



Fist of the Fleet Association

a non profit 501 (c) (19) military organization

NEWSLETTER

December 2015

Preserving the Past Providing for Today

Promoting the Future

HOLIDAY EDITION

By: Jerry "Ricochet" Fritze

I believe in Santa Claus. Not the seven-foot ogre in biker boots and silly red suit as stolen and twisted by Madison Avenue, hocking everything from sleepwear to power tools to cars more expensive than my house. And not some silly buffoon prancing on a stage in some theater singing words to a blatantly ripped-off Christmas Carol as some idiot tries to "re-imagine" Christmas. Christmas is the Season of Perpetual Hope. A time for Charity, a time for Family, and a time for Peace and Joy. Too many adults in our modern hypocritical society have turned their backs to the wonder of Christmas, claiming "it's just for the kids, anyway." In doing so they shut themselves off from the greater aspect. Beneath the lights and decorations, the presents and the cards and the too-often frantic, last-minute preparations there lies, often unheard, a small voice on Christmas Eve quietly crying "There is still Hope." Of all the human conditions it is Hope that carries us through each day; Hope that keeps our dreams alive. Hope endures, and in no place is the figure of Hope more apparent than Santa Claus. Clement Moore's "Right Jolly Old Elf" is the Hope of every child, who in their own innocence believe in the Magic and Wonder of Christmas. We should not sacrifice what we held so dearly as children as we move through life for if we do we sacrifice Hope and the death of dreams, and of life.

Michelle and I have a long-standing tradition for Christmas Eve: No one is allowed over, ever. It is the only time in the year when we can spend a quiet night together and talk about what was, and what is, and what might come: Dickens' Christmas Spirits are with us this time of the year, this one night to ourselves. No phone calls, no Internet, nothing. Just good food and drink in front of the tree with music in the back-ground and each other's company. All else in the world is shut off. And in that moment Santa arrives, and there is Hope, and Peace. Where would we be without him? So this year we both earnestly Hope that all of you, across the country and across the world, can find the time to shut it down, and find that Peaceful moment within, so that when Santa arrives again you can look him in the eyes and say "Old Man, I've missed you."

The Fist of the Fleet may not get that opportunity, however. As we all know they deployed to the Med on Nov 16th, and they are now answering a louder call: brash, brazen, and violent: War; that most ancient antagonist who refuses to be subdued. Ever at odds with Peace his banners fly, and his sword is no less sharp now than it ever was. And this time, we are not the only Masters of Battle in the sky. The Russians are making a hell of a lot of noise over there, and a hell of a mess. It's quite possible though, based on the latest intel, that they may have over-stretched themselves with worn out machinery left over from the Soviet Empire and the Cold War: aircraft and ships once left to rot. The theater is now more confused then ever with their entry: Sit Rep: *Charlie Foxtrot*. If we had just a handful of forward air controllers in there we would leave behind nothing but smoking ruins wherever Daesh assembled and accomplish more of our mission up-front than as an after-thought. But policy is not set by those who must fight. As John Paul Jones once said "If we cannot have what we like, we must learn to like what we have." And so the men and women of the Fist of the Fleet are once more prepared to answer the clarion call of War and head for that faint rattle of musketry beyond the farther hills. And we go with them; walking the wind-swept flight deck, sweating in the hanger deck, briefing in the Ready Room, flying where angels fear to tread. We go forth, and conquer. And this year in the spirit of Christmas they should paint all the planes RED, and then we could all hoist the cry "And we heard them exclaim as they flew out of sight: Merry Christmas to All! The target's in sight!"



www.fistoffthefleet.org

Mission Statement

**Perpetuate the history of Naval Aviation Squadrons VT-17, VA-6B, VA-65, VA-25 and VFA-25,
Remember deceased veterans and comfort their survivors,
Conduct charitable and educational programs,
Foster and participate in activities of patriotic nature,
Assist current active squadron members, and
Provide assistance to family members in times of emergency.**

President's Message

Fist 15 in Dallas is in the books and it turned out to be a great reunion of old and new shipmates. The Lockheed/Martin F-35 factory tour was no doubt the highlight and was enjoyed by all who attended. I think the L/M folks thoroughly enjoyed meeting our diverse group who formerly served in many capacities and different time-frames during their naval careers. I sent a letter to the manager at L/M thanking them for the time they took with our group and the professional atmosphere their tour guides displayed while explaining the complex process of manufacturing the three versions of this fantastic aircraft. The AT&T Cowboy Stadium VIP tour was also an impressive event. What a fabulous structure. Embassy Suites turned out to be an outstanding property to headquarter the reunion with the many amenities and comfortable accommodations.

