

*The
Captain's
Specific Orders*





EDWARD S. DAVOLL
1822-1863

*The Captain's Specific Orders
on the Commencement of a Whale Voyage
to his Officers and Crew*

CAPTAIN EDWARD S. DAVOLL

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Foreword

THE SPEECH of the whalemén is hard to recover. There is Ahab, of course, and his mates, rich and voluble in talk, but the words are Melville's, devised for purposes of his own. Other novels and reminiscences offer different versions of the idiom, but equally heightened or tempered for literary purposes. In the pages that follow, the words are more direct, less artful and perhaps as close as we shall ever come to the voice of a whaling master at the beginning of a voyage.

Custom and practicality called for the master to address the crew on the first full day at sea. Watches had to be chosen, boat crews picked, and all must hear the captain define the extent of his authority. On his mode of address could hang the outcome of the voyage, for his tone and words would have much to do with the attitudes adopted by the crew.

Captain Edward S. Davoll approached the task with the aid of a written script. Whether he read it word for word or used it only as an aide-mémoire, his text provides a unique glimpse of a master about to assume the duties of his calling.

Captain Davoll's career as a whalémán began at age 18 on a voyage of Brig *Elizabeth* of Westport, 1841-1842. Three voyages followed in quick succession: Brig *Mexico* of Westport in 1842-1843, Bark *Cornelia* of New Bedford in 1843-

1846 and 1846-1848. Command came to him at age 25, when he sailed as master of *Cornelia* on a voyage of 22 months.

After another voyage as master of *Cornelia*, he suffered the first setback in a career of steady advancement: in 1855, the Ship *Iris*, under his command, was driven ashore on the coast of Australia. Shipwreck, succeeded by a poor voyage on the *R. L. Barstow* of Mattapoisett, may have prompted him to a desperate venture. In 1860, he accepted command of the Ship *Brutus*, a vessel already under suspicion as a slaver. With Federal agents closing in, *Brutus* hastily departed New Bedford, bound for the Azores. At Fayal, Davoll left the ship, which continued on to Africa for a cargo of slaves. Returning to New Bedford, he made a short voyage on the Schooner *Palmyra*, but the threat of a Federal indictment hung over him. When *Palmyra* returned in August 1862, he was arrested and charged with taking *Brutus* to sea for the purpose of slaving. Before the case could be tried and the extent of his involvement determined, Davoll succumbed to typhoid fever, dying too young at 40 for a veteran of nine whaling voyages and a life spent mostly on the deck of a whaleship.

The sad end of Captain Davoll's career should not detract from the value of the words that survive. The small notebook containing his "Specific Orders" was given to the Society in 1976 by Henry W. Brightman of Westport. The daguerreotype reproduced here was given in 1943 by Frank H. Davoll, Jr. To these donors, the Society renews its gratitude. To the Trustees of the George E. Coleman Jr. Foundation, it expresses its appreciation for a grant that makes this publication possible.

Richard C. Kugler
DIRECTOR

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To the Foremast Hands

MY MEN, you must be well aware that the object of this voyage is to get a cargo of oil. To do this, it becomes necessary that some system be established in order to effect our purpose, and it becomes my duty to lay it before you, which you will strictly observe and abide by through the voyage. I am here to conduct the voyage; the rest of you to aid and assist to the best of your abilities, according to my orders, which will, after this, be made known by and through my officers.

Discipline is a thing that I must have on board at all times and in all places. Consequently I shall put you under such restrictions as is necessary for the purpose. Obey and respect each and every officer. Pass them when going fore and aft the deck on the lee side. Always give a respective answer to every call and order given, day or night, blow high or low, that they and myself know that you hear. Never fail to give an answer. Answer quick. Come quick. Go quick, and do as you are told and you'll find no trouble.

I strictly forbid quarreling and fighting [and] skylarking

from daylight til dark. No books to be read on deck at any time except Sundays. No scrimpsonting of any kind until I give orders to allow it. No loud and noisy conversation allowed from sunrise til dark. No singing or whistling at any time through the day. No sneaking into the forecastle under pretense of getting something when it is your watch on deck, because I know all about those things. No sleeping in your watches on deck, day or night. When you have a watch on deck, keep on deck day and night, fair weather and foul. No washing of clothes allowed in the daytime except on the day which I may appoint for the purpose, which will come once a week, and then all that cannot find washing and mending enough of their own to keep employed will have a job found for them to do about the vessel. I shall give you plenty [of] watch below expressly for sleep, so that in case you are caught sleeping in your watch on deck you may expect to be kept on deck in your watch below as a "*cure all*." I shall give you plenty of good and wholesome food as long as you do not waste anything. Remember if I find you waste bread, meat or anything in the shape of food, you will have a regular allowance dealt out to you.

