

USE OF BOATSWAIN'S CALL

HISTORY

As far as English ships are concerned, the call can be traced back to the days of the Crusades, 1248 A.D. As far back as 1485 A.D., it was used by the English as an honored badge of rank, and was then worn by the Lord High Admiral of England. It was probably worn because it has always been used as a method of passing orders. When the Lord High Admiral, Sir Edward Howard, was killed in action off Brest in 1513, a "whistle of honor" was presented by the queen mother of France to the officer who commanded the French galleys on this occasion. From about that time it was no longer worn as a badge of rank, and it reverted to its original use and was employed only as a method of passing orders. About 1671 it was referred to as a "call," and by this name it has been known ever since. In our Navy it is often referred to as a "boatswain's pipe."

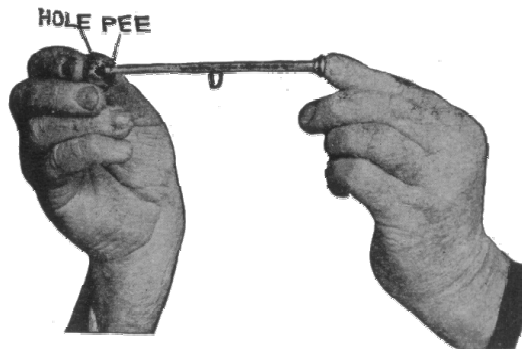


Figure 1 Top View

Tuning.

- (1) Some calls issued are not shrill enough in sound and each user of a call has his own method of tuning his call to that shrill note required in nearly all the pipes used.
- (2) Most calls are too open at the pee and have to be flattened out soldered at the sides of the pee, so as to fill the space between it and the bowl.

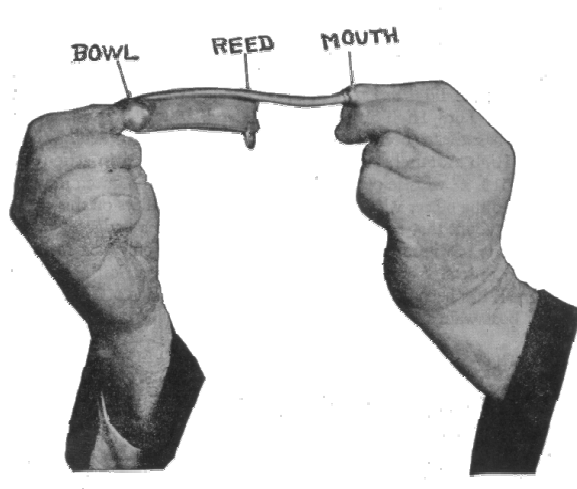


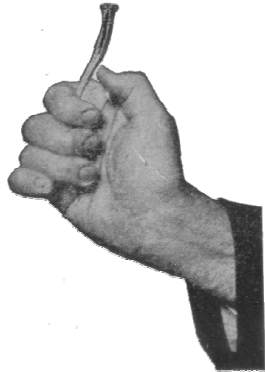
Figure 2 Parts of the Pipe

- (3) Some calls are improved by scraping the wind edge or edge of the bowl farthest from the pee. It is sometimes necessary to enlarge this hole by scraping as well as by sharpening the edge until the reed strikes the hole fair. A test of this is often made by pushing the large end of a broom straw through the reed to find how the straw hits the wind edge of the hole. That edge of the hole should split the straw. The call, once tuned, should sound if held with its mouth to a gentle breeze; and, when blown with open hand, should sound from the most repressed pressure to the full strength of the lungs without any flaw in

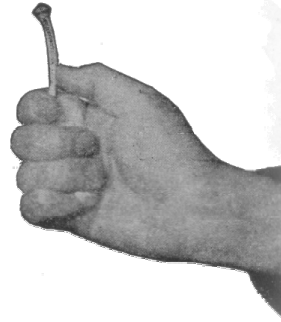
the sound known as wind leak or hoarseness; and the sound with closed hand should be as clear and shrill as it is possible to make it.

Positions of the hand.

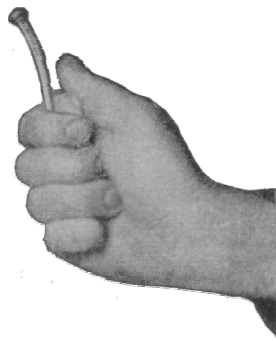
(1) There are four positions of the hand *open*, *curved*, *closed*, and *clinched*.



