

The U. S. Navy Boatswain's Pipe

The boatswain's pipe (originally termed a *call*) dates back to the days of sail. It had definite practical uses in those days, many of which have now ceased to exist. Men high on the royal and top gallant yards could hear the pipe under weather conditions that would cause the human voice to be inaudible or unintelligible.

Although the days of sail are gone, the boatswain's pipe is still very much a part of the Navy. Since the pipe or call is a device distinctive to the sea and particularly to the Boatswain's Mate rating, all the Boatswain's Mates should take special pride in knowing how to use it correctly and effectively. The use of the call implies the right to pass and to issue orders, and thus it continues a symbol of authority.

In learning to use the boatswain's pipe, you should have the benefit of instruction by an experienced BM. The following paragraphs contain specific information on the use of the pipe, but you will be able to understand and follow the information more quickly with the help of an instructor.

USING THE BOATSWAIN'S PIPE

One of your first military duties as a BM will be BMOW, but before you can carry them out properly, you must know the various calls on the boatswain's pipe and the standard Navy phraseology.

Tuning

Figure 1-1 shows the boatswain's pipe and the name of its parts. Whether you use a Navy-issue or a commercial pipe, the first thing you have to do is tune it. Pipes are stamped out when manufactured; therefore, both the hole and the pee are often misshapen. Most pipes are too open at the pee and have to be flattened and soldered at the sides of the pee to fill the space between the pee and the bowl; otherwise, a hissing sound of escaping air will interfere with the clearness of the call.

Some pipes are improved by filing the wind edge, which is the edge of the bowl farthest from the pee. The hole should be filed down until the blast of air from the pee is split exactly by the sharp edge of the bowl. A test of this can be made by pushing a broom straw through the reed. The edge of the hole should split the straw. At times it is necessary to flatten the part of the reed projecting over the bowl to accomplish this. Once tuned, the pipe should sound when held with its mouth to a gentle breeze.

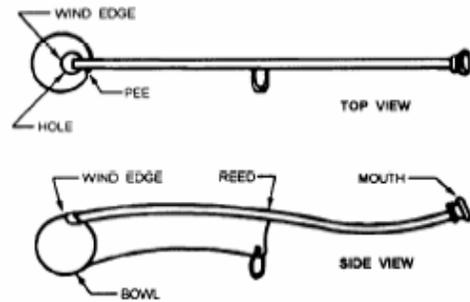


Figure 1-1.—Boatswain's pipe and its parts.

Hand Positions

The four correct positions of the hand for using the boatswain's pipe are open, curved, closed, and clinched. They are shown in figure 1-2. The lung force or blowing pressure varies with each position. As a rule the open hand requires the least pressure for a clear note, and the clinched position demands the greatest pressure in making the note shrill and clear. Low notes are made with the open hand position; high notes, with the clinched position.

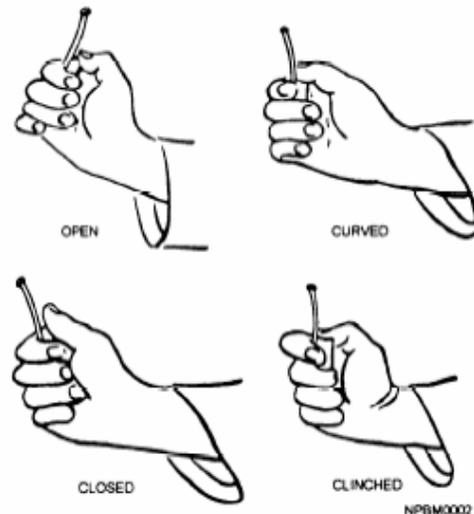


Figure 1-2.—Hand positions.

Scores

The various calls are written out somewhat like musical scores, with the four hand positions indicated in the four horizontal spaces. An explanation of the score follows:

1. A straight line indicates a SMOOTH note.
2. A dotted line means a RATTLED note.
3. A broken line stands for an UNDULATING note.
4. Full arrowheads along a line indicate FULL-BREATH PULSATION.

5. Half arrowheads along a line denote GENTLE-BREATH PULSATION.
6. An arrow on the end of a line signifies that you END SHARP.
7. No arrow on the end of the line means that you allow the note to DIE AWAY.

Intervals, or rests, are marked with a vertical line and the number of seconds noted above the line.

The number of seconds each pipe should be given under normal conditions is marked above the bar, but circumstances sometimes require that a signal be shortened. Smooth notes are made as an ordinary whistle is blown and are raised or lowered by the lung force exerted. Rattled notes are sounded by ballarding the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth, imitating a whistle rattled by a pee.

Undulating notes are made by a combination of the tongue slowly vibrating while the throat pulsates the lung pressure, causing the sound to undulate smoothly at equal intervals.