During the reunion your Board of Directors made suggestions for a few items that were brought to the General Membership meeting on Saturday for approval. Jerry Fritze had a great idea of recognizing the squadron's Sailor of the Year (SOY) similar to what we do with the Harry Jones Award. It was decided that we annually recognize the SOY with a \$500.00 grant and certificate from FOFA and in addition bestow a complimentary Life Membership to the recipient. Our inaugural SOY award goes to AM1 (AW) Garrett B. Roberts who is attached to the Line Division. Congratulations Petty Officer Roberts. The award is in the mail to the squadron aboard Truman somewhere in the Med or beyond. We also decided to forward a complimentary Life Membership to each past and future Harry Jones Award recipient. It is hoped that this will help stimulate interest of our Hornet shipmates past and present in the Association.

Many thanks to all who attended Fist 15 and to all who helped make it possible. In particular I'd like to recognize Hershel "Hersh" Pryor for his initial suggestion of the L/M tour and the DFW area as our reunion site. Hersh was invaluable in being the liaison go to guy for setting this up. Another former navy man at L/M, Thomas "Comet" Halley, pushed real hard to bring this whole experience to fruition. Many thanks Comet.

We discussed a future site for Fist 17 and Charleston, SC was high on the list. If you have knowledge of the area or live nearby we could use your input. The future leadership of the Association was also a hot topic as your Secretary Nick Johnson and I will both be stepping down at the end of 2016, as we will have reached our term limits. We need members to step forward and lead FOFA into the future. Please seriously consider serving this great organization.

Since we have regained our tax-exempt and tax-deductible status from IRS, it is time once again to solicit your generous donations for the various charitable programs FOFA supports. Currently the balance in the Educational Grant account is more than ample to cover future requests from the squadron for the next few years. I am requesting that you seriously consider future donations to the LTJG Harry D. Jones Award for Excellence and our new Sailor of the Year award. Both of these

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are currently under-funded and need your help. All three of these programs are very well received by the squadron and help sustain the positive morale of our active duty shipmates. Remember that FOFA is unique among other squadron associations as we sustain the continuing positive relationship we share with the VFA-25 leadership team and all members of the squadron. As we read this they are, this very moment, contributing new pages to our long and distinguished history as they engage the current enemies of our country and our way of life. Keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

In closing, on behalf of the entire FOFA BOD, I would like to extend our sincere best wishes for a very Merry Christmas and a happy, safe and prosperous New Year to all the membership and our active duty shipmates. Stay safe and stay vigilant.

Gary Kerans

Blue Notes



Capt. Katie Higgins, USMC

First Female Blue Angels Pilot

The Blues have begun the initial evaluation for trading in their legacy F-18C models for the Suoer Hornet and expectations are to complete the transition in 2017.

SKIPPER'S CORNER

Dear Fisties past and present,

Happy holidays! This month's edition of the newsletter comes to you from the Mediterranean. Team 25 has been at sea for a couple of weeks now and are all settled into our shipboard routines away from home and our traditional creature comforts. The crew is motivated, excited about our upcoming port visits, and looking forward to fulfilling their tactical obligations overseas.

The current operational environment is more challenging than what we were used to during work-ups. It is not common to be without a phone and e-mail for several days at a time – in fact, this has become the norm. For some of the more "seasoned" members of FOFA, you may recall the INMARSAT red phones and serialized snail mail...yep, our Sailors are learning about this for the first time. As I've stated many times before, the vast majority of the Sailors making up this great squadron have never deployed before. In fact, nearly 75 percent are on their first float! You would think this notion would keep me up at night, but I sleep soundly knowing

everyone believes in our mission, understands the risks associated with what we do, and knows the chain of command has their back when the chips are down. This family has been through a lot in 2015 to get us to this moment, and everyone is performing their duties to the best of their ability without fail. If only you could see them flourish on the deck plates as I can day in and out...it's awe inspiring.

