

Caught Napping

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A Nap?

<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/adventure/caught-napping.aspx>

Blasted AUTEK Range! D.. submarines! They're right. All we are is pond scum targets. Oh well no St. Croix visit AGAIN.

Wait, we're setting sea and anchor detail? Cool! Even if we are end of pier, I'll get to see that crescent shaped beach finally. Better get below and take the watch. CSOW here I come.

Our Captain had some pull so we got to have two Laser sailboats as part of our welfare and recreation deal. Not bad for a DDG destroyer. Being one of the few qualified sailor's (enlisted anyway) I was tickled pink. Naturally, beggars can't be too choosy, so one of them was a real dog. Scratched up, dinged dagger fin, and worst of all a slow leak somewhere in the hull. But it was a Laser, and it would sail.

Just after we moor, I see the Deck Crew putting both boats in the water. Great! This is a beautiful place to sail. Across the bay, that crescent beach is shining out and calling "Come see me. Come walk on me". Who am I to say no?

Next day, off duty. The wind is stiff, a solid 20 knots, not Laser weather unless you are a bit reckless and an expert. I am both, so it's "Hey Ho and Up She Gathers" for me. I chose to take out the leaky

blue job and leave the other in case someone else wants to sail today.

In the boat, I head out from the pier to work my way 'round the ship. As I clear the destroyer's hull I pick up the full wind and set course across the bay. The wind is the morning on-shore one so I get a dead run haul all the way across. The hull is leaking of course but nothing serious. My knees are killing me. These boats weren't built for dead haul runs. They plan on you being stretched out in the hiking straps at least part of the time.

Scrunch! The Laser's bow grinds into the 6-foot bank of clean white sand I saw from the ship. Up dagger! Luff the sail! I hop out and pull up as high as possible on the so-called beach. What a bummer! This is no beach just a sand berm, kept in place only by the tall saw grass planted on top. Not even good for sunbathing really. Oh well, live and learn. I drain down the hull. At least the bank is good for something, as the last drips drizzle out. Might as well get started back.

I did forget something. While the boat moves faster in the water on a tack, your distance to destination is more than doubled since you have to tack back and forth to gain ground against the wind. No big deal if you don't mind taking a lot more time to go back. However, I do mind since my hull leaks. Another "Oh well" nothing I can do about it now. As I tack back and forth, the boat starts to wallow and fight me as the water inside sloshes back and forth. Not only that, the boat is MUCH heavier and the wind has picked up. The two together are putting pressure and stress on the rigging it was never meant to handle.

Ping! I watch as something shiny silver shots away. What was that? The answer is immediately apparent as I now have half control of the yard arm since the wind just ripped the staple holding the in haul out haul line to the end of the yard's boom. And I get to work twice as hard keeping a now twitchy, wallowing, drunken boat on course and upright. Pop! Zing! There goes another. Now it is really interesting sailing this little monster. Every tack is an adventure in, "Can he do it?"

I judge my closest upwind course and realize it will take one more tack set to make the ship. Not good. I am so barely in control now I doubt seriously if I can make a jibe without flipping. I have no choice. Here goes, sail luffs up, boat heaves forward taking the bow nearly under. Even though I wait for it to level out the boat flips the second the sail takes air.

In the water but not hurt, I check the boat. All in one piece except for the rudder which has evidently decided to tour the bottom of the bay. Might as well be a thousand fathoms deep and gone! I don't have a sailboat anymore. I have a sail spinner.

Time to make a survival plan. I crawl up onto the upside down hull to dry off and think.

Water - none.

Food - a Snickers bar. (eaten immediately. No sense waiting).

Paddle, compass, whistle, flashlight -- none

Swiss Army Knife - one (Good, I can scratch the shark's nose while he eats me)

Wind - 20 knots dead out to sea. Let's see Gulf Stream heading north tiny boat slow search. Sounds like a bad choice. Better not to raise the sail.

Current - about 7 knots and parallel to the island. It will bring me close to the opposite point of rocks. About a half mile swim in a cross current. Let's keep the sail down and drift with the current.

I stand up and do the wave and holler. It's no good too far away, and most likely no one is watching. OK, I drift with current until I judge I can swim ashore. Boat is now excess baggage, so I abandon the treacherous little B.... to the ocean. Best plan I can come up with. What now? A nap sounds good: soon I'm drowsing and resting for what will be a killer swim.

Brummmmm, Hummmmm, What's that? A local fisherman! Jumping and waving work this time. They help me right the boat, tow me back in, even refuse payment. How about that good old fashioned mariner courtesy! What a relief not having to test my plan. I drag my sun - baked, carcass aboard and take a real nap.

I am often asked, "Weren't you scared?" My answer is always the same, "Not really. But I was deeply concerned!"