When you are at the masthead on the lookout for whales, sing out for every thing that you see. If white water, sing out "There She White Waters!"; if a breach sing out "There She Breaches!"; if a spout, sing out "There She Blows!"; if black-skin, sing out "There She Blackskins!"; if flukes sing out "There goes Flukes!"; if a sail sing out "Sail ho!!" Always sing out at the top of your voices. There is music in it. It makes things lively and cheerful and we shall never run past any sperm whales then and call them something else. We have glasses on purpose to make out any and all things which may appear, and before passing anything of the whale species

I want them brought into use, so as to make sure what it is we see. I shall have a bounty up for the man that raises the whales and none gets it that does not sing out.

If any of you feel unable to stand your watch at any time, through sickness or inability, come at once and report yourself to me or whoever has the charge of the deck, so that I may immediately know of it and give you relief. If you fail to do this and go off below without saying anything, you may rest assured that I do not believe you to be sick, and shall have you out of them tricks before you play them "*fine*."

Don't let yourselves be heard to grumble in any way. I and the officers can do all that. Grumblers and growlers won't go unpunished. Your places when on deck is forward of the try-works where you are to remain at all times unless you have orders to come aft. Remember what I have said to you from now to the end of the voyage. I now dismiss you. Go forward.

Cook of the Vessel

Cook, keep your galley and all things in and about it as neat and clean as a country farmer's kitchen. Clean every boiler daily. Keep sauce pans, bake pans and fry pans clean and ready for use at a moments notice. Wash out your galley every day except Sundays. Be saving of wood and fresh water, use no more than is wanted for your cooking. Waste nothing nor allow any provisions to go to waste. If you cook too much to day, cook less tomorrow and vice versa. Save every drop of slush you make and take pains to have it clean and sweet. What I have here said to you, you will hereafter abide by to the end of the voyage; if not you will be called into account and be adjusted.

Steward

To keep aft in his place all the time, to have no commerce with foremast hands at all, to be saving in all cookery and look well after the stores. Wash the cabin every day except Sundays. Keep the pantry and all things therein always clean. Don't let me find at any time a dirty dish, a knife, fork or spoon that is not clean. Do all this and no trouble will follow.

Boatsteerers

You will bear in mind the whole voyage that your place when on deck is in the waist and that I intend having you keep your places. Keep yourselves away and aloof from foremast hands. Hold no conversation with them further than is actually necessary to do in performing your ships duty. When you come to head watches, you are to keep awake yourselves and keep your watches also awake, always keeping one man on the lookout at all times and in all weather, trick and trick in turn, same as tricks at the helm. At any time when you cannot keep awake, come and call me but never get asleep. In case you cannot keep your watches up and awake, call the mate at once and have the case attended to. If any one in your watches complains of being sick and not able to stand his watch, come and let me know it at once. If you want to be respected by me, you do as I tell you. But in case you do not, you cannot inhabit the cabin. All who live aft I count on as my helpers, or officers. And now if you are not for me, say so, for if you are not for me you are certainly against me. Tell me now which side of

the fence you are likely to be found through the voyage. There is no such thing as hanging astride. Either keep aft or keep forward. Decide now and I shall know what ground I stand on.

Officers

I want at all times when I am on deck such respect paid me as my position demands. I look to you for the execution of my orders, and shall hold you answerable for all deficiencies. I don't want to see one of you go forward of the tryworks to call men, but when you do call men and they don't come immediately I shall expect you to be after them at once and bring them to a sense of their duty by making them know that you are to be obeyed. I do not want you should be tyrants and brutally treat men, but I do want you should make them know that what you say you mean, and mean what you say. One thing I want you to be very particular in and that is to have men answer you at every call and order. Don't let that be neglected on any account. Another thing I want you to be as particular in and that is to show at all times due respect to each other. By so doing you will command respect from the foremast hands.

You will also be very particular in noticing any and all violations of my orders to foremast hands, cook, steward and boatsteerers. When you call a man, see that he comes. When you send one, see that he goes. Allow no sleeping on deck. No skylarking. No books except Sundays. No Scrimpshonting of any kind. Call men by their proper names, but make them go and come quickly. When you do anything, always appear to be in a great hurry even if you are not. Be systematical in performing ships duty. I want everything kept in the best of

order and everything in its proper place, so as to be found at a moments notice, as well in the darkest night as at midday. The whaling gear you cannot be too particular about. Always have it in readiness for immediate use and fitted in the best possible manner.

In your watches be particular about the steering of the vessel; likewise at all times when I am off or even on deck allow no one to lay on the helm at any time. At the mastheads, all will stand up, and I want you to haze up all that do not keep good lookouts. Watch them closely. See that watches, helms and mastheads are relieved quick. Allow no one to be below in their watch on deck. Give work-up jobs to such as lay themselves liable and keep things straight all the time. Have no loopholes open for anyone. When you fill your respective places, there is not the least chance for anyone to undermine you. None can get into a place that is filled; there is no room for him. Prove this, and if you don't find it so, I'll make a heavy forfeit, for I know it by experience. At all times in the night watches, have a good lookout kept ahead and each bow. Not a man allowed to sleep in his watch on deck, night or day.

In whaling, you will bear in mind that there is no victory to be practised. I—and I believe you—come here for the purpose of getting a cargo of oil. To do this there must be a "*head*" or there will be no "*tail*," or else "*all tail*." I am here to head and control and conduct the voyage, and you are my co-partners. When I pull, I shall expect you all pull with me, not against me, and when we all pull together with a hearty good will there is easy times for us all and a bountiful harvest in store for our mingled exertions. Starting a voyage in this way and carrying it out in like manner can never fail of being crowned with success.

The hold to [be] kept in good order all the time, having everything in its proper place, snugly stowed away. Have no Irish pennants or cows tails flying about the vessel. A place for everything and everything in its place.

To the Mate

In the very first place, you will put all things for catching whales in order, then all things in order used in taking care of oil. Don't omit a single thing but have everything in the best of order and placed where it is most handy and easiest to get at when wanted for use. After we get the whaling gear all in the best of order, I shall make use of Saturdays for washing and mending of clothes. Therefore, you will arrange common matters in this way by seeing that in case we have not water, provisions, stores or anything of the kind to last from Fridays to the next Mondays to get them on Fridays, and every Friday clean and oil all the cooper's and carpenter's tools and cutting spades, etc. All such little jobs to be done by Friday nights. Saturdays after four o'clock wash off the paint work inside and give the decks a clean scrub. At all times when you wash decks swab off the paint work inside fore and aft, and decks dry. By so doing we shall have a clean vessel all the time. In performing such duty that is dirty, you will be particular and have the same kept from getting all over the vessel by having it often cleaned up.

In making use of any new rigging I want to know of it before you cut. And the standing rigging that may want setting up at any time, you will speak to me about before you commence operations. But chafes and such other things as are

necessary to be done in order to have the same in good condition, you will go ahead and do at all times at once and without consulting me. I only want to know about the most important things. You will keep a strict account of the use of all provisions, stores and fresh water, mentioning the quantities broached and the dates thereof. Be particular in your daily writings in the log, and mention every little incident that may occur on board necessary to be inserted, consulting with me from time to time in relation to it. Allow no man to give unhandsome answers, not to grumble or growl, play the soldier, or anything of the kind. Keep all on a "*Bee line.*"

In taking care of oil, you cannot be too particular in keeping it clean. When you are clearing away heads, have lippers and scoops employed so as not to have oil spread away from the work. Save everything in the shape of oil that will make a drop. In boiling, make white oil and be particular in keeping the head separate from the body. Have all the scraps taken out of the strainer cooler as often as every three pots. Have a cask purposely to put deck lipperings, and rack off from it from time to time. Lean off the blubber clean. Separate the fat from the red lean and save it. Cut small horse pieces and of uniform shape and size. Keep the decks clean as possible all through a fare of oil.

Give the second mate the care of the aft rigging. You will of course have an eye to it and see that it is kept in good order. I do not ask you to strike one of the crew. I rather you would not, if you can avoid it, but in case of too tough a cuss, one can't help it once in a while. Be guarded and guided by your best thoughts, holding your blows as long as possible. Use other ways first, gentle means before rash ones.

To the Second Mate

You are to be as particular in regard to discipline as the Mate, aiding and assisting him and me in keeping the same. Whenever you are in charge of the deck, remember the general orders and see that they are not violated. Use the same care and precaution as though the whole vessel belonged to you. There is to be places for everything and everything is to be kept in its proper place and you will strictly adhere to this principle. You will have the care of the aft rigging, under the Mate's and my supervision. Whenever you want anything to work with, apply to the Mate for it, or if the Mate is not at hand, speak to me. Never cut any rigging without consulting the Mate or me. Keep everything about the rigging in good order and well conditioned at all times. Have no Irish penants, cows tails, or loose ratlines hanging. Always fix things as soon as they get out of order. See that all is right. Keep all that are under you at a certain distance. By so doing they will know who you are. Never joke with a foremast hand nor hold any communication further than is necessary to carry on work. In fact the better plan is to never joke at all when at sea, for it generally ends in a quarrel or something similar.



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