In an effort to increase your morale back home and create an environment where our Fistic and FOFA family feel as though we are sailing as one, I've setup a Family Care Line on (559) 998-1925. Feel free to dial-in for weekly updates as to our whereabouts and happenings. Additionally, for our Active Duty members, there's a large social media footprint on our "closed" Facebook site complete with daily photos from the hangar and flight deck as well as various other informational updates. Coming ahead in the Winter Edition of the FOFA newsletter will be a traditional command photo taken on the flight deck with a couple of our trusty steeds in front of the TRUMAN's island; should make for a good canvas over the holidays.

One of the main reasons I enlisted in the Navy in 1989 still holds true today, "Join the Navy, See the world." Our first stop is Split and then over to Dubai. I'll leave the dates out of this newsletter in order to preserve the classified nature of the ship's movement. As you all recall from your own time as a Fistic, there are many opportunities to experience the culture, food, and hospitality. For pennies on the dollar, our strike group will visit palaces, lively streets and the countryside of some very historic places, some of which have been preserved for hundreds of years.

During the first week of November, we announced our 2015 Sailors of the Year (SOY)! Congratulations to the following truly outstanding professionals:

- AM1(AW) Garrett B. Roberts, Sailor of the Year • AM2 Ricardo M. Dominguez, Fist of the Year
- AM3 Shawna M. Fleeer, Blue Jacket of the Year • AE3 James T Heim, Plane Captain of the Year

The Thanksgiving holiday was celebrated with the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Richardson, and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, MCPON Stevens, onboard TRUMAN. It was a special affair. In fact, our very own AT2 Haneline was selected to enjoy a turkey feast with them both; one of only 20 selected from the nearly 6,000 embarked! We miss you back home in the States and significant holidays such as this help us focus on what truly is important in life. VFA-25 has much to be thankful for in 2015. We've had no major personnel injuries, we made a turn in the mutual trust and respect for each other throughout the chain of command, and have established a network of love and support here onboard TRUMAN and back home that is second to none. The entire FOFA organization has been incredibly supportive over my tenure and you have made a significant impact on the continued high morale of our squadron.

Proud to be a Fist,
Skipper



402 traps following a CAS Flight



406 traps to begin the squadrons' first Super Hornet deployment.

Have you paid your 2016 Dues?

Annual Dues: \$25/YR

Life Time Dues \$200

Mail dues to Financial Officer:

Chuck Webster 39224 132nd St. Bath SD 57427

Only Voting Members receive a copy of the Directory

Become a Voting Member!

Visit the Base Exchange at

www.fistofthefleet.org

FROM THE COCKPIT By: LT Chad Duncan

Deployment is finally here - on 16 November 2015, Strike Fighter Squadron TWO FIVE departed the port of Norfolk, Virginia embarked in USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75). The nearly nine-month work-up cycle prepared us for this moment by giving us the opportunity to hone our tactics and increase our lethality as the nation's leading strike fighter squadron. The pilots and Sailors of VFA-25 are now on the high-seas in support of Fifth and Sixth Fleet operations. Since the Autumn Newsletter, the squadron returned to Lemoore following the Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX) and commenced a 30-day pre-operational movement (POM) stand down. Our COMPTUEX manifested in flying 29 of 30 days once all of the alert launches were added in. Despite the exhaustion by all pilots and maintainers, the 384 traps for our nearly all Nugget Ready Room was exactly what we needed to prepare for what we are now doing in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. In addition to the hours and traps, LCDR Jonathan "Buddy" Slager, LCDR Paolo "Schwarma" Singh, and LCDR John "Johnny Kittens" Hiltz each earned their Air Wing Strike Lead qualification from CVW-7. Furthermore, LT Stephen "Scooby" Yoo also completed his Strike Fighter Weapons and Tactics (SFWT) Level II syllabus; earning him qualification as a Combat Wingman. Maximizing crew day and complying with the minimum amount of crew rest over a 30 day heavy lift set us up nicely to enjoy the POM. Here the flight hours were scaled back to about 25 percent that which was flown during COMPTUEX. Now, with our batteries recharged, we find ourselves back at sea doing exactly what we were trained to do and stand ready for whatever our country and the enemy throw at us.

