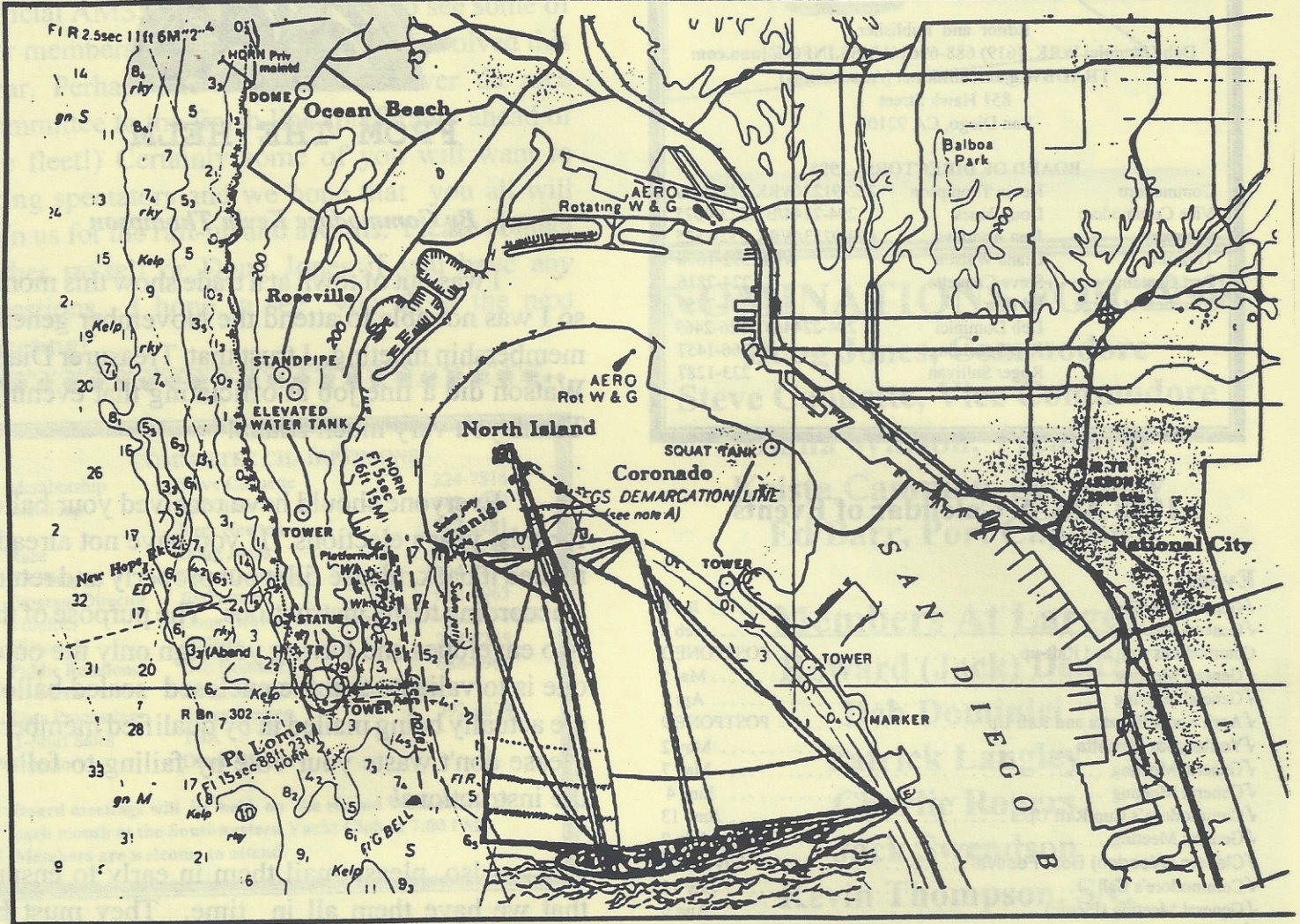


ALBATROSS

ANCIENT MARINERS SAILING SOCIETY Volume 24, Number 12

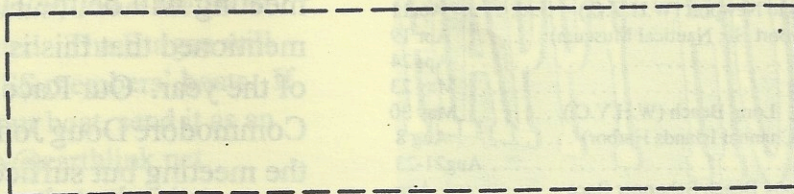
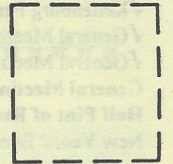
DECEMBER 1998



ANCIENT MARINERS SAILING SOCIETY

P.O. Box 6484

San Diego, California 92166



The Albatross is the official publication of
the Ancient Mariners Sailing Society.

