



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
Jessica Schwarz
Onboard NOAA Ship RAINIER
June 19 – July 1, 2006**

NOAA Teacher at Sea: Jessica Schwarz
NOAA Ship RAINIER
Departure
Day 1: Monday, June 19, 2006



NOAA hydrographic ship, RAINIER, preparing for departure from Sitka, Alaska

The RAINIER departed Sitka, Alaska this evening, officially making me a NOAA Teacher at Sea. While preparing to leave the dock, I spent my time on the flying bridge, located directly above the bridge, to get a good view of all the activity involved in getting the ship off the dock. I was very impressed with the amount of work it takes to get a 231 foot ship underway. The spring line, which basically looks like an enormous rope (3 inches thick), was used to change the pivot point of the vessel, making it easier to maneuver the ship away from the dock without any kind of serious impact. Larry, the Electric Technician on board, pointed out the importance of standing back away from the line as the pressure on the line is very tense and has been known to snap. Needless to

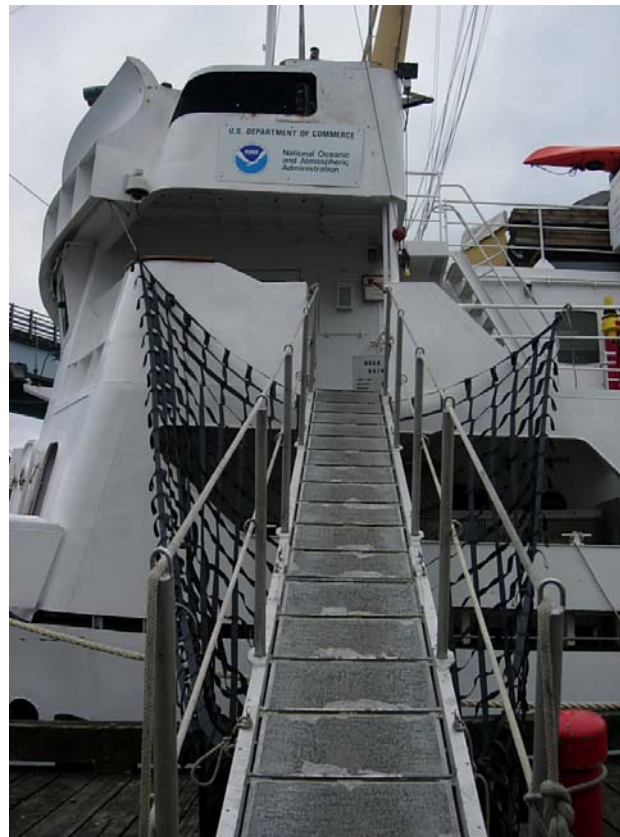
say, I kept a safe distance from the lines, but was still able to hear the sound of the lines tightening as the RAINIER pulled away from the dock. Yikes.

Once underway and traveling out of the channel, I went into the Bridge with the ship's Executive Officer, CDR Julia Neander, or as she is addressed on the ship, the XO. She explained some of the activity I was observing from the Officers in the bridge. Alaska is an amazing place to visit and the mountains outside made the view from the bridge spectacular.

On the bridge, officers are very focused on their assigned task. The AB, or Able-Bodied Seaman, Jodi was behind the helm and steering the ship. Jodi received course commands from the acting Conning Officer, Nate. By calling out helm directions to Jodi, Nate was making sure the ship was on, or as close to, the course charted. The ship's Navigational Officer, Sam, had the ship's route already charted prior to departure and the chart was clearly displayed on the port side of the bridge. This chart is used to track the ship's exact position while underway. Officers in the bridge are constantly navigating to be sure the ship is staying on course. While underway, a fix, composed of three bearings and/or ranges (distances), is taken every 15 minutes and recorded. I want to learn more about this entire process.

As for who is working onboard the RAINIER, NOAA Corps is one of seven uniform services within the United States. Each officer on board is in uniform. The view of the uniformed officers in the bridge behind the navigational equipment working to get us underway was very impressive. There is a very strict protocol and all the officers time is accounted for on a rotating schedule. With the vessel's commissioned officers, deck crew, engineers, stewards, and survey technicians I have really begun to get a feel for how hard everyone works to keep the ship running smoothly to complete successful missions.

As a side story, while heading South outside of Sitka, our course was somewhat interrupted by a marine mammal all my students in Hawaii should be very familiar with. The XO spotted a humpback whale just to the starboard, or right, side of the boat. I think it must have been around 100 ft.



NOAA Teacher at Sea, Jessica Schwarz's journey onboard the RAINIER begins here!

away. Within a matter of minutes, the humpback was directly in front of the ship. We thought it dove down into the ocean, but as the vessel continued to move forward, it surfaced again, this time only 5-10 feet from the hull of the RAINIER. The officers had to call for an immediate change in direction. It was a very exciting and unexpected encounter. I was so surprised the whale remained within a few feet of the ship. I like to think it was trying to say hello to me, since we both have made the long journey to Alaska from Hawaiian waters.

We are now anchored in Kanga Bay just south of Sitka within the Islet Passage. Tomorrow two survey boats will launch to get started on collecting the hydrographic data. I will not be participating in surveys tomorrow because I need to get oriented to the RAINIER. There is an incredible amount to learn starting with how to find my way to and from my sleeping quarters from any point on the ship without asking for help. You might be surprised how difficult that is. Luckily everyone onboard is very kind and helpful! I suggested they put some sort of transmitter on me in case I show up missing for awhile.

I am so excited to be onboard! I am at the beginning of my adventure with the RAINIER and feel I have already learned a lot. I look forward to sharing my experiences with everyone! WHEA crew...I am counting on hearing from you!!!

To contact me via e-mail, my address while at sea is Jessica.Schwarz@noaa.gov. Please feel free to write me any time!

Mahalo-

Jessica Schwarz