(4) Figure 3 Hand Open



(5) Figure 4 Hand Curved



(6) Figure 5 Hand Closed



(7) Figure 6 Hand Clinched

(2) These positions also indicate the lung force or pressure of blowing. As a rule, the open hand calls for the least pressure required to make a soft, clear note, while the clinched calls for all the pressure that can be used in making the note shrill and clear.

PIPING AND PASSING THE WORD

The score, explanation.

(1) The four positions of the hand, open, curved, closed, and clinched, are indicated on the four spaces of a musical staff, thus:

Clinched
Closed
Curved
Open

Figure 7 Musical Staff

(a) A *straight* line indicates a smooth note.

- (b) A *dotted* line indicates a rattled note.
 - (c) A *broken* line indicates an undulating note.
 - (d) *Full arrowheads* along a line indicate full breath impulses.
 - (e) *Half arrowheads* along a line indicate gentle breath impulses.
 - (f) Intervals, or rests, are marked thus | with the numeral of the seconds above if more than 1 second is necessary, otherwise notes are slurred smoothly.
 - (g) The number of seconds each pipe should be given under normal conditions is marked above the bar, but circumstances often call for the signal to be shortened.
- (2) —
- (a) Smooth notes are made as an ordinary whistle is blown, and are simply raised or lowered by the lung force used.
 - (b) Rattled notes are made by the ballarding of the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, imitating a whistle rattled by a pea.
 - (c) Undulating notes are made by a combination of the tongue slightly undulating while the throat checks the lung pressure or flow of breath, causing the sound to undulate smoothly, but continuously, at equal intervals.

The use of the voice.

The tone of voice in passing the word should be modulated and pitched as the occasion calls for. The rising inflection should be given to such calls as *All hands*, *Up all hammocks*, etc., and the lowering inflection should be given to such calls as *Down all bags*, *Call the watch*, etc.

Pipes and their uses.

- (1) *Call mates*. — Piped by the ship's boatswain to assemble his mates.
- (a) Call in clinched position and sound as "peep peep, peep peep," short and shrill with a pause of less than 1 second after the first 2 peeps.
 - (b) This is answered by all the mates as they close on the point of assembling to receive the order to be passed from the boatswain or his chief mate, who blew the signal.

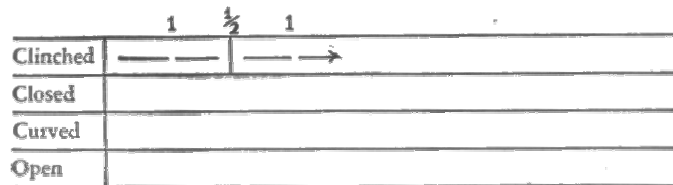


Figure 8 Call Mates

- (2) *Stand-by*. — Piped for *Set taut*, *Stand-by*, and *Lay in*.
- (a) Commence with the call in the curved position and instantly change to the clinch, causing a rising peep, and follow it with a slurred peep, short and ending sharp.

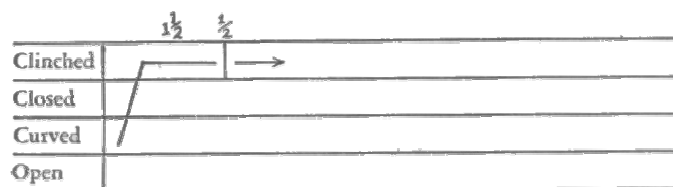


Figure 9 Stand-by

- (3) *Lay up*. — Piped to send men up or aloft together.
- (a) Commence as in *Stand-by* and follow the long peep by a series of 3 sharp peeps with an interval of about 1 second between each series of peeps, and slow down the last 3 peeps to about equal intervals between them.