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 6484, San Diego, CA 92166
- AMSS Ship-to-Ship VHF Common - Channel 68
General Meetings: First Thursday of every month at:
Southwestern Yacht Club, 2702 Qualtrough St., San Diego.

Editor and Publisher

Deb Dominici WRK: (619) 688-6961/AMSS.INFO@juno.com

TRADBW@earthlink.net (Attachments)

851 Hawk Street
San Diego, CA 92103

BOARD OF DIRECTORS - 1998

Commodore	Kevin Thompson	222-9123/WRK:222-2669
Vice Commodore	Doug Jones	294-2244/BT:523-0675
Secretary	Jean Andrews	489-0253/WRK:552-7525
Treasurer	Diana Watson	WRK:592-1678
Port Captain	Steve Caouette	224-7816
Members at Large	Ed Barr	224-7255
	Deb Dominici	294-2244/BT:226-2469
	Ken Spaulding	566-1457
	Roger Sullivan	223-1287



FROM THE HELM

By Commodore Kevin Thompson

I was out of town at a trade show this month so I was not able to attend the November general membership meeting. I trust that Treasurer Diana Watson did a fine job at officiating that evening. Thank you very much Diana!

1998 AMSS Calendar of Events

Events

✓General Meeting	Jan 8
✓General Meeting	Feb 5
Commodores Cup and Raft-up	POSTPONED
✓General Meeting	Mar 5
✓General Meeting	Apr 2
✓April Fools Regatta and Raft Up	POSTPONED
✓Yesteryear Regatta	May 2
✓General Meeting	May 7
✓General Meeting	June 4
✓Commodore's Cup/Raft Up	June 13
✓General Meeting	July 2
✓Classic (Wooden) Boat Festival	July 11/12
✓Commodore's Ball	July 11
✓General Meeting (Picnic)	Aug 6
✓General Meeting	Sept 3
✓Kettenburg Parade/Raft-Up	Sept 6
✓General Meeting (2nd Thurs) NOMINATIONS	Oct 8
✓General Meeting	Nov 5
General Meeting (ELECTIONS)	Dec 3
Half Pint of Rum Race	Dec 5
New Years' Eve Raft Up - La Playa	Dec 31

OTHER ORGANIZATION'S EVENTS

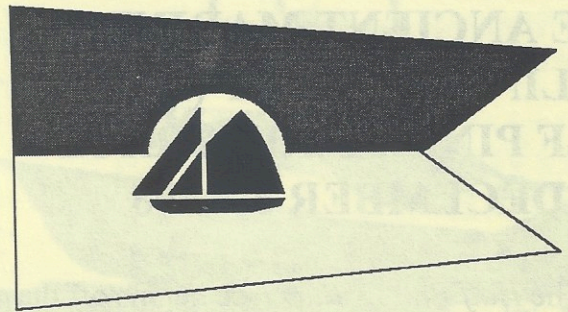
✓Kona Kai's American Schooner Cup	Apr 4/5
✓Wild Goose Chase, San Pedro to Newport (W.H.Y.C.)	Apr 11
✓Heritage Regatta- Show (Newport Hb. Nautical Museum)	Apr 19
✓Newport - Ensenada Race	Apr 24
✓Master Mariner's Race	May 23
✓Eric Erickson Oil Island Race, Long Beach (W.H.Y.C.)	May 30
✓McNish Classic Yacht Race (Channel Islands Harbor)	Aug 8
✓Bishop Rock Race (SDYC)	Aug 21-23
✓Nautical Heritage Society - Long Beach Schooner Race	Aug
✓W.H.Y.C. vs AMSS	Sept 26-27
✓S.W.Y.C. Ensenada Race	Oct 2
✓The Columbus Day Race, S.D. (W.H.Y.C.)	Oct. 10

Everyone should have received your ballot for this year's elections. If you have not already mailed it back, please fill it out properly and return it according to the instructions. The purpose of the two envelopes and having you sign only the outer one is to validate that the enclosed sealed ballots are actually being mailed in by qualified members. Please don't waste your vote by failing to follow the instructions!

