

# All in a Day's Work

## John O'Sullivan – Captain, Merchant Navy



John O'Sullivan works at sea as a Captain in the Merchant Navy. He works on oil tankers in Northern European sea areas delivering oil products, such as petrol, diesel, kerosene, jet fuel and lube oils, from major oil refineries to various cities around Europe.

Images courtesy of Capt. John O'Sullivan

### Where do you work?

I work for a Shipping Company called James Fisher Shipping Services, based in Barrow-in-Furness, UK. They own/manage about twenty ships, mainly oil tankers of various carrying capacity. I work on an eight week on, eight week off rotation. When I am due to join a vessel I will fly out to wherever in Europe the ship is at that time.

### Did you always want to do this job?

I have always had a love for the sea. I was born and brought up in Dublin in an area close to the sea and now live on Sherkin Island. Even as a toddler my grandmother had me down on the beach nearly every day and I feel the sea is in my blood. After I finished my Junior Cert (Inter Cert as it was known then), I was only fifteen and wanted to work at sea but I was persuaded to complete my Leaving Certificate so more opportunities would be available to me.

### What training did you do for this job?

When I finished school there were few jobs in the shipping industry so I fell back on my second choice of

hotel management. I have always enjoyed dealing with people, food and catering. After a couple of years at that an opportunity came up to work on fishing trawlers. Then I joined the Merchant Navy and took a job as an Able Seaman/Deckhand on a cargo ship. After a short time I knew this was the career for me. I went back to college and studied for deck officer exams, which I passed first time, but even serving as Chief Mate was not enough for me so I went back to college again and studied for my Masters Certificate. With that I got a job as Captain on a cargo ship and have been in command of various ships since then.

### What is a day in your life like?

No day is ever the same in this job. I normally take the morning navigation watch on the bridge, making sure the ship proceeds safely towards the next port. In the afternoon I do paperwork and go back on the bridge in the evening for the evening navigation watch. On watch you have to deal with many other ships travelling in various directions, narrow channels, shallow areas of

water, various tidal effects and sometimes extreme weather. The task is anything but routine. I also have to manage the everyday running of the ship including maintenance, stores, food and water, hours of work for the crew to comply with regulations, safety drills etc. I may get called to the bridge at any time day or night to deal with emergency or other situations.

### What is the best thing about your job?

Travelling around the world and visiting different countries. When the sea is calm we often observe whales and dolphins at play or hunting shoals of fish. The other good thing is the amount of time off. Eight weeks is plenty of time to enjoy home life and carry out projects in one go. Most people only have weekends free with a couple of weeks annual holidays.

### What is the worst thing about your job?

The worst part of my job is dealing with the weather winter throws at us. Another thing is being away from family and friends for months at a time and missing out on social events.

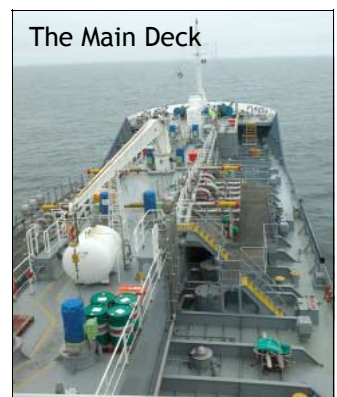
This has become a little easier to bear nowadays with computers and mobile phones. When I first went to sea we were lucky to receive a letter once a month and phone calls were only available when the vessel was in port.

### Do you enjoy your work?

I love working with people of all nationalities, spending time on the open sea and manoeuvring large ships in small areas safely. There is a huge sense of satisfaction at the end of the every day.

### What is best piece of advice you have ever had?

Work hard, always use your initiative and don't be afraid to ask for advice. Asking for advice is not a sign of weakness but a sign that you have the ability to gather information and use it for the best outcome based on the experiences of others.



The Main Deck



The Wheelhouse