

# Quartermasters and Signalmen

## Working together for safer navigation

"All engines ahead two-thirds, indicate 56 rpms for 12 knots", commands the conning officer of the AMERICA as she concludes her 29th refueling and fifth alongside the USS CALOOSAHATCHEE.

CDR Richard T. Vosseler, AMERICA's Navigator and Navigation Department head, assists in this operation providing the ship with ample fuel to travel the final 1,181 miles to homeport Norfolk, Virginia in four days.

At this point in her most recent deployment, AMERICA had travelled more than 29,500 miles and according to Quartermaster First Class Dennis Finn, "Going home, is his most anxious moment spent on the bridge", and that includes several days of heavy winds and high seas.

QM1 Finn has the weighty responsibility of making sure that all other quartermasters are fully trained.

The "bread and butter" of a quartermaster are special details such as at-sea replenishment operations, moorings and sea and anchor details.

Quartermasters man the engine order telegraph, which relays speed changes to Engineering Central Control below decks in the Engineering spaces. On watch, he has the twenty-four a-day duty of logging in all pertinent ship information.

Some of the equipment used by the Navigation Department includes the Omega navigation satellite receiver, the Loran receiver, (takes wave lengths and computerizes a course to be followed) and the Sonar Sounding Set (gives water depths).

In those cases where special details are called for, a quartermaster will normally man the helm, the lee helm, and after steering. A helmsman is usually required to stand 60 hours of steering before qualification, and 80 hours before becoming a master helmsman. The helmsman keeps the ship on course by reading one of the two gyros and a magnetic compass. The gyro is an electronically-motivated compass, but is not affected by the ship's own magnetism, like the magnetic compass is. The latter has two lead cylinders which deflect magnetism while getting a reading from the magnetic North Pole.

LT Stephen Riley, the Assistant

Navigator, assures that all administrative orders and navigational operations are harmonious. He has the added responsibility of ensuring navigational orders are enforced as directed.

CDR Paul B. Austin is designated as the prospective navigator, taking the helm from CDR Vosseler, the current Navigations officer.

The Navigations Department on board AMERICA consists of three officers, one first class, two second class, seven third class, nine designated men, two strikers, and a yeoman; a total of 26 men.

At last, the ship is returning after a seven-month absence and Quartermaster Finn summarizes the last leg this way"; We (the quartermasters) have to stand our special sea and anchor detail watches two hours ahead

of mooring, longer than in any other port. But pulling in and seeing our families again makes *this one* worthwhile."

### Signalmen: a navigator's aid

Ever stand out in the rain for seven hours? Did you ever have a helicopter fly so close you could "see the shoelaces" on the pilot's feet? And have you ever had the whole horizon at your command, with the ability to describe a ship as "that pole sticking out of the water?"

These are the joys and occasional frustrations of a signalman on the signal bridge.

Although his job is only as pleasant as the weather outside, few signalmen would opt for a life "below decks". According to Master Chief Signalman Mike Duncan the attraction