Also, please mail them in early to ensure that we have them all in time. They must be postmarked at least two days prior to the election meeting. In accordance with the by-laws, ballots will not be accepted if delivered by hand at the December meeting.

Coming right on the heels of our December meeting will be the Half-Pint of Rum Race. I've mentioned that this is probably my favorite event of the year. Our Race Committee Chairman Vice Commodore Doug Jones will go over the details at the meeting but suffice it to say that this is quite a test of seamanship, not to mention quite a spectacle as the skippers run down the beach to

their dinghies, row to their vessels and sail off anchor towards the finish. Afterwards there is always a great raft-up in La Playa where various creative things are done with the entry fees (you can't imagine what 16 different types of rum taste like after being all mixed together in the official AMSS oak cask). I'd like to see some of our members with power boats get involved this year. Perhaps one of you could deliver the race committee to the finish line (preferably ahead of the fleet!) Certainly some of you will want to bring spectators and we hope that you all will join us for the raft-up and awards. Please contact either myself or Doug Jones if you have any questions. I hope to see you all at the next meeting!

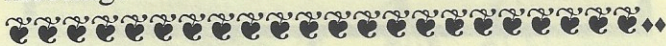
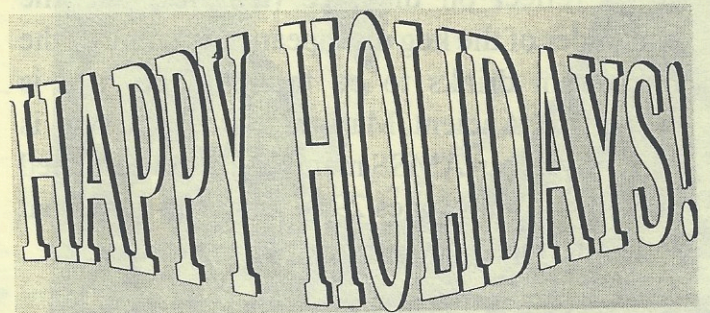


NOMINATIONS FOR 1999

Doug Jones, Commodore
 Steve Caouette, Vice Commodore
 Diana Watson, Treasurer
 Krista Campion, Secretary
 Ed Barr, Port Captain

Members At Large

Howard (Jack) Dentz
 Deb Dominici
 Patrick Langley
 Charlie Rogers
 Jack Swendson
 Kevin Thompson, S/C



COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Membership	Steve Caouette	224-7816
Handicap	Bill Clark	542-1229
	Jerry Newton	222-1281
	Doug Jones	294-2244
Race	Steve Caouette	224-7816
Cruising	Jim Sutter	972-1963
Program Director	Doug Graves/Ted Stearns	226-3446/287-4125
Trophies	Ed Barr	224-7255
Historical	Deb Dominici	688-6961
Public Relations	Doug Jones/Doug Smith/Ed Barr	
Bye-Laws	Diana Watson	592-1678
Data Processing	TBA	
T-Shirt Sales	Diana Watson	
Directory		

Board meetings will be held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Southwestern Yacht Club at 7:00 PM. Members are welcome to attend.

AMSS IS ON THE WEB

www.sdsailing.com under "Racing" or "Cruising", Then go to the "Mall" under "Groups and Associations". AMSS is listed under "Associations". The *Calendar, From the Helm* plus feature articles are listed. The Burgee will become a photo link of AMSS members' boats. If you have a .JPG file of your boat, send it as an attachment to tradbw@earthlink.net

If you want to go directly to the site:

www.sdsailing.com/amss.htm

**THE ANCIENT MARINERS
SAILING SOCIETY (AMSS)
HALF PINT OF RUM RACE -
DECEMBER 5, 1998**

The *Half Pint O' Rum* race begins off the beach southeast of the Naval sailing club along the bay side of the Silver Strand. The skipper's meeting is held on the beach where the course is given out. An entry fee of at least a half pint of rum is required. Note: this is the only race of the year where your handicap may depend on the quantity and quality of your entry fee. The race committee has great latitude in assessing penalties as well as time awards for exceptional seamanship or costumes. The boats anchor off the beach with sails down and the **skipper** (not his/her representative) rows (or swims) ashore for the skipper's meeting.