VFA-25 maintains an excellent reputation of tactical performance on the Lemoore flight line and across Carrier Air Wing SEVEN. In order to sustain this high level of excellence, we must bring in new pilots from time to time. I'd like to welcome two new pilots to the Fist of the Fleet: LT Zachary "hAMPster" Griswold and LT Alex "FNG" Degelder who both joined us during POM. "hAMPster" hails from Illinois, graduated from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and was commissioned through the Navy's ROTC program. He is now serving as our Training Officer and Tactics Department Head. Alex, on the other hand, was raised in Michigan, graduated from Western Michigan, and ultimately received his commission through Officer Candidate School. Welcome to the Fist family!

Farewell

Every Fist officer progresses through their operational tour and eventually moves on to their next assignment. The Fist of the Fleet is proud to pass on pilots, ground officers, and Sailors to other fleet commands knowing that they are Fists and will always answer the call without hesitation. Last month we bid farewell to LCDR Matthew "Golden" Minzes. He had served as the Safety Officer, Maintenance Officer, and Operations Officer here in VFA-25 and is now enroute to the Joint Chief of Staff to work for the J2 as a representative to Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). His leadership and work ethic will have lasting impact on the squadron and he will be missed

Additionally, LT Mark "Seacrest" Lovrencevic departed to attend the prestigious Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) at NAS Fallon with a follow on assignment as an instructor at Strike Fighter Weapons School Pacific in NAS Lemoore. A special Thank You to the entire FOFA organization for recognizing "Seacrest" as the 2015 LTJG Harry D. Jones Memorial Award for Excellence winner. The certificate, plaque, brass plate, and substantial monetary gift were all well received. Your selection was spot on and he will carry on the legacy of LTJG Jones for many years to come.



LT Mark "Seacrest" Lovrencevic (left) receives the 2016 Harry Jones Award from CDR Gerber



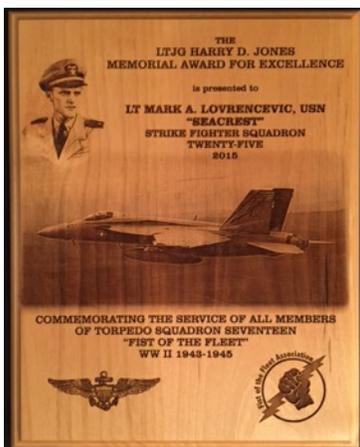
LT Stephen "Scooby" Yoo, Fist 2015 PAO



LCDR Matthew "Golden" Minzes' last flight as a Fistie



Right: Ready Room Cheer!
Happy Holidays from the Fist of the Fleet!





FROM THE HANGAR DECK

Greetings Fistie Family; this edition of "From the Hangar Deck" comes to you from the Mediterranean Sea as we sail along on this fantastic voyage, guarding the water ways and ensuring freedom of navigation for all ships and water vessels around the world. What an exciting time for VFA-25 as we are on our first deployment in several years. As you know, we had to once again pack up our entire command and make our way to the east coast to embark USS Harry S. Truman, this time to head out on our 2015 deployment. Our biggest task was in getting all 10 of our Fist of the Fleet F/A-18E aircraft to the east coast and onboard this mighty war ship. We did it, but not without some challenges, as one of our aircraft had some power plant issues while in Albuquerque, NM. We quickly scrambled together a five man team and sent them out there to make some emergency repairs and quickly had the aircraft back on its journey east. We also sent an early det team out to Oceana to ensure aircraft 404, our jet that was damaged by another aircraft's FOD during COMPTUEX, was in tip-top condition and ready to recover aboard with the rest of the Fist of the Fleet aircraft. I am happy to say that due to the incredible work by some of the best F/A-18 maintainers in the fleet, we have all 10 of our aircraft onboard and ready to go when we get the call. The crew has settled into their roles and the arduous work-up cycle has proven to be most valuable as we are now sailing with a well-trained crew of professional aviation maintainers. There are so many things going on in the world today and being on this deployment gives the crew a punch of reality that we can be called upon at any time to do anything - *we are ready*.

Being on deployment over major holidays is always a difficult task. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years are holidays typically spent with family. Although nothing can compare with being with your loved ones for the holidays, the ship does an excellent job of providing us with a small piece of home through exceptional meals for the respective holiday. So, the VFA-25 family came together to make this time more special and that was evident during Thanksgiving as the Fistie Chiefs volunteered to man the mess lines and serve the meals as so many of our Sailors sat together for a Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings. We were treated to all the traditional foods like turkey, ham, prime rib, mashed potatoes, stuffing, green bean casserole, sweet potato casserole, macaroni and cheese, corn on the cob, gravy, and the list goes on. There was also a wide assortment of desserts to include ice cream, cookies, cakes, and pies. To top it all off, we were joined by the Chief of Naval Operations and the Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy, who came in to eat lunch and talk with the Sailors.

