

HORNBLOWER NAUTICAL GLOSSARY

A

Aback

Wind on the wrong side of the sails.

Abaft

Toward the rear of the ship, behind the ship.

Abeam

At a right angle to the length of the ship.

Abreast

Off the side, even with the ship.

Accidental jibe

An accidental jibe happens when the ship is steered or the wind shifts such that the stern of the ship accidentally passes through the eye of the wind. This causes that main boom to swing violently to the other side of the ship.

Alee

To the leeward side (downwind).

Anchor rode

The line or chain attached to the anchor and secured to the ship.

Anchor watch

A watch kept when the ship is at anchor in case the anchor starts to drag.

At the dip

A flag hoisted half way up a flagpole. Also see Close up.

Athwart, athwartships

Lying along the ship's width, at right angles to the vessels centerline.

B

Backing (wind)

The changing of the wind direction, opposite of veering. Clockwise in the southern hemisphere, counter-clockwise in the northern hemisphere.

Backstay

A stay (line or cable) used to support the mast. The

backstay runs from the masthead to the stern and helps keep the mast from falling forward.

Backwinded

When the wind pushes on the wrong side of the sail, causing it to be pushed away from the wind.

Barque

A three-masted ship with a distinctive sail configuration.

Barricade

A parapet running along either side of the open deck.

Batten

(1) A thin strip of wood.

(2) Battens are attached to a sail to stiffen it to a more preferred shape. They are placed in pockets sewn into the sail called batten pockets.

(3) Battens also used to be used to secure hatches.

Beam reach

Sailing on a point of sail such that the apparent wind is coming from the beam (side) of the ship at about a 90° angle. A beam reach is usually the fastest point of sail. A beam reach is a point of sail between a broad reach and a close reach.

Beam

(1) The widest part of a ship.

(2) Abeam, at right angles to the length of the ship.

(3) Sturdy wooden timbers running across the width of a ship.

Bear away, bear off

To fall off. A ship falls off the wind when it points its bow further from the eye of the wind. The opposite of heading up.

Bearing

The direction of an object from the observer. "The lighthouse is at a bearing of 90 degrees."

Beat

To sail on a tack toward the wind.

Bight

The center of a slack line (i.e: where it sags). Also a small indented curve in a shoreline.

Bilge

The lowest part of the interior of the ship where water collects.

Binnacle

The mount for the compass, usually located on the wheel's pedestal.

Boarding wave

A wave that breaks over the deck of the ship.

Boatswain

See Bosun.

Bollard

A large pillar, usually made of concrete or steel, to which a ship's mooring lines can be tied.

Boom

A spar that is used to secure the bottom of a sail, allowing more control of the position of a sail.

Bosun

Also boatswain, bos'n, bo's'n, and bo'sun, all of which are pronounced bosun. A crew member responsible for keeping the hull, rigging and sails in repair.

Bowditch

A reference book named after the original author, Nathaniel Bowditch. Updated versions contain tables and other information useful for navigation.

Bowlines

Lines tied to sails as a means of pulling them forward.

Bowsprit

A pole extending from the bow of a ship. The bowsprit is used to attach the headstay forward of the front of the ship's deck. This allows added sail area for the head sail.

Brace

A line attached to a yard for fixing its direction.

Breaking seas

With sufficiently strong wind, large waves can form crests even in deep water, causing the wave tops to tumble forward over the waves.

Breeching

The line attached to a gun and the ship's side, preventing it from being run out too far.

Brig, Brigantine

A two-masted, square-rigged ship.

Bristol fashion

A term used to describe a clean and orderly ship.

Broaching

The unplanned turning of a vessel to expose its side to the oncoming waves. In heavy seas this could cause the ship to be knocked down.

Broad on the beam

The position of an object that lies off to one side of the vessel.

Broad reach

Sailing with the apparent wind coming across the quarter of the ship. A broad reach is a point of sail between a beam reach and running

Bulwarks

The side of a ship above the upper deck.

By the lee

A point of sail similar to running where the wind is coming over the quarter of the sailboat on the same side that the main sail and boom are on. This point of sail is considered dangerous because of the possibility of an accidental jibe.