Around noon a horn goes off and the skippers row out to the boats. Only when he/she is aboard can the crew begin to hoist sail and sail off anchor (no motors). After sailing the course, the finish is on the sandy beach across from Silvergate YC on Shelter Island. The skipper or his representative must row ashore with his/her own cup, find the race committee and the rum keg and drink a mug of rum. Only then is she or he finished. The raft-up in La Playa following the race is usually the best of the year, where crews reflect on the race (tell lies) and the remainder of the keg disappears into some of the finest rum drinks to be found. The race is opened to Ancient Mariner Boats. If one is currently not an AMSS member, the owners need to contact Doug Jones 294-2244 or E-mail Boat INFO to tradbw@earthlink.net

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

***HALF PINT
OF
RUM RACE***

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1998

**Please Sign-Up with
Doug Jones (294-2244)
INTERNET: tradbw@earthlink.net**

HISTORY'S CORNER:

BY Edward S. Barr

It happened in December-

Dec 20th, 1995, prominent yacht designer Al Mason died at age 84 in Salinas, Calif. Few are aware that his first yacht design occurred at age 16 while still in high school. The 78' vessel, *CALIFORNIA*, a 3- masted barquentine was built and launched in 1935, Vallejo, Calif.

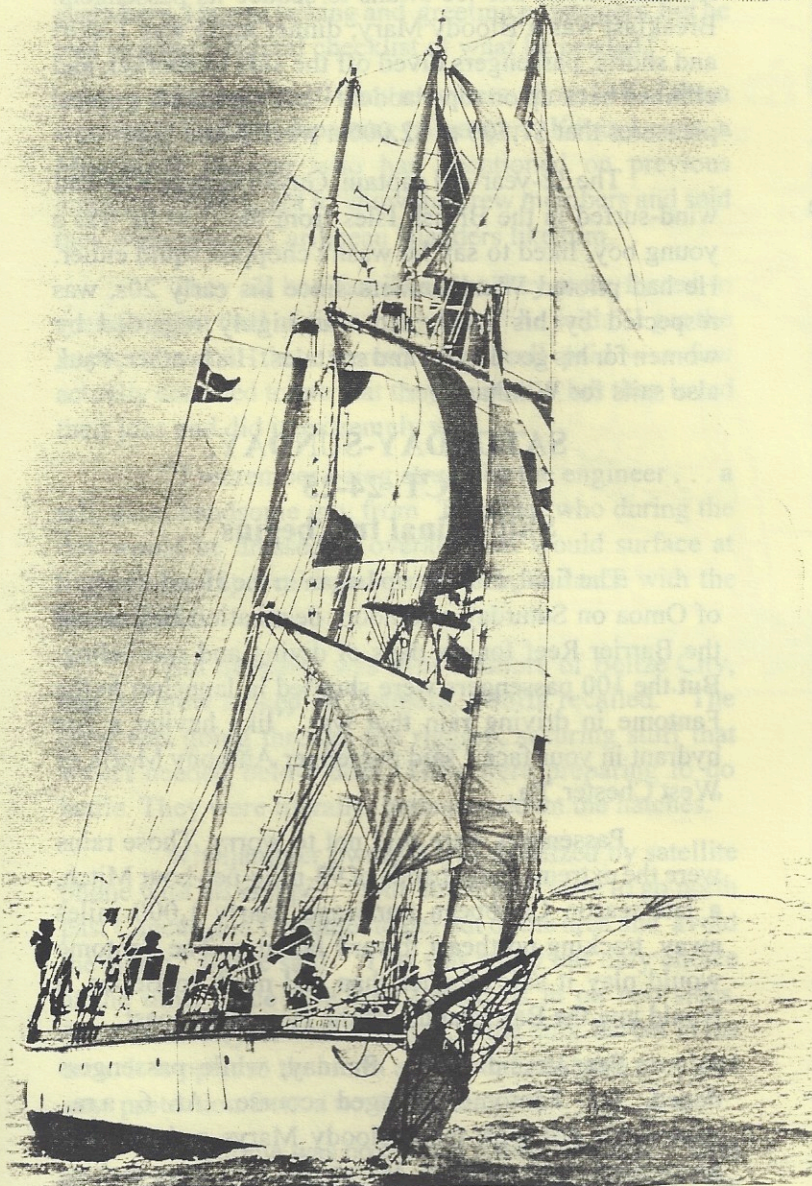
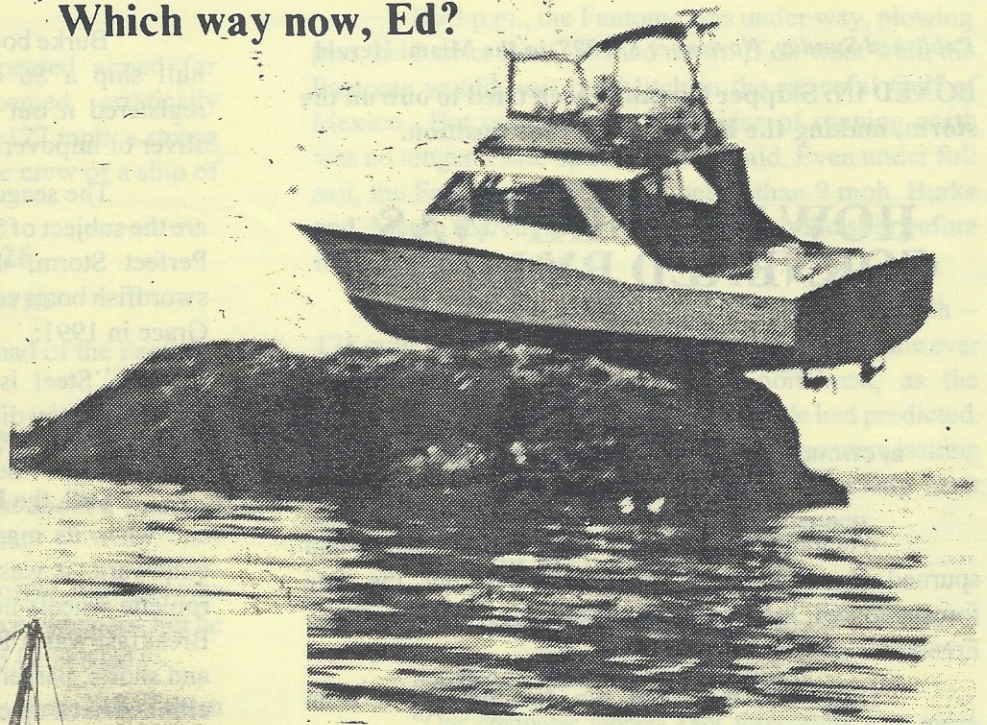
After one Honolulu Race and World War II, *CALIFORNIA* circled the World and was placed in passenger charter service as the first flagship of Hornblower Cruises in Hawaii. Later she carried passengers in San Diego.

Her untimely end occurred Feb 15, 1981 when she was grounded on the rocks off Point Loma, San Diego, Calif. while in thick fog. Fifty-four passengers and crew abandoned ship. On that date, I was the Captain of the *CALIFORNIA*.

An anonymous "humorist" later attached this picture to my front door at home! →

Which way now, Ed?

I spoke with Al Mason on the phone in 1982. He offered and sent to me the original *CALIFORNIA* plans. There was a classic though modern beauty present in all of Al Mason yacht designs for over six decades! He and *CALIFORNIA* are missed.



CALIFORNIA

Edward S. Barr in 1978

Published Sunday, November 8, 1998, in the Miami Herald

BOXED IN: Skipper Guyan March tried to outrun the storm, making the best of dangerous position.

HOW THE SHIP WAS CORNERED BY MITCH

*Trying to escape, it sailed to doom
A cornered ship, 31 men and
a date with doom*

By CYNTHIA CORZO, CURTIS MORGAN and JOHN BARRY

When the race ended, the ship built for a duke and spurned by a princess had no choice but the fate foreshadowed by its 1927 christening: "Fantome" -- French for ghost.

