

Sometimes you will find the outgoing Chief Officer appearing quite harassed, running around in a dirty boiler suit trying to keep everything going. On the other hand, all could be flowing nicely and he could meet you with a nice cold beer in his air-conditioned cabin while wearing his uniform.

He should take you along to meet the Captain as soon as is feasible. A few things to remember. The fact that the outgoing Chief Officer calls the Captain 'Harry' or 'Attila' does not mean that you can. They could have been sailing together for the last twenty years and be joined at the hip. Call him Captain or even Sir and you cannot go wrong. Once the polite formalities are complete and your documents handed over, move on. This is not the time for any ship discussions, these will come later.

You have a number of questions to ask the outgoing Chief Officer and I suggest that you make a checklist prior to joining. Some of the items you should want answers to are:

### 3.1 Questions for the Chief Officer

- Present port problems.
- The cargo situation, plans and stability calculations.
- Next port problems.
- If the stability calculations are on a ship's computer then you will want a run through of this with him.
- The current ballast system and plan of the tanks.
- If the ship is a tanker or bulk carrier, you will want a run through of the ballasting system.
- Enhanced tank survey programme and current state of the tanks.
- The Captain, his likes and dislikes.
- Second and Third Mates.
- The Bosun and the crew.
- Chief Engineer.
- Second Engineer.
- What are the present responsibilities of the Chief Officer?
- Stores. When is the next storing and current situation?
- Paint. Is there enough for the forthcoming voyage?
- Budget. Do you have control of the deck budget and what is it?
- Expense account. What are you allowed?
- Surveys. Are there any due?
- Strange as it may seem, any seating preference in the saloon? Watch for those ruffled feathers!
- Bridge routine at sea.
- Dates of wire change and end for end (if applicable) in register.
- Spare wires for davits, cranes and gangways.
- Any anchor problems.
- Pollution. State of hydraulics on deck.

- If there are hatches, are there hatch rubber spares, tools, adhesive and spare chains?
- Whether computers are networked and what the passwords are.
- Fresh water tanks, tonnages and filling rates.
- Hold damage.
- Hull damage.
- Normal sailing trim required by the Master.
- Periodic tank survey system.

Undoubtedly you will think of more, but the main thing is that you don't think of too many after he has gone.

Ensure that you have all the stability data unless the Class stamped books are with the Master. Also make sure you have sight of the Chain Register (or record of working and lifting appliances) as this belongs to you and is your responsibility. If the outgoing Chief Officer is to remain until completion of cargo operations it will give you time to study the stowage plans and the ballasting systems and ensure that you are satisfied with the departure figures.

### 3.2 Checking Around the Ship

Having just joined, there are many things going on that will require your attention. However, if time allows, you should take a walk around the ship, examining in particular areas that are your departmental responsibility. You should make your priority those that you can check only while in port. At this stage, you are not looking for a list of faults to be corrected, but rather you are trying to get a feel for the ship and have an idea of your priorities for improvement or change.



**You'll obtain a broad overview as you walk around.**

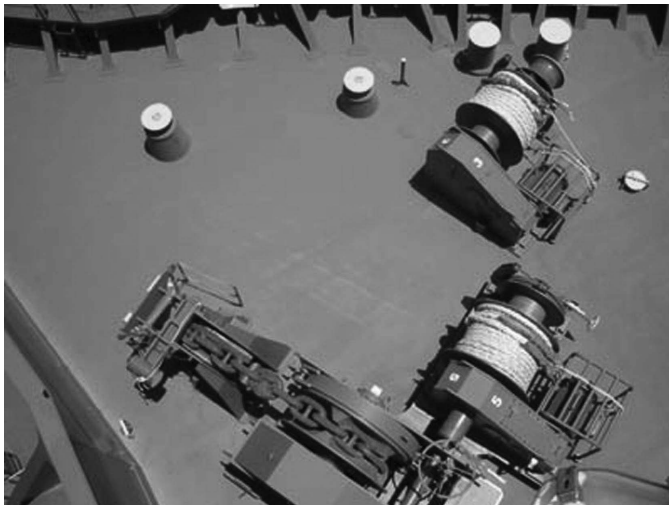
### 3.2.1 Mooring lines

Hopefully these will all be rope as many ports now object to wires. The springs could be wires with nylon tails. Have a look at the general condition of these. Frayed spliced ropes will provide an indication of the company's storing system. Check the wear of the eyes and see if they are covered. How they are secured on the bollards will give you an idea of the seamanship ability of the crew.

A good indication of the quality of maintenance onboard can be found by checking any roller fairleads and whether they turn easily or, as is sadly the case in many instances, they do not turn at all. They are required to turn with pressure from the mooring ropes so if they do not turn they could just be stiff.