C

Cable length

A measurement of about 240 yards.

Capstan

A rotating drum used to haul heavy lines and chains. Similar to a winch, but mounted vertically.

Caronade

A short-barreled gun that fired large shot at close range.

Catboat

A sailboat rigged with one mast and one sail.

Celestial navigation

A method of using the stars, sun and moon to determine one's position. Position is determined by measuring the apparent altitude of one of these objects above the horizon using a sextant and recording the times of these sightings with an accurate clock. That

information is then used with tables in the Nautical Almanac to determine one's position.

Chock

A fitting that a line can pass through and be controlled.

Chop

Small, steep disorderly waves.

Clew

The lower aft corner of a sail.

Close hauled

Sailing with the sails hauled tight, sailing the ship towards the wind as much as possible.

Close reach

Sailing with the wind coming from the direction forward of the beam of the ship. A close reach is the point of sail between a beam reach and close hauled.

Close up

A flag hoisted to the top of a flagpole. Also see At the dip.

Close winded

A ship that is able to sail well into the wind.

Club footed

A jib or staysail that utilizes a small boom.

Club-hauling

Tacking by using an anchor.

Cold front

A mass of cold air moving toward a mass of warm air. Strong winds and rain typically accompany a cold front.

Compass rose

A circle on a chart indicating the direction of geographic north and sometimes also magnetic north. Charts usually have more than one compass rose. The compass rose nearest to the object being plotted should be used as the geographic directions and magnetic variations may change slightly in different places on the chart.

Crosstrees

Spreaders. Small spars extending toward the sides from one or more places along the mast. The shrouds

cross the end of the spreaders, enabling the shrouds to better support the mast.

Cutter

A small, single-masted vessel. Also see Sloop.

Cutwater

The front edge of the ship.

D

Dead before

Running with the wind directly behind the ship.

Deckhead

The underside of the deck, viewed from below (the ceiling).

Dinghy, dink

A small boat used to travel from a boat to shore, carrying people or supplies. Also known as a dink or tender.

Distance made good

The distance traveled after correction for current, leeway and other errors that may not have been included in the original log-line distance measurement.

Douse

To drop a sail quickly.

Down helm

To steer a ship toward the wind.

Downhaul

A line used to pull down on a spar or sail.

Downwind

In the direction the wind is blowing.

Draft

The depth of a ship, measured from the deepest point to the waterline. The water must be at least this depth or the ship will run aground.

Drift

The velocity of a current.

Drogue

Any object used to increase the drag of a ship. Typically shaped like a parachute or cone opened underwater, drogues slow a ship's motion in heavy weather. Also see Sea anchor.

E

East wind, easterly wind

A wind coming from the east.

Ebb, ebb tide

The falling tide when the water moves out to the sea.

Eye of the wind

The direction that the wind is blowing from.

F

Fall off

Also bear away or bear off. A ship falls off the wind when it points its bow further from the eye of the wind. The opposite of heading up.

Fathom

A nautical measurement equaling 6 feet (182 cm).

Flood tide

The incoming tide where the water comes in from the sea.

Flotsam

Debris floating on the water surface.

Flush deck

A deck that is not obstructed by a cabin.

Following sea

A sea with waves approaching from the stern of the ship.

Foot

- (1) The bottom edge of a sail.
- (2) Sailing slightly more away from the wind than close hauled to increase the ship speed.

Fore and aft sail

A sail with its length running along the ship's length as opposed to a square sail which is mounted across the width of the vessel.

Forecabin

The cabin towards the front of the vessel.

Forecastle

Also fo'c'sle or fo'csle. Pronounced fo'csle. The most forward below decks area of a vessel.

Foredeck

The forward part of the deck.

Foremast

The forward mast of a two or more masted vessel.

Forepeak

The furthestmost forward storage area of a vessel.

Foresail

A sail placed forward of the mast, such as a jib.

Forestay

A line running from the bow of the ship to the upper part of the mast designed to pull the mast forward. A forestay that attaches slightly below the top of the mast can be used to help control the bend of the mast. The most forward stay on the ship is also called the headstay.