Thirty-one men had run for their lives from Hurricane Mitch for a day and a half. They sailed north, sailed south, then tacked east and west, back and forth in futility, behind a little island of cover. But it left them in a virtual vise, walled in between 50-foot waves and 100-mph winds where sea and sky merged into a vast howling whiteout.

To the south and west lay the shoals of Honduras and Belize. To the north and east, more of Mitch. Their young captain tried vainly to thread a needle to safety. But as he clung to the helm two Wednesdays ago, drenched and exhausted, the deck beneath him listing a sickening 40 degrees -- his sense of right, left, up or down was likely lost in the maelstrom of foam and spray.

Experienced mariners can tell you what comes next. You want to lie down and go to sleep. When the ship starts falling apart, you are just waiting -- and wanting -- to die.

The Fantome was the \$15 million, self-insured pride of Windjammer Barefoot Cruises Ltd., a Miami Beach-based sailing line its president, Michael D. Burke, said he started 51 years ago when he got drunk in Miami and woke up the next morning in bleary possession of a \$600, 19-foot sloop he dubbed the Hangover. Over the years, his fleet grew to six.

The Fantome itself had a far more regal beginning. It was built for the Duke of Westminster 71 years ago, and Aristotle Onassis later bought it as a wedding gift for Princess Grace and Prince Rainier. But the princess, foolish girl, left the mogul off her guest list and never got the boat.

Burke bought it in 1969, gave the 282-foot, steel-hull ship a \$6 million, four-masted make-over, and registered it out of exotic Equatorial Guinea, a small sliver of impoverishment in West Africa.

The seagoing pros and cons of steel-hull vessels are the subject of Sebastian Junger's 1997 best-seller, *The Perfect Storm*, the tale of a fleet of New England swordfish boats caught near Newfoundland by Hurricane Grace in 1991:

"Steel is tough compared to wood, don't let anyone tell you different. Steel goes down faster, though. It goes down . . . well, like a load of steel."

Still, the Fantome was considered a solid vessel, and when its massive sails were filled making way to windward, it was romance in motion, needing neither roulette wheels nor ice swans to seduce its passengers. Breakfast was a Bloody Mary; dinner attire was T-shirt and shorts; passengers dived off the side to snorkel, and climbed back up on rope ladders -- all the simple tropical pleasures that \$1,500 to \$2,000 a week could buy.

The 32-year-old captain, Guyan March, who had wind-surfed in the British Isles from the time he was a young boy, liked to say he wasn't chopped squid either. He had piloted Windjammers since his early 20s, was respected by his crew, and was highly regarded by women for his good looks and sea tales. His brother, Paul, also sails for Windjammer.

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, OCT. 24-25 Ship's final trip begins

The final, fateful trip began in the Honduran port of Omoa on Saturday afternoon, destination Belize and the Barrier Reef for six days of diving and snorkeling. But the 100 passengers were shuttled in launches to the Fantome in driving rain that was "like having a fire hydrant in your face," said passenger Anthony Moffa of West Chester, Pa.

Passengers were told not to worry. Those rains were the extreme outer bands of 98-mile-per-hour Mitch, a late-season Caribbean hurricane nearly 1,000 miles away, tracking northeast toward Jamaica. The Fantome would play it safe: Rather than sail north to Belize, it would hug the Bay Islands off the Honduran coast.

But around 2 a.m. Sunday, while passengers dozed, the Fantome changed course. At 6 a.m., passengers got with their Bloody Marys a depressing announcement from Capt. March that they were making a sprint to Belize City, where they and "nonessential" crew members would be dropped off. It would take all

day.

The hurricane no longer appeared aimed for certain at Jamaica. Its path seemed erratically northwestward. It was now blowing at 127 mph, a strong Category 3, serious enough to scare the crew of a ship of any size.

MONDAY, OCT. 26

Cornered by the storm

The last sight that passengers had of the Fantome crew left haunting impressions.

"I talked with Capt. Guyan as we were waiting for the launches," passenger Moffa recalled. "He was telling me that he had been on the Fantome for about a year and had sailed for Windjammer for 10 years.

"But you could tell he was pensive, his mind was elsewhere. He was talking and greeting passengers, but he was making a mental checklist of what he needed."