### 3.2.2 Anchors

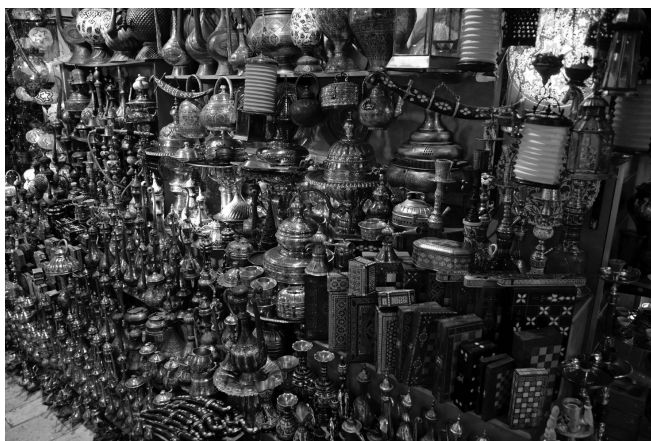
Are they well greased and are the brakes free from old grease? Are the decks coated in non-slip paint as this is a dangerous working area? Check out the windlass platforms. These can often be corroded and broken in places. The foremast and stays take very heavy weather and a close look at these will give you an idea of the maintenance standard of the vessel.



**The working areas of the ship will reveal a lot about how it has been operated.**

### 3.2.3 Foc'sle

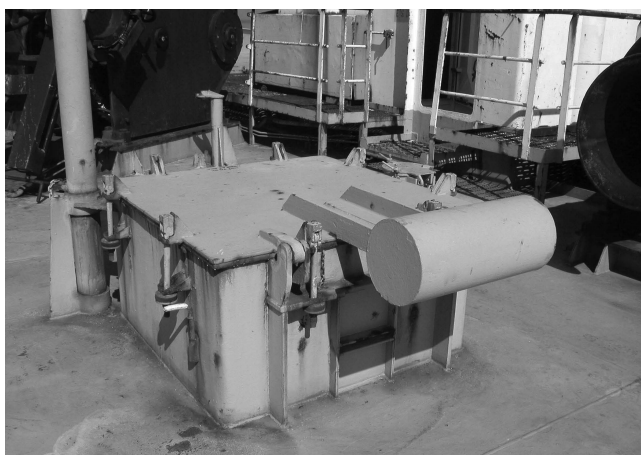
The state of the foc'sle will again indicate the housekeeping standards of your department. Chief Officers tend to hoard anything and everything on the premise that one day it might be useful, so on old ships you may find ancient machinery that no one knows the use of, pieces of rope way past their sell by date and drums of obscure liquid with no labels. But at least it should be tidy!



**How does the foc'sle store look? Well kept and orderly? Or more like a bazaar or Souk?**

### **3.2.4 Hatch top undersides**

If your ship has hatches, this is the best time to look at the undersides. Apart from noting any rust and corrosion, what is most important are the rubber seals around the coamings and any indentations that could stop the seals from being weathertight. If there is any evidence of hatch tape then be suspicious. Hatch tape is fine when carrying certain cargoes, such as grain in winter Atlantic conditions when your ship is trying to emulate a submarine, but it should not be used as a normal sealing.



**Any hatches on the foc'sle will be particularly prone to weather damage, regardless of the ship type.**



**How weathertight is your ship?**

### **3.2.5 Deck lighting**

Check these for lamps out, dirty covers and reflectors, and water or condensation inside. You will realise the importance of good working deck lighting if there is ever an accident at night, particularly in port with shore labour involved.

Check the gangway/s and safety net for damage, particularly the platform for any sign of twisting.



**How is the means of access?**

Finally, have a look at the hull paintwork. Here you are looking for any signs of flaking of corroded plating, oil marks that would indicate a potential pollution problem and to see that the draught and plimsoll marks are clearly identified and that they are in the right place. Plimsoll marks have been known to be upwardly mobile!

### 3.3 The Bridge

If the outgoing Chief Officer has not shown you around, have the Second Officer give you the tour. Items of importance to you at this time are, the setting up of the radars if you are unfamiliar with the make, the whereabouts of the lighting switch panels, the workings of the engine controls and, if available, the thruster units. All this is particularly important if your station for departure is on the bridge. If this is the case and the bridge is large with considerable equipment that you are unfamiliar with, and you have little time to absorb it, it might be an idea to see the Master and suggest that, as this is your first time on the bridge, it might be better if one of the other officers took over for the departure.

If he agrees you can go forward or aft and the bridge will have an officer who is familiar with the equipment for the departure. Should the Master require your presence on the bridge, it is doubly important that you are familiar at least with the radar, engine controls, communications and, if it is a night time departure, the lighting. Of course, you could have onboard a senior cadet or another deck officer who will be present and can assist, but on many ships this is unlikely.