



The Seafaring Dictionary: Terms, Idioms and Legends of the Past and Present

By David S. T. Blackmore



The Seafaring Dictionary: Terms, Idioms and Legends of the Past and Present By David S. T. Blackmore

Navigable waters cover almost three-quarters of the surface of our planet, and they have been home to centuries of seafarers who, being isolated from land for extensive periods, developed a specialized language all their own. Their language is a complex mixture of the strange and the familiar, including words taken from many English dialects, coined words, slang words, words used by mariners speaking other tongues, and words developed to identify occupations, titles, equipment, or activities. With its many intricate nuances, 'navalese' can be as esoteric and incomprehensible to the layperson as ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs - but such a specialized language is vitally important to a profession in which complex technical concepts need to be communicated briefly and accurately from seaman to seaman. This book is an alphabetical compendium of more than 9000 nautical terms taken from numerous dictionaries, glossaries and other sources of nautical terminology, including volumes on nautical customs and traditions, ghost ships, paranormal maritime events, sea serpents, and marine monsters. Many of the entries are brief and factual, but when appropriate the author has inserted anecdotal material of colorful or intrinsic interest. The volume should be a helpful reference for researchers and laymen who want to understand nautical speech and customs, but it should also be of use for professional seafarers who cannot always be familiar with the complex vocabularies of today's specialized maritime occupations, let alone those of bygone ages. There is an appendix that discusses real and speculative sea monsters, while 17 tables cover wind and wave measurement, date and time notation, phonetic alphabets, maritime signals, navigation rules, military and naval ranks and ratings, and the process of boxing the compass.

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- Rank: #2417102 in Books
- Brand: Brand: McFarland
- Published on: 2009-05-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.90" h x 1.10" w x 6.90" l, 1.55 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 398 pages

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Editorial Review

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A sincere effort at defining global examples of navalese, this book covers some 9,000 terms and situations as well as traditions, slang, abbreviations, verse and chantey lyrics, etymologies, and sailing history. Written by a seagoing veteran of merchant and military vessels, the text ranges from two-word definitions to chatty entries on Non-naval flogging, Rogue waves, Sailing rigs, and Scurvy. Author Blackmore also describes the function of the Astrolabe and Gun carriage and enlarges on the historical significance of Gallipoli, Impressment, Kamikaze, and Roles de Oléron. An appendix offers a 10-part debunking of mythic ocean lore. Tables on wind speed, flag and sound and light signals, and naval rank precede a 25-entry bibliography and an eight-page index. Cross-referencing is meager, and entries for International date line and Piracy, among others, seem scanty. Overall, the book cries out for illustration. Because of the absence of charts, photos, maps, and schematic drawings, it must rank far below Peter Kemp's standard text, the second edition of *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (2005). Nonetheless, the dictionary suits the needs of medium-sized and large public and college libraries, and of purchasers of gifts for day sailors and old salts. --Mary Ellen Snodgrass

Review

"guides the reader through centuries of terms and idioms of the sea. Blackmore's dictionary should find a home on the reference shelves of libraries and in the hands of landlubber readers interested in the language of the sea. Recommended"--*Choice*; "easy-to-use and convenient...a useful work"--*ARBA* "the inquiring reader cannot fail to be impressed by the wide extent of the author's knowledge. The dictionary will be helpful to all readers who wish to inform themselves about the ways of sailors and the sea, and can be recommended to libraries with an interest in that important aspect of society"--*Reference Reviews*; "thumbs-up...for its overall treatment and accuracy"--*The Bosun's Chronicle*; "Blackmore's work is likely to become a standard reference for naval organization, practice, and idiom from the 1940s to the present day"--*Nautical Research Journal*; "a valuable contribution to the canon...by recognizing that sailors see the world differently to landlubbers, Blackmore has produced a work with much of interest to both"--*The Naval Review*.

About the Author

David S.T. Blackmore is a veteran of the Merchant and Royal Navies. A dual citizen of the United Kingdom and Canada, he lives in Toronto.

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Jamie Brewer:

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