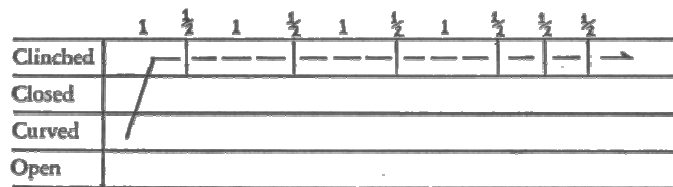


Figure 10 Lay Up

- (4) *Lay-out.* — Piped to *Lay out* in manning yards or rail; also for *Trice up* and *Out booms*.
- (a) As in *Stand-by*, except that the first peep is but about half the length of the second one and is pitched higher on the start. The interval of time is about the same as the verbal order and, in fact, should be so timed.

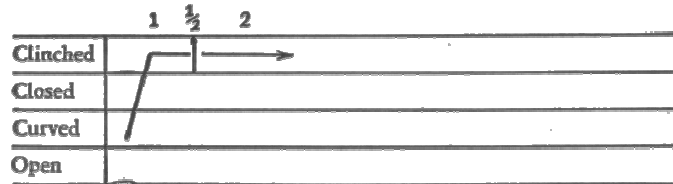


Figure 11 Lay Out

- (5) *Word to be passed.* — Piped to command silence preliminary to passing an order or the word about information.
- (a) Call in the closed position and clinch within a second. Impulse the shrill call with the lung force about 3 times and end sharp.
- (b) The length of this pipe should not be less than 5 nor more than 10 seconds. Sing out the words, *D'ye hear there*, than wait for all hands to silence, and pass the word as given by the officer of the deck.

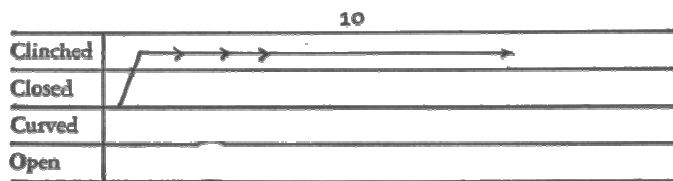


Figure 12 Word to be Passed

- (6) *Hoist away.* — Piped in hoisting boats in hoisting generally, and in the walk away with the cat or fish falls; and is always preceded by the pipe *Set taut*.
- (a) Same as (5), except that the shrill is not impulsed, and the shrill is softened by changing the position from clinched to curved, and the lung pressure is lessened so as to finish low and soft, instead of sharp.
- (b) The length of this pipe is about 10 seconds for a signal to make a long walk away in hoisting.

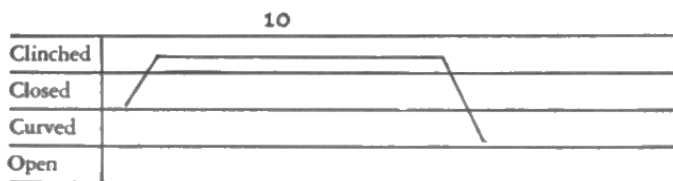


Figure 13 Hoist Away

- (7) *Haul.* — Piped to keep men pulling together.
- (a) Call in the closed position and changed to the clinched, and so timed as to sound about an equal length of time in each position; finish with a sharp shrill. Normal time about 3 seconds.
- (b) This signal is used at such times as the men are facing their work at a standstill and in position for a pull together. The low note of the signal is *Stand-by*, and the shrill note *Pull*. This is repeated as often

as the signal is blown, and the length of the shrill note signifies the strength and amount of rope to be gained in the pull, so that as the signal is shortened it becomes the first note of the *Short belay*.



Figure 14 Haul

- (8) *Belay*. — Piped to avast hauling and make fast; and also to annul an order just piped.
- Call open; close sharply to the clinch and impulse with the tongue to the roof of the mouth about 6 times while holding the first shrill of about 5 seconds; then change to the curved and impulse softly with the breath and tongue to cause a smooth, undulating sound for about the same interval as the impulsed shrill; then clinch sharply and finish with three shrill, slurred peeps in rapid succession.
 - This is the most difficult pipe to blow, owing to the contraction of it. The *Short belay* is more uniform in sound, as it really grows out of the *Short haul*. The *Short belay* means *Hold fast*.

