



NOAA Teacher at Sea
Eric Heltzel
Onboard NOAA Ship RONALD H. BROWN
September 26 – October 22, 2005

Log 3

Teacher At Sea aboard the RONALD H. BROWN, September 29, 2005, Eric Heltzel

I can hardly believe that this is my fourth full day on board the RON BROWN. We are sailing southward across the Caribbean towards Panama. It is so very different from my life in Wyoming. Outside are temperatures in the 80's and low 90's with high humidity. I'm having a bit of difficulty adjusting to the fact that the deck (floor) is in constant motion. Walking down a corridor, I must be prepared to catch myself. I'm a bit slow in finding my "sea legs."

Yesterday I had the opportunity to interview the Executive Officer, Stacy Burke. What follows is a synopsis of that interview.

The Executive Officer (XO) is number two, second only to the Captain. Her responsibilities focus on the ship's personnel. She is responsible for hiring crew, solving problems that might arise, and overseeing the wellbeing of the crew. Commander Burke stands half watch (4 hours) on the Bridge. When there, she is responsible for "driving" the ship, navigation, avoiding collisions, and executing maneuvers to enable the scientific missions.

Commander Burke has been working for NOAA for nineteen years. The last six of those have been "at sea." She indicated that operating a ship is complex and she enjoys being part of a team that works towards the success of the mission. "Going to sea is not solitary," says Commander Burke. The crew lives and works together, often for months at a time. A working cruise has little resemblance to "taking a cruise." This ship rarely calls in at ports. Most missions take the RON BROWN to remote locations to enable the gathering of scientific data.

To become a NOAA officer Commander Burke suggests a bachelor's degree in one of the "hard" sciences (physics, chemistry) or engineering. Oceanography works if the student focuses on the technical aspects of the field. She also said, "I have openings right now for Deck Hands." Operation of a large research vessel requires crew performing many different jobs.

I hope to continue interviewing personnel aboard the RONALD H. BROWN to help clarify what ship life and ocean research are like.

Eric Heltzel