Meanwhile, 10 crew members, about half of them women, joined the departing passengers. Kevin Lewis, a Montserrat islander who had vacationed on previous Fantome cruises, got to know the crew members and said they were mostly Caribbean islanders like him.

"They all had families that they were forced to spend a great deal of time away from," he said. "I got the impression that they weren't very well paid -- a few actually confided to me that they weren't -- but they loved their jobs and did it extremely well.

"I remember being struck by the engineer . . . a tall, dark, handsome guy from Trinidad, who during the day would be dressed in overalls, but would surface at night in an impeccable white uniform to dance with the passengers."

But the party was over offshore of Belize City, and the crew looked all business, Moffa recalled. "The crew was going through the rigging, securing stuff that wasn't needed below deck. They were preparing to do battle. They were literally battening down the hatches."

Windjammer owner Burke agonized by satellite phone with his skipper. "Our intentions were to go north past Cancun and Cozumel to get out of the area and avoid the storm," Burke said. "This was really our only choice at the time, since the land locked us in on two sides. Puerto Cortes, just west of Omoa, is the only harbor in the area. It is open to the north and would not have provided any protection from a north wind.

"Fantome was boxed in a corner," he said, "with the Yucatan Peninsula to the west and Honduras to the south."

By 3 p.m., the Fantome was under way, plowing past the Barrier Reef, headed north. If all went well, the Fantome would wait out Mitch in the peaceful Gulf of Mexico. But within hours, "the idea of running north was no longer a safe option," Burke said. Even under full sail, the Fantome could do no better than 9 mph. Burke and March feared the storm might catch the ship before it cleared the Yucatan.

Mitch was now blowing at monster strength -- 178 mph, the fifth-most powerful Atlantic hurricane ever recorded. It was slowly bending northwest, as the National Hurricane Center in Miami-Dade had predicted. So March turned south. But forecasters also were issuing clear warnings: The atmospheric currents that help steer hurricanes were weak. Anything could happen.

TUESDAY, OCT. 27

A frightening surprise

Anything happened. Mitch stopped.

"Our computer models kept forecasting it to move northwest toward Belize and the Yucatan," said Max Mayfield, the hurricane center's deputy director. "It didn't do that. It slowed. Basically, it stalled off the coast of Honduras."

At that point, everything changed for forecasters. "It is very unusual," said hurricane center director Jerry Jarrell. "In late October, early November, they typically go northwestward or turn north." Forecasters constantly underlined the uncertainty of Mitch, but they stuck to probabilities and to their projection -- Mitch, like most hurricanes, would eventually drift northwest, then north.

"Realize that when you're making forecasts, you're thinking you're right," Jarrell said. "It's the sort of thing you're almost psyched up about. You almost convince yourself this forecast is right. We had so much evidence going for the forecast we were making, we were actually pretty slow to give it up. I think, correctly. It pays off every other time. Certainly not this time."

Aboard the Fantome, March was making for the lee side of the island of Roatan, which lies east to west, parallel to the Honduran coastline, staunchly perched between ship and storm, giving protection from large swells. But around noon Tuesday, with forecasters still predicting that the storm would bend west and northwest, Mitch dipped south and then began churning directly toward Roatan.

Fantome's shelter suddenly looked like ground zero. The ship set sail to the east, hoping to slip out as the eye passed above. Instead, Mitch kept coming and coming, trapping Fantome between the dangerous coastline and the eye, the proverbial rocks and a hard place. Forecasters know what happened now, Mayfield said. "The steering currents just collapsed. The computer models didn't see that."

Fantome's captain, Mayfield and Jarrell said, did what

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Fantome's captain, Mayfield and Jarrell said, did what

he could do with the information and options he had. The Gulf of Honduras sits in a triangle of coastline that turned into a deathtrap. "If you imagine the guy's position: He's got two choices. He goes north or he goes east. He can't go any other direction," Jarrell said. "He had to make a choice. He figures they almost never go south. He'll slip in underneath."

"This is pure conjecture on my part. I haven't talked to the guy, and I don't think anyone ever will."

Around 4:30 p.m., the Fantome had moved east of Roatan, about 40 miles south of Mitch's 155-mph eye wall. March told Burke that he was fighting a 100-mph gale and 40-foot waves. And Mitch was taking dead aim at him.