Forestaysail

A sail attached to the forestay as opposed to a jib which is attached to the headstay.

Freeboard

The distance between the top of the hull and the waterline.

Freeing port

An opening in the bulwarks along the deck to allow water to drain.

Freestanding mast

A mast made out of exotic materials so that it can support itself without the use of stays. See Fully-stayed mast.

Fronts

Used in meteorology to describe boundaries between hot and cold air masses. This is typically where bad weather is found.

Full and by

Sailing as close to the wind as possible with full sails.

Fully-stayed mast

A mast supported by the use of lines known as stays and shrouds.

Furl

To lower a sail. Sails are sometimes partially furled to reduce the amount of sail area in use without completely lowering the sail. This is usually known as reefing.

Futtock shroud

A short iron rod connecting the topmast rigging with the lower mast.

G

Gaff rigged

A type of traditional working ship using four sided gaff sails that are hoisted on gaffs.

Gaff

A spar that holds the top of a four sided gaff sail.

Gale force winds

Wind speeds strong enough to qualify the storm as a gale.

Gale

A storm with a wind speed between 34 to 40 knots.

Gallows frame

A frame used to support the boom.

Gasket

Ties used to tie up the sails when they are furled.

Genoa

A large jib that overlaps the mast. Also known as a jenny.

Go about

To tack.

Great circle route

A course that is the shortest distance between two points, following a great circle. Great circle routes usually do not look like the shortest route when drawn on a flat map due to deviations caused by trying to draw a flat map of a round object such as the earth.

Green water

A solid mass of water coming aboard instead of just spray.

Ground swells

Swells that become shorter and steeper as they approach the shore due to shallow water.

Ground tackle

The anchor and its rode or chain and any other gear used to make the ship fast.

Gudgeon

The hole in which the pin from a stern mounted rudder fits. The pin is known as a pintle.

Gunkholing

Cruising in shallow water and spending the nights in coves.

Gunnel, gunwale

Pronounced gunnel. The rail around the edge of a ship. Smaller versions are called toe rails.

Guy

Also called a brace. A line used to control the movement of the object at the other end, such as a spar.

Gybe

See Jibe.

Gypsy

A windlass or capstan drum.

Gyres

A large circular ocean current.

H

Halyard

A line used to hoist a sail or spar.

Hand lead

A weight attached to a line used to determine depth by lowering it into the water.

Handsomely

To do something carefully and in the proper manner, such as when stowing a line.

Handy-billy

A movable block and tackle.

Hank

Clips used to fasten a sail to a stay.

Hard over

To move all the way in one direction, such as when turning the wheel.

Hard-a-lee

A command to steer the ship downwind.

Haul the wind

To close-haul a ship.

Hawse hole

A hole in the hull for mooring lines to run through.

Hawser

A rope that is very large in diameter, usually used when docking large vessels.

Head to wind

A position with the ship's bow in the direction that the wind is coming from. This will probably stop the ship and place it in irons.

Head up

To turn the bow more directly into the eye of the wind. The opposite of falling off.

Head

- (1) The front of a vessel.
- (2) The upper corner or edge of a sail.
- (3) The toilet and toilet room in a vessel.

Heading

The actual course of the vessel at any given time.

Headsail

Any sail forward of the mast, such as a jib.

Headstay

The furthest forward of all the stays on the ship.

Heave to

Arranging the sails in such a manner as to slow or stop the forward motion of the ship, such as when in heavy seas.

Heaving line

A light line used to be thrown ashore from which a larger rope can then be pulled.

Heavy seas

When the water has large or breaking waves in stormy conditions.

Heavy weather

Stormy conditions, including rough, high seas and strong winds.

Heel, heeling

When a ship tilts away from the wind.

Heeling error

The error in a compass reading caused by the heel of a ship.

Helm's alee

A warning from the helmsman that the ship is about to tack.

Helm

The wheel or tiller of a ship.

Holding ground

The type of bottom that the anchor is set in. "Good holding ground."

Horizontal angle

The angle measured between two fixed objects (usually on shore) to aid in finding a ship's position by determining the arc of a circle on which the ship must lie.

