels	33, 123
Ringtail	1. A narrow studdingsail set abaft a gaff sail, esp. a spanker, upon spears extending beyond the gaff and boom (does not mean anything to me either!) 2. A small triangular sail, extended on a little mast, which is occasionally erected for that purpose on the top of a ship's stern	86
Santa Anna	Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón (21 February 1794 – 21 June 1876), Mexican President and military leader	8
Schooner	A type of sailing vessel characterized by the use of fore-and-aft sails on two or more masts with the forward mast being no taller than the rear masts.	51
Schooner	A sailing ship carrying two or more masts bearing fore and aft sails, with the mizzen forward of the mainmast.	91

Scuppers	Originally a series of pipes fitted through the ships side from inside the thicker deck waterway to the topside planking to drain water overboard, larger quantities drained through freeing ports, which were openings in the bulwarks	11
Second Mate	The second mate is the third in command (or on some ocean liners fourth) and a watchkeeping officer, customarily the ship's navigator	111
Shanghaied	Condition of a crewman involuntarily impressed into service on a ship	26
Shank Painter	A short rope or chain by which the shank of an anchor is held fast to a ship's side when not in use	20
Sheave	The rotating wheel inside a block or pulley	76
Sheet	A line (rope, cable or chain) used to control the movable corner(s) (clews) of a sail.	20, 97
Shellback	A veteran sailor, usually referring to one who has crossed the equator	31
Signal, signals	The system of international maritime signal flags is one system of flag signals representing individual letters of the alphabet in signals to or from ships	20
Skipper	The captain of a ship	Various
Skysail or Skys'l	A sail set very high, above the royals. Only carried by a few ships	30
Sloop	A sailing vessel carrying a single mast mounted slightly forward of the beam and a jib	91, 92, 106
Sounding	Measuring the depth of the water. Traditionally done by swinging the lead	20
Spar	A wooden, in later years also iron or steel pole used to support various pieces of rigging and sails	Various
Splice	To join lines (ropes, cables etc.) by unravelling their ends and intertwining them to form a continuous line. To form an eye or a knot by splicing.	136
Splice The Mainbrace	A euphemism, it is an order given aboard naval vessels to issue the crew with a drink, traditionally grog. The phrase splice the mainbrace is used idiomatically meaning to go ashore on liberty, intending to go out for an evening of drinking	
Spliced	Married	136
Square Rig, Square Rigger	A sailing ship having four sided sails suspended at the middle on yards. Most of the tall ships are square rigs	137
Squaring a yard	"Squaring a yard" adjusts the position of the square sails so that they are perpendicular to the keel of the ship	20
Staggers & Jags	Twitching, loss of balance and motor skills, and hallucinations caused by intense alcohol abuse; technical term is delirium tremens.	11
Stamp and Go (shanty)	Although technically a hauling action, the work accompanied by this type of shanty was continuous in nature. Thus the songs had longer choruses, similar to heaving shanties. The work entailed many hands taking hold of a line with their backs to the "fall" (where the line reaches the deck from aloft) and marching away with it along the deck.	96

Starboard	The right side of a vessel when seen by someone facing the bow;	
Station	A seaman's assigned place of work, or his assigned area of responsibility in an emergency	75
Stays	Rigging running fore (forestay) and aft (backstay) from a mast to the hull.	11
Stockholm Tar	Pine tar has long been used in Scandinavian nations as a preservative for wood which may be exposed to harsh conditions, including outdoor furniture and ship decking and rigging. The high-grade pine tar used in this application is often called Stockholm Tar since, for many years, a single company held a royal monopoly on its export out of Stockholm, Sweden	138
Stu'n's'l	A studding sail or studsail (traditionally pronounced stuns'l) is a sail used to increase the sail area of a square rigged vessel or 1950s racing skiffs in light winds.	14
Tacks	The tack is the lower corner of the sail's leading edge	20
Tall Ship	Any of the large square rigged sailing ships	91
Top	The platform at the upper end of each (lower) mast of a square-rigged ship, typically one-fourth to one-third of the way up the mast. The main purpose of a top is to anchor the shrouds of the topmast that extends above it.	
Topman	A crewmember stationed in a top - see top	15
Topsail, Tops'ls	The second sail (counting from the bottom) up a mast. These may be either square sails or fore-and-aft ones, in which case they often "fill in" between the mast and the gaff of the sail below.	Various
Transports	Convicts being conveyed to Australia	85
Valpariso, Vallipo	A Port in Chile	4,75
Weigh Anchor	To heave up (an anchor) preparatory to sailing	85, 127
Windlass	A geared bit that gives a mechanical advantage when drawing a line taut	
Windward	The side of the vessel that is in the wind	111
Yard	The horizontal spar from which a square sail is suspended.	
Yardarm	The very end of a yard. Often mistaken for a "yard", which refers to the entire spar	33

Clive Simpson - October 2012