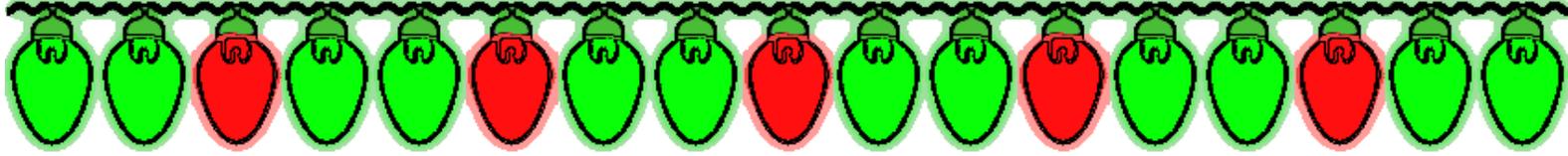
Smiles were in heavy demand two days before Thanksgiving as the results for those personnel who were advanced off the September Navy-Wide Advancement Exam to the next paygrade was announced. Congratulations are in order to our 16 newly advanced personnel; their hard work and dedication in finding time to study during our difficult work-up cycle has paid off for them as they were informed by Skipper Gerber during command quarters of their newly acquired rank. I can't think of a better way to start off a deployment than to be told you are being advanced to the next higher paygrade. Their advancement came just in time for them to enjoy their new pay-grades in our first port visit of the deployment

In some small way, each and every one of us joined the Navy so that we could experience traveling the world and visiting different countries; that is what being in the Navy is all about and it is what many of us look forward to. The Fisties got to enjoy their first port visit in the beautiful city of Split, Croatia. This was the first port visit ever for many of our first time deployment Sailors and I can tell you they thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to take in the sights, sounds, and foods of the culture. Although the weather was a little cooler than we would have liked, it didn't stop us from enjoying Split. There were a multitude of tours to partake in that gave a wide variety of things to do. There were tours that allowed Sailors to bike around the city, hiking tours, golf tours, tours to waterfalls, paint ball tours, architecture tours to castles and buildings from the 17th century, and for all those Game of Thrones fans, there were tours to some of the locations where the show was filmed. As we found out prior to pulling in, a lot of the episodes for the show Game of Thrones were shot on location in Split. Before we could get to any tours or just get your feet on solid ground, we had to brave the unforgiving beast of the seas called liberty boats. I am sure anyone who has had to anchor out off the coast of a port remembers these slow, bouncing, wobbly little boats that are used to shuffle Sailors back and forth to the beach. Although they have never been a Sailor's favorite part of a port visit, these boats are the only thing getting in the way of a magnificent meal or incredible tour. What a great first port visit and I know a memory of a lifetime. I am willing to bet everyone remembers the very first port visit of their careers, mine was London, England, and now that same memory has been etched for so many of our Fistie Sailors

Next up for the Fist of the Fleet is Christmas at sea, and I am sure the ship will deliver another outstanding meal to bring our ship and air wing family together. We will eventually make our way through the Suez Canal, another unforgettable milestone in every Sailor's career, and over to the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf at some point. While I am sure the excitement of cruising through the Mediterranean Sea and past so many European and African countries was fun, there are so many more countries and cultures to explore and, if we are lucky, we will get to pull in to a few more places and make this deployment much more memorable. In between all the memorable liberty ports and liberty boats, we will still continue to meet our mission of putting fuzed ordnance on target on time the first time. We don't know where this deployment will take us, but we are prepared and ready to answer the call of our nation. I am honored to be a part of the U.S. Navy and even more proud to call myself a Fistie!

With the Utmost Respect,
CMDM Claude "Hendu" Henderson





15 newly frocked Fisties on 11/24/15



VFA-25 Ordnancemen conducting maintenance on our 20mm cannon.



CMDM Henderson - Serving up a Thanksgiving Meal for his Sailors.



YNC Pittman and PSC Rocha - Serving up a Thanksgiving Meal for their Sailors



XO CDR Scott and AE-3 Smith, Blue Jacket of the Year.