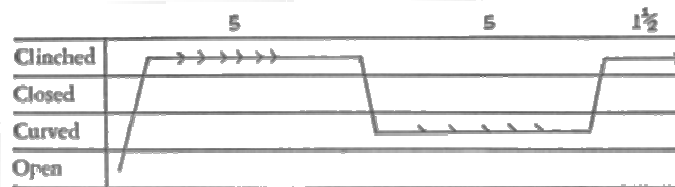


Figure 15 Belay

- (9) *All hands*. — Piped as a general for all events calling upon all hands; also for calling the first, mid, and morning watches.
- Close to the clinched and impulse softly about 3 times, holding the shrill for 10 seconds, ending sharp, then again close to the clinched softly and hold the second shrill for 10 seconds and allow it to fall softly to a finish for 3 seconds.

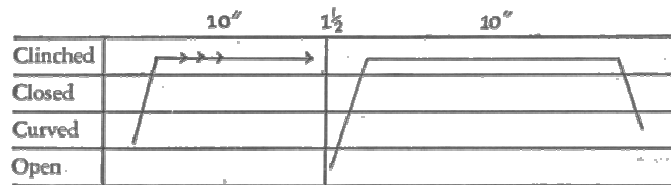


Figure 16 All Hands

- (10) *Boat call*. — Piped to call away a boat; also to call a division or divisions to quarters.
- Call in the open, close to the clinched, hold the shrill for 5 seconds, then open and close again to the clinch and hold the second shrill for another 5 seconds, then open and allow the signal to end softly, allowing about 3 seconds for the fall to silence.
 - All hands should listen to this pipe, as the boatswain's mate is to sing out in a long-drawn Away the boat that is to be manned; and he should use the word away a second time in the call of the barge or the gig; such as *Away, barge (gig); away*. Etiquette requires that both the pipe and the word, when calling away the barge or the gig, should be full length. The pipe and the word for other boats are not to be so long.
 - In calling a division or divisions to quarters, follow with *All the-division-to quarters*.
 - The boatswain's mate looks for silence as in after the *Word-to-be-passed* pipe, and then pitches his voice in a roaring song, raising it to its full power on the first word of the call, and lowering it on the last syllable of the last word.

- (e) The interval of the song is about equal to the interval of the call.

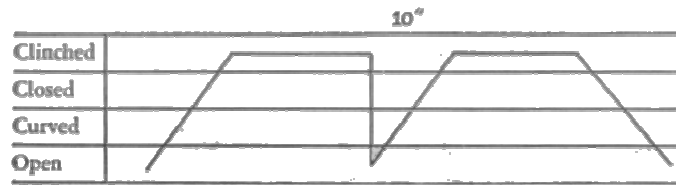


Figure 17 Boat Call

(11) *Heave around*. — Piped for *Mess gear*; also to heave around a capstan.

- Call in the curved, and blow very softly with an undulating sound by checking the breath with the throat, allowing the tongue to undulate slowly; then in the clinched position, increasing the rapidity of the undulations from about the same interval as during the rising; then allow the sound to fall back to the soft, low tones of the start.
- Make a double *Heave around* for the capstan, and a single long *Heave around* for *Mess gear*; but the interval of the double *Heave around* should not exceed that of the single *Heave around*.

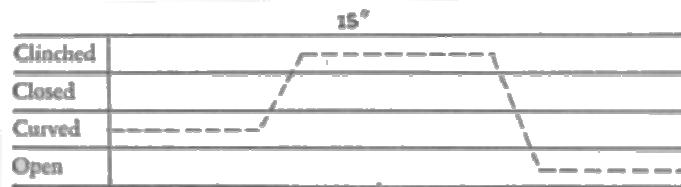


Figure 18 Heave Around

(12) *Sweepers*.—Pipes all sweepers to start their brooms and clean out spit kits.

- Commence as in *Heave around* and close sharply to a short shrill. Repeat this 3 times and finish with 4 or 5 sharp peeps from the closed to the clinched in rapid succession. Repeat this from its commencement, but instead of finishing with the sharp peeps, make the sound more like an impulsed shrill as though slurring the peeps.
- If necessary the boatswain's mates follow with the words *Clear up the decks for quarters*.

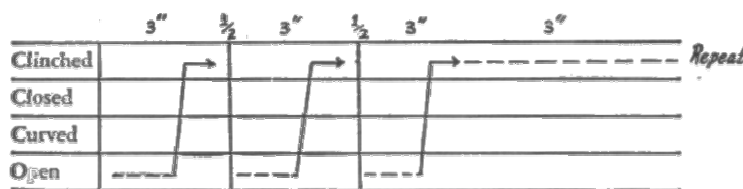


Figure 19 Sweepers

(13) *Veer*. — Piped to *Ease away*, *Walk back*, and *Slack away*. A slurred veer calls side boys to *tend the side*; 1 veer, 2 side boys; 2 veers, 4 side boys; 3 veers, 6 side boys; 4 veers, 8 side boys.

