

Nautical Chips (Received in email, Author Unknown)

Scuttlebutt -

A butt was a barrel. Scuttle meant to chop a hole in something. The scuttlebutt was a water barrel with a hole cut into it so that sailors could reach in and dip out drinking water. The scuttlebutt was the place where the ship's gossip was exchanged.

Garbled -

Garbling was the prohibited practice of mixing rubbish with the cargo. A distorted, mixed up message was said to be garbled.

No Great Shakes -

When casks became empty they were "shaken" (taken apart) so the pieces, called shakes, could be stored in a small space. Shakes had very little value.

Fly-by-Night -

A large sail used only for sailing downwind and requiring rather little attention.

Start Over with a Clean Slate -

A slate tablet was kept near the helm on which the watch keeper would record the speeds, distances, headings and tacks during the watch. If there were no problems during the watch, the slate would be wiped clean so that the new watch could start over with a clean slate

Let the Cat Out of the Bag -

In the Royal Navy the punishment prescribed for most serious crimes was flogging. This was administered by the Bosun's Mate using a whip called a cat o' nine tails. The "cat" was kept in a leather or baize bag. It was considered bad news indeed when the cat was let out of the bag. Other sources attribute the expression to the old english market scam of selling someone a pig in a poke (bag) when the pig turned out to be a cat instead.

Taking the wind out of his sails -

Sailing in a manner so as to steal or divert wind from another ship's sails.

Son of a Gun -

When in port, and with the crew restricted to the ship for any extended period of time, wives and ladies of easy virtue often were allowed to live aboard along with the crew. Infrequently, but not uncommonly, children were born aboard, and a convenient place for this was between guns on the gun deck. If the child's father was unknown, they were entered in the ship's log as "son of a gun".

A Square Meal -

In good weather, crews' mess was a warm meal served on square wooden platters.

The Devil to Pay -

To pay the deck seams meant to seal them with tar. The devil seam was the most difficult to pay because it was curved and intersected with the straight deck planking. Some sources define the "devil" as the below-the-waterline-seam between the keel and the adjoining planking.

Paying the Devil was considered to be a most difficult and unpleasant task.

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea -

The devil seam was the curved seam in the deck planking closest to the side of the ship and next to the scupper gutters. If a sailor slipped on the deck, he could find himself between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Above Board -

Anything on or above the open deck. If something is open and in plain view it is above board.

Under the Weather -

If a crewman is standing watch on the weather side of the bow, he will be subject to the constant beating of the sea and the ocean spray. He will be under the weather.

Slush Fund -

A slushy slurry of fat was obtained by boiling or scraping the empty salted meat storage barrels. This stuff called "slush" was often sold ashore by the ship's cook for the benefit of himself or the crew. The money so derived became known as a slush fund.

Toe the Line -

When called to line up at attention, the ship's crew would form up with their toes touching a seam in the deck planking.

The Bitter End -

The end of an anchor cable is fastened to the bitts at the ship's bow. If all of the anchor cable has been payed out you have come to the bitter end.

Pipe Down -

Means stop talking and be quiet. The Pipe Down was the last signal from the Bosun's pipe each day which meant "lights out" and "silence".

Footloose -

The bottom portion of a sail is called the foot. If it is not secured, it is footloose and it dances randomly in the wind.

To Know the Ropes -

There were miles and miles of cordage in the rigging of a square rigged ship. The only way of keeping track of and knowing the function of all these lines was to know where they were located. It took an experienced seaman to know the ropes.

Over the Barrel -

The most common method of punishment aboard ship was flogging. The unfortunate sailor was tied to a grating, mast or over the barrel of a deck cannon.