Hurricane

A strong tropical revolving storm of force 12 or higher in the northern hemisphere. Hurricanes revolve in a clockwise direction. In the southern hemisphere these storms revolve counterclockwise and are known as typhoons.

I**In irons**

A ship with its bow pointed directly into the wind, preventing the sails from filling properly so that the ship can move. It can be very difficult to get a ship that is in irons back under sail. An old square rigger could take hours to get underway again.

Inboard

Toward the center of the ship.

J**Jack line, jack stay**

A strong line, usually of flat webbing, or a wire stay running fore and aft along the sides of a ship to which a safety harness can be attached.

Jacob's ladder

A rope ladder.

Jaws

A fitting holding a boom or gaff to the mast.

Jenny

A genoa jib. A large jib that overlaps the mast.

Jetsam

Cargo or equipment that is thrown overboard to lighten a ship in distress.

Jib netting

A rope net to catch the jib when it is lowered.

Jib sheets

A sheet (line) used to control the position of the jib.

The jib has two sheets, and at any time one is the working sheet and the other is the lazy sheet.

Jib stay

The stay that the jib is hoisted on. Usually the headstay.

Jib

A triangular sail attached to the headstay. A jib that extends aft of the mast is known as a genoa.

Jibe

Also spelled gybe. To change direction in a manner such that the stern of the ship passes through the eye of the wind and the boom changes sides. Prior to jibing the boom will be very far to the side of the ship.

Careful control of the boom and mainsail is required when jibing in order to prevent a violent motion of the boom when it switches sides. Jibing without controlling the boom properly is known as an accidental jibe. Tacking is preferred to jibing because the boom is not subject to such violent changes. Jibing is usually needed when running with the wind and tacking is used when close hauled.

Jigger

A small sail on the mizzen mast of a yawl or a ketch.

Jury rig

A temporary repair using improvised materials and parts.

K

Kedging

To kedge off. A method of pulling a ship out of shallow water when it has run aground. A dinghy is used to set an anchor, then the ship is pulled toward the anchor. Those steps are repeated until the ship is in deep enough water to float.

Keel

A flat surface built into the bottom of the ship to prevent the reduction of leeway caused by the wind pushing against the side of the ship. A keel also usually has some ballast to help keep the ship upright and prevent it from heeling too much.

Keelson

A beam attached to the top of the floors to add strength to the keel on a wooden ship.

Ketch

A sailboat with two masts. The shorter mizzen mast is aft of the main mast, but forward of the rudder post. A similar vessel, the yawl, has the mizzen mast aft of the rudder post.

King plank

The center plank on a wooden deck.

King spoke

The top spoke on a wheel when the rudder is centered.

Knocked down

A ship that has rolled so that she is lying on her side or even rolled completely over. A ship with appropriate ballast should right herself after being knocked down.

Knot

A speed of one nautical mile per hour.

L

Labor

Heavy rolling or pitching while underway.

Lacing

A line used to attach a sail to a spar.

Land breeze

A wind moving from the land to the water due to temperature changes in the evening.

Lateen sail

A triangular sail.

Launch

A small boat used to ferry people to and from a larger vessel.

Lay line

An imaginary line on which a ship can sail directly to its target without tacking.

Lazarette

A small aft storage space for spare parts and other items.

Lazy guy

A line attached to the boom to prevent it from accidentally jibbing.

Lazy sheet

A line led to a sail, but is not currently in use. The line currently in use is known as the working sheet. Usually the working and lazy sheets change when the ship is tacked.

Lead line

A line with a weight on the end used to measure depth. The lead is dropped into the water and marks on the line are read to determine the current water depth. The lead usually has a cavity to return a sample of the bottom type (mud, sand, etc.)

League

Three nautical miles.

Lee helm

The tendency for a ship to want to steer away from the direction of the wind. The opposite condition is known as weather helm.

Lee shore

The shore that the wind is blowing toward. It is important to keep distance from the lee shore because the ship will be blown toward it if control of the vessel is lost.

Lee

The direction that the wind is blowing toward. The direction sheltered from the wind.

Leeward

The direction away from the wind. Opposite of windward.