- Call in the curved and blow to imitate a whistle rattled by a pea. This rattling sound is produced by ballarding the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth; and the rapidity of the ballarding is in proportion to the pitch of the sound, rising to the -maximum in the shrill rattle.
- For walking back the falls, this pipe is sounded continuously during the *Walk back* or the lowering from a *Belay*; and the speed of the lowering is in proportion to the undulations of the pipe or the rapidity of its rising and falling in sound caused by changing from curved or open to clinched, sometimes accentuated by impulsing with the throat; short peeps of it indicate to lower handsomely for a short distance as in the case of fouling while lowering.

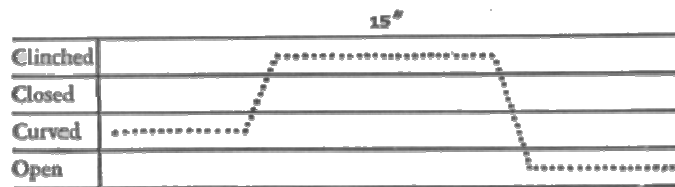


Figure 20 Veer

- (c) At the finish of the lower or at the *Come up*, the signal is finished with a short, sharp peep as in the finish of *Pipe down*.

(14) *Piping the side*. — Accompanies appropriate side honors.

- (a) Fill the lungs, commence with the lowest smooth note and rise to the shrill, then fall to the low note again and finish with a low, soft shrill.
- (b) The time in rising to the shrill should be about equal to the time of holding the shrill, and the time of falling from the shrill should be about one-third less than that of rising, so that the time of rising, holding, and falling to a finish are about equal.

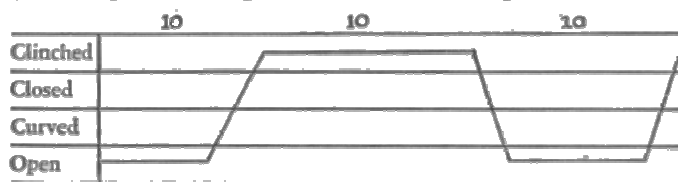


Figure 21 Piping the Side

- (c) The pipe *Alongside* is started in time to finish as the boat makes the gangway.
- (d) The pipe *Over the side* is started in time to finish it when the visitor is greeted by the officer of the deck. At the first note of this pipe, the boatswain's mate takes station in rear of the proper outboard side boy and all side tenders come to the Salute, remaining at Salute during the sound of the pipe, and dropping to Attention at its last note.
- (e) Upon the visitor's departure, the ceremony is reversed as follows: Boatswain's mate commences the first note of *Over the side* as the visitor passes him in departing; and the first note of *Away* as the visitor's boat gathers headway and curves away from the gangway in shoving off, and this signal should be very long-drawn in the finish.
- (f) In the piping of officials alongside and over, the side pipe is lengthened to full breath for officials receiving 8 side boys. But short side pipes in any event are considered lubberly and contrary to the proper "etiquette of the side."
- (g) For officials received with 8 or 6 side boys, the side will be piped by the ship's boatswain. For officials received with 4 side boys, the side will be piped by the chief boatswain's mate. For officials received with 2 side boys, the side will be piped by a boatswain's mate.

(15) *Pipe down*. —

- (a) This pipe is a combination of the pipe *Word to be passed* and a long *Veer* of about 10 seconds; ending in a sharp, short peep, with an interval of 1 second between the two pipes.
- (b) This signals the termination of all evolutions and ceremonies to which all hands had been called, and is blown by the boatswain's mate of the watch. After the sounding of taps, follow the *Pipe down* with *Silence fore and aft*.

(16) *Pipe to (any) meal*. —

- (a) Pipe *All hands*, long *Heave around (Mess gear)* and long *Pipe down*.
- (b) This signals the termination of all evolutions and ceremonies 1 minute.*

* Taken from *The Blue Jackets Manual*, Tenth Edition, 1940. United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland

