

LIFE ABOARD SHIP

A crew worked in four-hour shifts. Their duties included pumping bilge, cleaning the deck, working the sails, and checking the ropes and cargo. When they were off duty, they slept anywhere they could find space. Sleeping was on the deck and was always uncomfortable as the ship was so loaded with cargo, her decks were always awash. The sailors' lives were hard, and they often died from disease, hunger, and thirst.

The crew received one hot meal a day cooked over an open fire in a sandbox on deck. Their diet consisted of ship's biscuit, pickled or salted meat, dried peas, cheese, rum, and fresh-caught fish.

SPEED OF TRAVEL

As you can guess, the speed of a sailing vessel depends on the speed of the wind.

Over several days, ships of the time would average a little less than 6 knots or 7 miles per hour. (One knot is a nautical mile and is 1.15 miles per hour or 1.85 km per hour). Top speed for the vessels was about 10 knots. Good ships covered approximately 150 miles a day.

The crews used a compass for direction and a chip log and reel to measure speed. A sailor counted how many knots were let off the reel in a certain amount of time. The sailors could figure the distance they had travelled by multiplying their speed by the amount of time.

When the ship left on any of her voyages to the New World, her cargo hold was full of provisions, water, armaments. Needless to say, there was little room below decks for the 27 or so crew to sleep.