Calls

Calls are derived from using individual scores or combinations of scores. To be efficient with the pipe, a person needs to practice the scores, using the hand positions and various combinations of scores.



Figure 1-3.—Call mates.

CALL MATES.—Before the days of public address (PA) systems aboard ships, every word passed was by word of mouth. The word was given to the Boatswain or BMOW, who sounded “Call mates” to assemble his mates. As they drew near from different parts of the ship, they answered repeatedly with the same call. After receiving the word, they dispersed to pass the word at every hatch.

The call is shown in figure 1-3. Start the call in a clinched position and sound as “peep-peep-peep,” short and shrill, with a pause of less than 1 second after the first two peeps.



Figure 1-4.—Passing the word.

WORDS TO BE PASSED.—This call usually is the prelude to any word passed aboard ship. Its purpose is to command the attention of all hands to the announcement about to be made.

Commence the call in a closed position and clinch within 1 second. Impulse the shrill call about three times and end sharp. See figure 1-4.



Figure 1-5.—All hands.

ALL HANDS.—All hands is piped as a general call to any event in which all hands are to participate (battle stations, for example).

Close to the clinched position and impulse softly about three times, holding the shrill for 10 seconds, ending sharp; again close to the clinched (softly) and hold the second shrill for 10 seconds and allow it to fall softly to a finish in 3 seconds. This call is seen in figure 1-5.

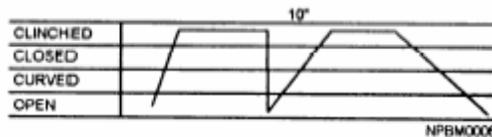


Figure 1-6.—Boat call.

BOAT CALL.—Boat call is piped to call away a boat and also to pipe a division to quarters. The entire call is lengthened in proportion to the seniority of the boat called. In other words, the call is longer for the gig than for the motor whaleboat. After you pipe the call, pass the word “Away the gig (barge). Away!” For other boats, omit the last “Away!” When piping a division to quarters, after the call, pass the word “All the (number) division to quarters!” See figure 1-6.

Start the call in the open position, 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 again and let the signal end softly, allowing about 3 seconds for the fall to silence.

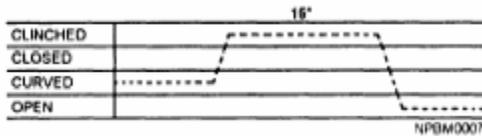


Figure 1-7.—Heave around.

HEAVE AROUND.—This call piped twice means “Heave around on the capstan or winch.” Piped once, it means Mess Gear. The overall duration is the same for both. (It also is part of the pipe for Mess Call.)

Call in the curved position and blow very softly with an undulating sound by pulsating the breath with the throat, allowing the tongue to undulate slowly. Shift to the clinched position, increasing the rapidity of the undulations; then allow the sound to fall back to the soft, low tones of the start. See figure 1-7.



Figure 1-8.—Sweepers.

SWEEPERS. —This call, as shown in figure 1-8, pipes all sweepers to man their brooms and clean out all butt kits.

Commence as in “Heave around” and close sharply to a short shrill. Repeat this three times and finish with four or five sharp peeps from the closed position to the clinched in rapid succession. Repeat the call from its commencement; however, instead of finishing with sharp peeps, make the sound more like an impulsed shrill, as though slurring the peeps.

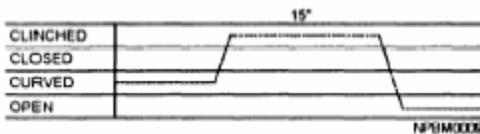


Figure 1-9.—Veer.

VEER. —This call is piped to “Ease away,” “Walk back,” or “Slack away.” A slurred veer calls side boys to “Tend the side”: one veer, two side boys; two veers, four side boys; three veers, six side boys; four veers, eight side boys.

Call in the curved position and blow to imitate the sound of a whistle rattled by a pee. This rattling sound is produced by ballarding the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth. The rapidity of the ballarding is in proportion to the

pitch of the sound, rising to the maximum in the shrill rattle to clinched. Sometimes this is accentuated by impulsing with the throat; short peeps mean to lower handsomely for a short distance. The call is shown in figure 1-9.

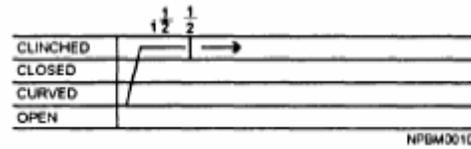


Figure 1-10.—Stand by.

STAND BY.—This call is piped for “Stand by” and “Set taut.”

Commence the call with the hand 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. This is shown in figure 1-10.

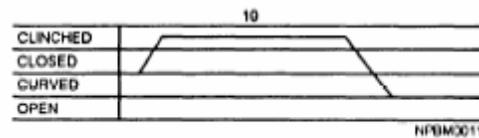


Figure 1-11.—Hoist away.

