

As Sunday night wore on and the evenings Bat-a-Rat watch began to form up on the pier, some crew members were elated at the recent "capture" of the English Frigate, others were only inclined to try and achieve an even greater accomplishment. An after-deck drinking party ensued and as the wine flowed so did the daring-do and crazy ideas. One of which involved yours truly. Someone had said, "Wouldn't it be great if we could fly a white hat off their Jack-Staff!" To which I replied, "Yeah, I could climb up their bow line and do it easily!" (At this juncture, it is important to point out that the Frigate was NOT Med. moored! She had pulled into her berth bow first and tied her port side to the far left of the docking area. She also had a bowline run out of the bull-nose to a bollard.)

All hands thought this was a great idea and a white hat appeared. We tied a short piece of line, like clothes stop, through the inside loop in the hat and rolled it up so as to fit in my dungaree pocket. Eight or so Cobbler sailors walked innocently along the pier coming at last to the bowline of the Frigate. There was enough slack in the line so that it ran from the ships bull-nose down towards the water in an arc and up over the edge of the pier to the bollard. Seven of the crew hauled out the slack and held it tight. I grabbed the rope and began climbing.

Once I was well up the line they carefully let the slack out and returned to the Cobbler so as not to create a scene that might give the plan away. I was a skinny monkey in 1967 --- odd what 33 years will do to a man --- anyway, those of you who had to climb ropes in gym class already know that the effort became greater as time passes, simply because you grow tired. Well, not only did I tire of my efforts, but the Cobbler crew evidently tired of the endeavor and forgot about me.

It was a long HARD climb and when I finally reached the bull-nose I was about ready to drop into the water. At some point during the climb, it occurred to me that a topside watch might find me hanging there and simply shoot me as a spy! But either surface ships don't post a walking deck watch, or else he never came forward because no one spotted me.

Getting through the huge bull-nose wasn't easy either. As I pulled with my arms, I'd get wedged inside and have to work my hands up the line a little to pull again. It was long and laborious, but once my back was more or less supported inside the opening, I was finally able to rest and relax somewhat --- if anyone can truly relax while thinking of being shot as a spy. When at last I could sit up in what amounted to the after end of the bull-nose I was able to look around on the forward deck of the Frigate and could see no watch in view.

My location was right at the Jack-Staff and I didn't really need to move anywhere. The line on the staff was tied on a small cleat mounted on the lower end of the pole and I untied it. Two brass flag clips were connected together and raking out the white hat I tied the line through the clips and hoisted away. When the hat was safely flying at its mast head, I tied the line off and lay down in the bull-nose to stop shaking. (I've never been real ballsy when the possibility of being shot was fairly high.) At the time I was wishing I had thought of that BEFORE I'd started the climb.

Finally I began the relative easy slide down the rope. Only you really have to climb backwards - you can't actually slide. When I reached the lower end of the bowline the slack let the rope dip well below the top of the pier. I tried to reach a foot up to the pier - no way - could not make. I tried everything else that I could think of - nothing worked. There were my shipmates: sitting on the after deck only a few short hundred feet away, oblivious to my plight. Lets face it, the bastards had completely forgotten about me and hadn't even looked in my direction since God knows when.

I tried to call out, without raising a watch on the Frigate. Finally a loud "Hey COBBLER!!" did it. (Note - "Hey COBBLER" was a signal used by anyone off the Cobbler who was on the beach, in the shits and within earshot of any crew members. It brought as many as heard it on the dead run, or at least a decent stagger to their assistance. Some like "Little Big Mouth Mike" abused this availability of manpower. (But that's another story.) Several guys came over and hauled me up as they took out the slack in the line and I climbed ashore, my arms shaking like a dog shitin' peach pits. Once everyone realized that I had accomplished my mission I was damn near carried back to the boat. We went back aboard the Cobbler and watched the white hat swing every now and then in the gentle Mediterranean breezes.

The Cobbler's crew "hit the rack" that evening --- fairly smug in the knowledge that they had hung a "white hat" from the Jack Staff of one of Her Majesties Frigates --- and rightly so.