

A Not-So-Average BITSian Day

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*J*ust another day of dumb cold work, or so it promised to be! 4th March, and

nearly a year now, but I'm not going to forget it that easy, ever. Lets start off with a little something about the general scene then. We were aboard a 237m long ship, that's designed to carry crude oil. We were anchored off the coast of Stavanger, which is a fairly well known town in Norway, waiting for orders to proceed. Now whenever the vessel is anchored close to Norway, the Norwegians aboard never lose a chance to go ashore - how? The mo-boat! This boat is officially called the Rescue boat and is used to rescue people who fall overboard and the like. The boat can reach speeds of 35 knots (a 'knot' being close to 2 kmph); she's a lovely piece of work, all in fibreglass, and just under 4min length. Not very big at all, quite like a long car, and takes on three people!

The boat was let down a few times through the week that we were there; this particular day, Second Officer Watson was taking her out, but had no help. None of the crew wanted to go, because of the weather (March there is usually a few degrees under!); which is why I (the only cadet on board) got taken instead! The trip was great, the first part, that is. We left pretty late (only to learn later that it was an unwise thing to do), at nearly 5 in the evening, rushing to get back before dark. The ship was anchored a few miles off the coast, and there was a little bit of inroads to clear too, so a half-hour plus trip. Lovely weather, with no winds, a calm sea, really pretty. Would have managed to write enough about it even if nothing happening! Well, something happened...

We got to this lovely yacht marina at a little town called Tananger, close to Stavanger, and went ashore, bought some newspapers and stuff - and some grub. Didn't hang around long, since it was getting dark; we got on some extra clothing, and set out. No sooner had we left the safety of the landlocked waters, and got off the coast, the engine sputtered, coughed, and shut down! Right in the middle of nowhere.... we tried revving her up again, but to no avail. And we were in greater trouble immediately.... there were huge clusters of rocks nearby on towards which we were drifting. Fast. And when you are in a fibreglass-hulled boat, you don't want to hit rocks! We paddled like crazy, but before you knew it, we were on to the rocks. There wasn't much wind or swell, so we



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weren't getting thrashed on to the rocks. However we were hitting those rocks often enough, which was still no good; it could easily damage the bottom, if it continued.

We jumped off the boat, on to the rocky land, and stood there keeping the boat off. Thought a million times to myself then: where am I? And what am I doing here! Shipwrecked in the middle of some rocks, halfway around the world from home? ("Boat"-wrecked, actually!) -Can you imagine! I was sandwiched a few times between the boat and the rocks, but it was ok - we did manage to save the boat from any further damage (though you have little idea how many parts of me were aching the whole of the next week!) Meanwhile, if you are wondering how one could have lasted that long in the water there, (you've surely heard of hypothermia?), it is cause we were wearing suits called 'immersion suits'; it's a safety precaution taken when going in the mo-boat (am I glad I stuck to the rules there!). These suits are one piece suits, including shoes, and are buoyant. Only your palms and face are exposed. So we could enter the water, and not get too wet... We were only waist deep in water, but when I slipped a few times on the moss there, getting water in my immersion suit, I had instant nightmares of all the safety movies about hypothermia and its effects! Was extra, extra careful after.

Don't know exactly how long we were there for, but it was real dark by now - we had called our ship on the radio, and help was supposedly coming (I had no idea how!!). We however, spotted a powered yacht making her way back to the marina, and signalled like crazy. She just didn't respond! Oh, how my heart sank.... sometime later, another yacht came by, and we resorted to some real frantic signalling. Thankfully, she came by, passed us a line, and towed us back to the marina.

There's a lot more to this story, including the horrid ride back to the ship being towed by a fishing trawler; the weather had turned by then (past 9 pm now), and how! The boat was tossed around like a leaf, and I kinda wished that I had never left the marina. Both Steven (Second Officer Watson) and I were quite sick by the time we reached the ship. We were back aboard just after 10 pm; and I don't think I have ever been happier to be back aboard! All I was thinking about was my warm quilt, cabin, and some hot dinner. Had a huge meal, and crashed, not showing up anywhere for the next 12 hours. The paddling and pushing had the two of us walking like mummies for the next few days - everything felt so sore!

And that's about it. It could have been a lot worse - a mile or two further away from the coast, and we'd probably have drifted off to who-knows-where, though the Atlantic Ocean wouldn't be a bad guess! We learnt later that a filter on the fuel line had broken,



mirror, mirror on our world...



and all the fuel had leaked out. We had an engine compartment flooded with high speed Diesel! Thankfully, nothing more went wrong there! As for the boat, she's pretty fine - owes Steven and me a lot. She's back to her old glory since; we patched up her bottom and gave her some new glossy paint too...

Another experience to learn from humbling one, for sure. All in awe now, of the sea, nature, and God's mercies... sure makes a difference.

So, that's a not-so-average day from my life; different from what happens in the precincts of the institute, but not enviable in anyway, nah? A friend of mine asked me to try and highlight the difference between a BITSian, and one of us DLPD students. As a student of BS Nautical Sciences, I think my days are sure very different from those you have there... Not any better, or worse... just different! Calling myself a BITSian is a little difficult though; I think the lot of you at the univ have put in far more effort, not only to have gotten there, but also to keep up there. Hence, I would probably not qualify for the honour. To us at sea, it's a job before anything else... and a passion to some too. Seafaring is a way of life, a very different one... it takes a lot from you, though it gives you a lot too.

Must add this as a last note though; I had the chance to meet up with quite a few 'real BITSians' recently, and I had a wonderful time; would love to be part of the show there any day, though I don't see something like that happening too soon. College for me will always be a snug cabin in the middle of the Atlantic, a few thousand miles from the coast or home; and for those of you who thought that sailing was a wonderfully romantic or exciting thing to do, it's not so when I am taking a comprehensive test for the semester!!!



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