Leeway

The sideways movement of a ship away from the wind, usually unwanted. Keels and other devices help prevent a ship from having excessive leeway.

Limber hole

A hole in between compartments in the bottom of the

ship to allow water to flow into the bilge where it is sent overboard.

List

A leaning to one side when not underway. Usually the result of an improperly loaded ship. Heeling is different from a list because it is caused by the forces of wind acting upon a ship that is underway. When a ship changes tacks, the direction of the heel will change sides, whereas a list is a continual leaning to the same side under any condition.

Log

A written record of a ship's condition, usually including items such as ship position, ship speed, wind speed and direction, course, and other information.

Log-line

A piece of wood attached to a line and thrown overboard. The line was knotted at regular intervals so that the number of intervals pulled overboard in a given time enabled calculation of the ship's speed. The distance read from a log-line could be affected by currents, leeway and other factors, so those distances were sometimes corrected to a "distance made good."

Loose footed

A sail whose foot (bottom) is not attached to a boom or other rigid object. The opposite of club footed.

Lubber line

A mark on a compass used to read the heading of a ship.

Luff rope

Bolt rope. A rope in the luff of a sail. The luff rope is usually used to attach the sail to a mast.

Luff

The edge of a sail toward the bow of a ship. See also Luffing.

Luffing

A description of a flapping motion along the luff (leading edge) of a sail. A sail begins to luff when the air flow stalls when traveling across the sail. Luffing is a sign that the sail is not properly trimmed or that the

ship is trying to sail too close to the eye of the wind (pinching.)

Lying ahull

A ship that is letting herself be subjected to prevailing conditions without the use of sails or other devices. Lying ahull is usually not preferred to other actions because a ship may tend to lie with her beam to the waves and the wind (parallel to the waves.) This can cause a ship to roll excessively and even become knocked down.

Lying to

A ship that is almost stopped with her bow into the wind, probably with the aid of a sea anchor.

M

Magnetic north

The direction to which a compass points. Magnetic north differs from true north because the magnetic fields of the planet are not exactly in line with the north and south poles. Observed differences between magnetic and true north is known as magnetic variation.

Magnetic variation

The difference between magnetic north and true north, measured as an angle. Magnetic variation is different in different locations, so the nearest compass rose to each location on a chart must be used.

Main mast

The tallest (or only) mast on a ship.

Main topsail

A topsail on the main mast.

Mainsail

The main sail that is suspended from the main mast.

Mainsheet

The line used to control the mainsail.

Mark

Marks used on a lead line or anchor rode indicating the length of the line at that point.

Marlinespike

A pointed tool used to separate the strands of a rope or wire.

Mean low water

A figure representing the average low tide of a region.

Mercator

A type of projection of the globe used when making charts. Since the world is a sphere, it is impossible to draw accurate charts on flat paper. A Mercator projection shows all of the meridians as straight vertical lines rather than lines that would intersect. This is the type of projection used on a typical world map, but the distances become very distorted near the poles.

Meridian

A longitude line. Meridians are imaginary circles that run through both poles.

Messenger

A small line used to pull a heavier line or cable. The messenger line is usually easier to throw, lead through holes or otherwise manipulate than the line that it will be used to pull.

Midships

A place on a ship where its beam is the widest.

Minute

One sixtieth of one degree. One minute of latitude is equal to one nautical mile. Each minute is divided into sixty seconds.

Mizzen

The rear section of a ship.

Mizzen mast

A smaller aft mast on a ketch- or yawl-rigged ship.

Mizzen staysail

A small sail that is sometimes placed forward of the mizzen mast.

N

Nautical mile

Distance at sea is measured in nautical miles, which are about 6067.12 feet, 1.15 statute miles or exactly 1852 meters. Nautical miles have the unique property that a minute of latitude is equal to one nautical mile (there is a slight error because the earth is not perfectly round.) Measurement of speed is done in knots where

one knot equals one nautical mile per hour. A statute mile is used to measure distances on land in the United States and is 5280 feet.

Neap tide

The tide with the least variation in water level, occurring when the moon is one-quarter and three-quarters full. The lowest high tide and the highest low tide occur at neap tide. The opposite is the spring tide.