Then the Fantome apparently lost its satellite antenna. Burke pleaded with ham radio operators to search their frequencies for a signal. There was none. Thirty-one souls were cut off from the world.

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 28

Climactic scenarios

Few live to describe what it's like in the fury of a hurricane at sea. In *The Perfect Storm*, author Junger offered this description of the sound of the wind:

"A scream means the wind is around Force 9 on the Beaufort Scale, 40 or 50 knots. Force 10 is a shriek. Force 11 is a moan. Over Force 11 . . . the wind makes a deep tonal vibration like a church organ. There's no melody, though; [it's like] a church organ played by a child."

Mitch was way, way off the Beaufort scale -- a hell where sailors would hardly be able to tell the difference between sea and air. Two experienced seamen sketched out how March might have fought to save the ship and crew as Mitch closed in Wednesday: Thomas Danti, dean of instruction at the Chapman School of Seamanship in Stuart, and Rick Ramos, chief warrant officer and sailmaster aboard the *Eagle*, a four-masted square-rigger that the U.S. Coast Guard sails for cadet training.

With no way around a storm, the next best course is to ride it out in what mariners call "the navigable semicircle" -- the less powerful side of a storm. For a ship heading straight into an oncoming hurricane, that's the right side. The opposite side has a name, too, Danti said: "It's the dangerous semicircle. The winds are stronger, the waves usually higher. Because of the wind direction, it also tends to suck you into the eye."

The idea would be to enter as far away as possible from the eye and the fiercest winds. The crew would prepare by "shortening sails" -- changing to fewer, smaller and more durable storm sails that maximize the captain's control.

Aboard the *Eagle*, similar in size to the *Fantome* but rigged differently, "there are probably a half-dozen different configurations we would use" depending on weather conditions, Ramos said. As wind velocity increases, a skipper might even strip the sails to bare poles -- the hull alone would be more than enough to push the ship along. In such weather, a captain would

struggle just to keep the ship upright and on course. "You want just enough so he can maintain steerage and headway," Danti said.

What mariners call the point of sail -- the position of the ship in relation to the wind -- is critical to survival. In winds so powerful, a vessel rides best with its stern starboard quarter -- the right rear portion of the ship -- to the wind, and its bow pointed at an angle away from the eye. This position takes advantage of both wind and storm direction.

The gales, twisting counterclockwise, propel the ship away from the evil of the eye, opposite to the hurricane's direction. Windjammer's President Burke said that was the strategy he and March had plotted. It didn't work. The near-complete disappearance of the 282-foot ship provides a clue to what may have happened. "It's a sign the boat went down quickly," Danti said. "Very quickly." The 71-year-old ship lacked the watertight bulkheads of newer vessels, and while its heavy steel hull made it a solid-riding, durable vessel, it also meant that should it founder, it could sink like a stone.

With waves perhaps as high as 50 feet, *Fantome* would have been tossed and twisted over each crest. Any of several things might have happened. The ship, heeled over hard by the relentless wind, could have simply broached, flipped on its side, and filled with water. Its bow could have plunged into a large wave, wiping out the bridge and flooding the forward sections. "It's like what happened to the *Titanic* -- when too many of the compartments filled with water, it sank," said Lt. Cmdr. Marcus Woodring of the U.S. Coast Guard's Miami base.

If the *Fantome* crested a large wave and plunged into the trough, it might have pitch-poled -- a dramatic end-over-end flip, masts ("poles") literally pitching forward and the ship's bottom turning up.

Or *Fantome*'s hull may have broken under the beating or the laws of physics. Huge waves create stress that ships aren't designed to endure. With its bow and stern atop two crests and an empty trough in the middle, *Fantome* could have cracked in half.

The vessel's life rafts as well as its emergency beacon were designed to release and float if the ship capsized, but they might have been trapped in pockets of the upside-down ship as it sank in waters 1,100 to 1,400 feet deep.

"In a steel hull," Danti said, "once that goes down -- boom! -- it's going down like that."

MONDAY, NOV. 2

A sense of finality

On the fifth day of an intense search, the crew of a Monty 45 helicopter, dispatched from the British frigate *HMS Sheffield*, spotted debris in the water near eastern Guanaja, off Honduras: eight life vests, two life rafts. Stenciled on them:

SV/*Fantome*.

Now *Fantome* truly was a ghost ship.