Skipper Gerber and AD-3 Palmer, Plane Captain of the Year.

THE FIST OF THE FLEET ASSOCIATION

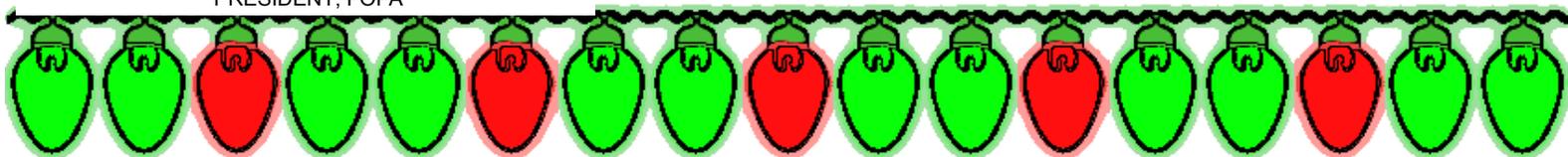
IS PLEASED TO AWARD THE 2015 SAILOR OF THE YEAR GRANT TO

AM1 (AW) GARRETT B. ROBERTS

IN RECOGNITION OF HIS LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

CONGRATULATIONS AND WELL DONE ON BEHALF OF THE ASSOCIATION

GARY L KERANS
PRESIDENT, FOFA





Fist 15 Reunion: Lockheed Martin Factory Floor



Fist 15 Reunion: F-35 Factory Tour

Mulled Wine for the Holidays

Mulled wine has a long and storied history, beginning with wine that was spiced and heated in First Century Rome. Roman legionnaires brought wine, viticulture – and their recipes – as they conquered or traded with Europe. It wasn't until the 14th century, that the brew gained its name from an Old English word meaning 'muddled.' It is thought that the process of mulling wine was first employed as a way to save wine that was about to spoil.

Mulled wine is popular throughout Europe and has been served during the winter months for centuries. It may go by different names such as *Glögg* (Sweden), *Vin Chaud* (France), or *Glühwein* (Germany). *Glühwein* translates to 'glow wine' ... named for the glow produced when a hot poker was thrust directly into the mix to heat it. Nearly every culture has its own particular form of mulled wine.

Most mulled wine recipes begin with dry red wine, and many recipes call for the wine to be fortified with brandy, port or cordial. Common spices used in mulled wine include cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, anise, allspice and vanilla. Some recipes use sugar or honey for a sweeter taste.

Charles Dickens is credited with making mulled wine synonymous with the holidays ... its appearance in his story, *A Christmas Carol*, clinched its place in culinary tradition.

INGREDIENTS: 1 orange, sliced and seeded, ½ cup sugar, 2 cups water, 1 teaspoon ground cloves

2 teaspoons cinnamon, 1 bottle red wine such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, or Merlot

DIRECTIONS

Combine the orange, sugar, water, and spices in a large stainless steel or enameled pot. Slowly bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer for 15 minutes.

Reduce the heat, add the wine, and slowly reheat but do not boil.

Serve warm in mugs. Can be garnished with cinnamon sticks or orange slices.





Sea Fever: John Masefield (from *Salt-Water Ballads*, 1902)

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a gray mist on the sea's face, and a gray dawn breaking.

I must down go to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way, where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

Christmas Eve at Sea: by Andrew Shiston, 2007

The sheets were frozen solid and snow lay on the decks,
The day was as cold as charity as we tacked from east to west.
We could see the shore lights bright and clear, with warmth in the streaming smoke
But we couldn't get close, or near or we would founder on the shore.
The proud figure-head of our bounty had dove in the grey-beards before,
But now her head stayed wet as we heeled hard to the storm.
The young-bloods were trying to reef but the frappings were covered in ice,
And to climb high above the decks would be the last of a young-bloods life.
With a cannon-shot the topgallant went we broadsided to the gale,
With sheets ripped into pennants only time for the others to fail.
From the shore we heard the church bells ring now it was Christmas day
And with all the crew in the forecastle now was the time to pray.
The sailing master saw a shining light it was the light at Portland Bill,
With starboard rudder hard over he clung to the steering wheel.
The figure-head aimed for the opening between two massive great stone walls
And on Christmas day as the church bells rang the anchor fell through the hawse.
And our torn and shredded vessel swung at anchor with cheers from townfolk ashore.