Noon sight

A sighting taken for celestial navigation at noon, when the sun is at its highest point in the sky.

North wind, northerly wind

Wind coming from the north.

O

Off the wind

Sailing with the wind coming from the stern or quarter of the ship.

On the beam

To the side of the ship at right angles, abeam.

On the quarter

To the stern of the ship, aft of the beam.

On the wind

Sailing close hauled. Sailing toward the wind as much as possible with the wind coming from the bow.

Ordinary

An uncommissioned warship in dock, i.e., paid for by the Navy's ordinary peacetime budget.

Orlop deck

A ship's lowest deck.

Overfall

Dangerously steep and breaking seas due to opposing currents and wind in a shallow area.

P

Packet

A small courier vessel.

Painter

A line attached to the bow of a dinghy and used to tie it up or tow it.

Parachute

Sometimes used to describe a spinnaker.

Pinch

Steering a ship too close to the eye of the wind, causing the sails to luff.

Pinnacle

A ship's boat.

Pintle

A pin used to attach a stern mounted rudder. The hole that the pin fits is known as a gudgeon.

Pitch poled

When a ship's stern is thrown over its bow.

Pitch

A fore and aft rocking motion of a ship.

Plying

Turning to windward.

Point of sail

The position of a ship in relation to the wind. A ship with its head into the wind is known as "head to wind" or "in irons". The point of sail with the bow of the ship as close as possible to the wind is called close hauled. As the bow moves further from the wind, the points of sail are called: close reach, beam reach, broad reach, and running. The general direction that a ship is sailing is known as its tack.

Point

- (1) One of 32 equidistant spots on a compass card
- (2) To sail as close as possible to the wind.

Poop deck

A ship's aft deck, above the rear of the quarterdeck.

Port tack

A ship sailing on a tack with the wind coming over the port side and the boom on the starboard side of the ship. If two ships under sail are approaching, the one on port tack must give way to the ship on starboard tack.

Pram

A type of dinghy with a flat bow.

Prevailing winds

The typical winds for a particular region and time of year.

Prow

The part of the bow forward of where it leaves the waterline.

Pulpit

A sturdy railing around the deck on the bow.

Pushpit

Also called stern pulpit. A sturdy railing around the deck at the stern.

Q

Quadrant

A device connected to the rudder that the steering cables attach to.

Quarter

The side of a ship aft of the beam. There are both a port quarter and a starboard quarter.

Quartering sea

A sea which comes over the quarter of the ship.

Quoin

A wedge-shaped piece of wood or metal.

R

Raffle

A jumble or tangle of nautical equipment.

Range

The difference between high and low tides.

Ratlines

Small lines tied between the shrouds to use as a ladder when going aloft.

Reaching

Any point of sail with the wind coming from the side of the ship. If the wind is coming from directly over the side, it is a beam reach. If the ship is pointed with its bow more directly into the wind it is a close reach. If the wind is coming from over the quarter, it is called a broad reach.

Reef

To partially lower a sail so that it is not as large. This helps prevent too much sail from being in use when the wind gets stronger.

Reeve

Leading a line through a block or other object.

Rigging

The wires, lines, halyards and other items used to attach the sails and the spars to the ship. The lines that do not have to be adjusted often are known as standing rigging. The lines that are adjusted to raise, lower and trim the sails are known as running rigging.

Roaring forties

A region between 40° south and 50° south where westerly winds circle the earth unobstructed by land.

Royals

Square sails just beneath the topgallants.

Rudder post

The post that the rudder is attached to. The wheel or tiller is connected to the rudder post.

Running fix

A fix taken by taking bearings of a single object over a period of time. By using the vessel's known course and speed, the location of the vessel can be found.

Running rigging

The lines and wires (rigging) that are used to raise, lower and adjust the sails.

Running

A point of sail where the ship has the wind coming from aft of the ship. Running can cause the danger of an accidental jibe.

S

Sail trim

The position of the sails relative to the wind and desired point of sail. Sails that are not trimmed properly may not operate efficiently. Visible signs of trim are luffing, excessive heeling, and the flow of air past telltales.

Sampson post

A strong post used to attach lines for towing or mooring.

Scend

The distance that the trough of a wave is below the average water level. With large waves in shallow water the scend is important to help determine whether a ship will run aground.

Schooner

A ship with two or more masts. The aft mast is the same size or larger than the forward one(s). Also see Ketch and Yawl.

Scow

A boat with a flat bottom and square ends.

Scud

To run before the wind in a storm.

Scull

A method of moving a ship by using a single oar at the stern.

Scupper

An opening through the toe rail or gunwale to allow water to drain back into the sea.

Sea anchor

A drogue designed to bring a ship to a near stop in heavy weather. Typically a sea anchor is set off of the bow of a ship so that the bow points into the wind and rough waves.

Set

The direction that a current is moving.

Shake out

To remove a reef from a sail.

Sheave

A wheel used to change the direction of a line, such as in a block or at the top of the masthead.

Sheer strake

The top plank on the side of a ship that follows the sheer of the deck.

Sheer

The fore and aft curvature of the deck.

Sheet

A line attached to the clew of a sail and is used to control the sail's trim. The sheets are named after the sail, as in jib sheets and main sheet.

Shroud

Part of the standing rigging that helps to support the mast by running from the top of the mast to the side of the ship.

Sideslip

The tendency of a ship to move sideways in the water instead of along its heading due to the motion of currents or leeway.

Skiff

A small boat.

Slack water

A period of almost no water movement between flood and ebb tides

Sling

Ropes used to secure the center of a yard to the mast.

Slipping the cable

Cutting the anchor line (after attaching a marker buoy for recovery).

Sloop

A style of ship characterized by a single mast with one mainsail and one foresail. Also see Cutter.

Slot

The opening between the jib and the mainsail. Wind passing through this opening increases the pressure difference across the sides of the mainsail, helping to move the ship forward.

South wind, southerly wind

Wind coming from the south.

Spar

A pole used as part of the ship rigging, such as masts, booms, spinnaker poles and gaffs.

Spill the wind

To head up into the wind or loosen a sail, allowing the sail(s) to luff.

Spinnaker

A very large lightweight sail used when running or on a broad reach.

Spring tide

The tide with the most variation in water level, occurring during new moons and full moons. This is the time of the highest high tide and the lowest low tide. The opposite of a neap tide.

Stanchion

A post near the edge of the deck used to support life lines.

Standing rigging

The rigging of a ship that does not normally need to be adjusted.

Starboard tack

A ship sailing on a tack with the wind coming over the starboard side and the boom on the port side of the ship.

Stay

Lines running fore and aft from the top of the mast to keep the mast upright. Also used to carry some sails. The backstay is aft of the mast and the forestay is forward of the mast.

Staysail

A triangular sail similar to the jib set on a stay forward of the mast and aft of the headstay.

Steadying sail

Also stability sail or riding sail. Any small sail set to help the ship maintain its direction without necessarily moving, as when at anchor or in heavy weather.

Steep seas

Tall and short waves caused by water current and wave directions being opposite to the direction of the wind.

Steerage way

In order for the rudder to be able to properly steer the ship, it must be moving through the water. The speed necessary for control is known as steerage way.

Stem

The forward edge of the bow. On a wooden ship the stem is a single timber.

Storm sail

The storm jib and storm trysail. Small sails built from heavy cloth for use during heavy weather.

Strakes

A row of wooden planks on the hull of a wooden ship.

Strike

To lower.

Studded sail, Stunsail

A small lug sail attached to the edges of the mainsails.

T

Tack

- (1) The lower forward corner of a triangular sail
- (2) The direction that a ship is sailing with respect to the wind. See also Port tack and Starboard tack.
- (3) To change a ship's direction, bringing the bow through the eye of the wind.

Taffrail

A rail around the stern of a ship.

Take in

- (1) To remove a sail.
- (2) To add a reef to a sail.

Telltale

A small line free to flow in the direction of the breeze. It is attached to sails, stays in the slot, and in other areas, enabling the helmsman and crew to see how the wind is flowing. Proper use of the telltales can help sailors improve their sail trim.