HOIST AWAY. —Hoist away is piped after “Set taut” to start a power hoist or a “Walk away” with boat falls or tackles.

The pipe is the same as “Passing the word” except that the shrill is not impulsed and it is softened by changing the position from clinched to curved; also, the lung pressure is lessened so as to finish low and soft instead of sharp. The length of this pipe is about 10 seconds for a signal to make a long walk away in hoisting. See figure 1-11.

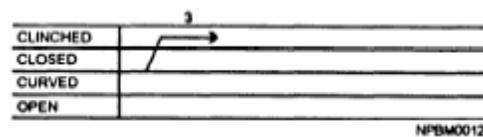


Figure 1-12.—Haul

HAUL.—Haul is the pipe equivalent of “Ho! heave! ho! heave!” by voice when the gang is heaving together on a line instead of walking away with it. The low note means “Get another purchase,” and the high note means “Heave!” For walking back the falls, this pipe is sounded continuously during the walk back or the lowering from a belay. 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

Commence with the hand in the closed position and change to the clinched; sound about an equal length of time in each position and finish with a sharp shrill. Normal time is about 3 seconds, as shown in figure 1-12.

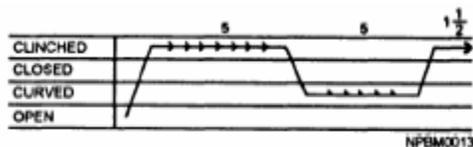


Figure 1-13.—Belay.

BELAY.—This call is piped to avast hauling and make fast and to annul an order just piped. See figure 1-13.

Call open, then close sharply to the clinched position and impulse with the tongue to the roof of the mouth about six times while holding the first shrill 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 impuled shrill, then clinch sharply and finish with three shrill, slurred peeps in rapid succession.

PIPE DOWN.—The call “Pipe down” consists of “Passing the word” and a long (10-second) “Veer,” ending in a short, sharp peep in the clinched position. It is piped as “Secure” from any all-hands function. Also, it is piped immediately after the bugle call “Tattoo,” just before word is passed to “Turn in. Keep silence about the decks.”

MESS CALL.—Mess call is the longest of the calls; it should cover no less than 1 minute. It consists of “All hands,” a long “Heave around,” and a long ‘Pipe down,’ in that order.

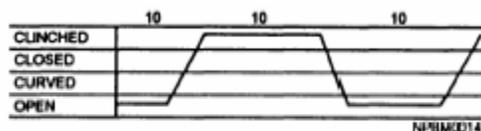


Figure 1-14.—Piping the side.

PIPING THE SIDE.—This is the aristocrat of all the calls on the boatswain’s pipe. It consists of the call shown on the score in figure 1-14 piped twice. The call for “Alongside” is sounded so as to finish just as the visitor’s boat or vehicle makes the gangway. During this pipe the side boys and BM stand at attention, but do not salute.

The call for “Over the side” starts just as the visitor’s head appears at quarterdeck level. The side boys and BM salute on the first note and drop from salute on the last one. See figure 1-15. 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. Rising to the shrill should be about equal to the time of holding the shrill; the time of falling from the shrill should be about one-third less than that of rising.

Saluting procedure is reversed when a visitor is leaving. “Over the side” is piped as the visitor passes the BM on the way to the gangway, and the side boys and BM salute on the first note. They drop from salute on the last note and remain at attention while “Alongside” is sounded. The last call begins as the visitor’s boat or vehicle departs. Inhale deeply before you start piping the side, because etiquette requires that it be drawn out as long as possible. The more side boys the visitor rates, the longer the notes should be sustained.

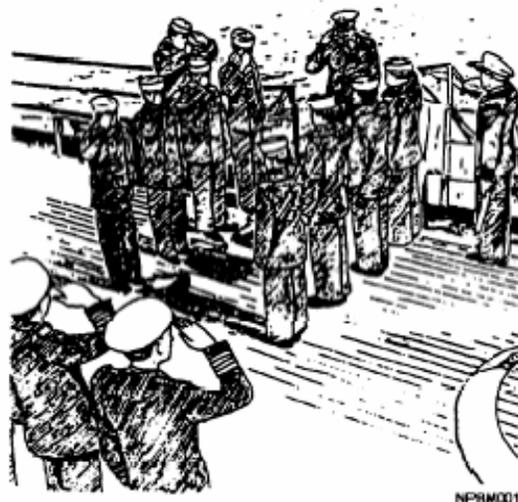


Figure 1-15.—Over the side.



This is an excerpt from the U.S. Navy Boatswain’s Mate Nonresident Training Course.

For additional Boatswain Mate Pipe information visit:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~bosun-m8/>