

Week 6: When Rubber Meets the Road (Continued)

After watch, I may have an hour or two to work on collateral assignments and then it was off to training again. On Monday and Tuesday, I went from morning watch to lunch and then to drills. We simulated fighting fires, reacting to a sewage leak, and responding to a collision and flooding. During the drills we dressed-out in firefighting gear, oxygen tanks, and even used the fire hoses. We had practiced using this equipment before on *Eagle*, but I had never run a drill with it. It was definitely challenging, and there was a lot of practical steps and useful information that I didn't know. I really wish that we had better training in this stuff at the Academy—and I don't just mean once; I mean continually. Proficiency in shipboard DC requires practice and experience. It might be hard to develop a program or class at the Academy, but not impossible. There's something for me to work up when I have free time—oh, wait!

The drills lasted most of the afternoon. Toward the end of the day we have the daily cleaning of the ship and then Andy and I along with one of the seamen attend a DC class where we learned techniques for various damage control situations.

After DC class we had dinner, I had time to do a short workout, and then I headed back to watch for four hours and by then it was nearly midnight, so I went straight to bed. And then the day started again. I tried to rotate through the different watch times so that I could get a good idea of what the entire day looks like but also so that I could get some rest—both physically and mentally. That left me with a fluid schedule, which can be challenging to balance.

Mentally, it has not been an easy week, not having as much self-directed work time (and time to take breathers) as I am used to. But, hey! I made it, so I know that I can do it again this coming week—and I know that I will handle it better! As I look back and reflect on the week, I can see now that I have a lot to learn this summer (and when I get out to the fleet as an ensign). I thought I was used to non-stop, go-go-go from the Academy, but this is different. I think it has to do with the type of learning. What I am experiencing here is different than I'm used to; after 16 years of classroom teaching and learning concepts and theories by taking notes and reviewing PowerPoint presentation, there is a stark difference to the on-the-job, task-completion-focused lessons we learn here. Even the DC class (sit-down, notes, presentations) is focused on the ability to do something. Proficiency only comes by actually doing it...repetitively! The fast-paced tempo of underway life sometimes makes that difficult to do. I'm sure that when I get into the fleet and experience this type of learning every day for several years, it will become more natural and easier. For now, I shall continue to work diligently each day to gather as much information as I can.

Well, there you have it, my week six reflection. Crazy to think that week six is over; we're more than halfway to the end of the summer. I must say that as leave gets closer and closer, I am getting excited to be home. I'm ready for some rest and being able to completely set my own schedule. I've got some fun experiences planned, too, along with some projects at home that I want to get done. I'm anxious to get there. There are definitely times when it's hard to stay focused on the here-and-now. All it takes, though, is a short break out on deck, looking out over the immense span of the Pacific Ocean or, at night, looking up at the sky filled with

innumerable stars to remind myself that I have a pretty amazing opportunity going on right here, and I don't want to miss a minute of it! We're working buoys this week, so that'll be a super neat experience. Can't wait to tell you about it (and to experience it, of course)!