Tender

A small boat used to ferry people and supplies between a ship and the shore. See Dinghy.

Tidal range

The difference of a tide's high and low water levels.

Tide

The predictable, regular rising and lowering of water in some areas due to the pull of the sun and the moon. Tidal changes can happen approximately every 6 or 12 hours depending on the region. The period of high water level is known as high tide and the period of low water level is known as low tide.

Tiller

An arm attached to the top of the rudder to steer a small boat. If the helmsman wants to steer to starboard he pushes the tiller to port. Larger boats usually use a wheel instead of a tiller.

Toe rail

A small rail around the deck of a ship. The toe rail may

have holes in it to attach lines or blocks. A larger wall is known as a gunwale.

Topgallant

The highest of three wooden spars joined to make a mast, or a sail attached to it.

Top mast

A mast on top of another mast.

Topsail

A triangular sail set above the gaff on a gaff-rigged ship.

Trade wind

Winds in certain areas known for their consistent strength and direction. Trade winds are named because of their reliability, allowing for planned voyages along the routes favored by those winds.

Trim tab

An adjustable section of the rudder that allows the rudder to be corrected for lee helm or weather helm.

Trim

To haul in on a sheet to adjust the sail trim.

Tropic of Cancer

A line 23 degrees, 27 minutes north of the equator. On June 21 the sun is directly above the Tropic of Cancer, at all other times the sun is further south.

Tropic of Capricorn

A line 23 degrees, 27 minutes south of the equator. On December 22 the sun is directly above the Tropic of Capricorn. At all other times the sun is further north.

Tropics

The region around the equator between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. The tropics are known for their warm weather.

True north

Geographic north. Toward the North Pole.

True wind

The speed and direction of the wind. The motion of a ship will cause the wind to appear to be coming at a different direction and speed, which is known as apparent wind

Trunnion hoop

A hinged fitting at the top of a mast to hold another mast above it.

Trysail

Also called storm trysail. A very strong sail used in stormy weather. It is loose footed, being attached to the mast, but not the boom. This helps prevent boarding waves from damaging the sail or the rigging.

Turk's head

A turban-shaped knot worked on a rope with a piece of small line.

Typhoon

A strong tropical revolving storm of force 12 or higher in the southern hemisphere. Typhoons revolve in a counterclockwise direction. In the northern hemisphere these storms revolve clockwise and are known as hurricanes.

U

Under bare poles

Having no sails up. In heavy weather the windage of the mast and other spars can still be enough to move the ship.

Under the lee

On the lee side of an object, protected from the wind.

V

Veer

A shifting of the wind direction, opposite of backing. Clockwise in the northern hemisphere, counterclockwise in the southern hemisphere.

W

Warp in, Warp to

To move by hauling on a line attached to a fixed object.

Wear

To turn a ship around by turning it's prow to leeward.

Weather

To sail to windward of something.

Weather helm

The tendency of a ship to head up toward the eye of the wind. The opposite of lee helm.

Weather gauge

The advantageous position of a fighting sailing vessel relative to another. A ship at sea is said to possess the **weather gauge** if it is in any position upwind of the other vessel.

West wind, westerly wind

Wind coming from west.

Windage

The distance a strong wind blows a ship off course.

Windlass

A mechanical device used to pull in cable or chain, such as an anchor rode.

Windward

In the direction of the wind. Opposite of leeward.

Wing and wing

A method of running before the wind with two sails set. Usually the mainsail on one side and a headsail on the other, or one headsail on each side.

Working sheet

The sheet that is currently taught and in use to control a sail. The opposite of the lazy sheet.

Y**Yard**

A horizontal spar across the mast, from which sails are suspended.

Yaw

Swinging off course, usually in heavy seas.

Yawl

A two masted ship with the shorter mizzen mast placed aft of the rudder post. A ketch is similar, but the mizzen mast is forward of the rudder post.

Z**Zephyr**

A gentle breeze. The west wind.

With many thanks to Steve Pope, whose entry in *Hornblower's Navy* provided inspiration for this document; and to Nance & Underwood, whose listings provided much of the detail.

John Ward

