

XVIII Trofeo Accademia Navale a Citta di Livorno – 28 April-01 May 2001

Naval Academies Regatta hosted by the Italian Naval Academy in Livorno, Italy

DAILY JOURNAL of team members Midn 1/c John Walsh, Peter Firenze, Chris Fisher, Cecily Taylor, Larry Williams and coach Nancy Haberland.

Day One: Arriving in Italy – Wednesday-Thursday 25-26 April

The flight to Italy was actually rather enjoyable, aside from the pocket of turbulence we encountered just northwest of Biscay. Every seat had its own TV screen with plenty of movie choices. It was a balmy 65 degrees in Rome when we arrived, though the temperature quickly rose into the eighties toward noon. We took the Peter Firenze three-hour whirlwind tour of Rome while Chris Fisher provided interesting commentary about the historical significance of the various Roman ruins. The Vatican, Forum, and Coliseum were all visited and photographed with haste. The bus ride was probably the most interesting part of the tour. We were packed in like sardines and Larry almost had his pocket picked by a band of midget gypsies.

The train ride to Livorno was beautiful; the Italian countryside very much resembles Northern California. We did not know where to sit on the train and there were no conductors to guide us to our seats, so we just found seats of our own. Little did we know that we were sitting in the first class car! The nice Italian lady who stopped by our car half way through the ride to check our tickets adamantly pointed out this fact to us.

We arrived in Livorno and were met by our Italian hosts John-Luc, John-Paul, and Fredericko. Lt. Pimental, U.S. Navy exchange officer, met us at the train station as well and took us all out for an excellent Italian dinner. After dinner we went back to our barracks accommodations at the Italiano Accademia Navale. We passed out quickly after being awake and on the road, so to speak for about forty hours straight.

Day Two: Practice and Orientation – Friday 27 April

We woke at 0730 and donned our SDBs for a formal presentation of all the academies to the superintendent of the Italian Naval Academy. There are 21 countries represented here; Japan, Finland, Sweden, UK, Libya, Turkey, Russia, Bulgaria, and Tunisia just to name a few. We're sharing a barracks, normally reserved for the Italian Plebes, with most of the other teams. Some of the sailors from countries like Libya are older men in their thirties and forties.

After the ceremony, we went down to the tiny yacht harbor to see our boat, a twenty-four foot one-design boat in the J-24 class provided by our hosts the Italian Naval Academy. We waited in line for half an hour to get our boat in the water, and then went out sailing with Coach Haberland. The boat is one of the better J-24s in the fleet; we had a good boat draw. The sails are in decent shape and the traveler is self-tacking, which makes Fish's job (Chris Fisher, the helmsman) easier through the tacks. The wind was pretty light in the morning but picked up around noon as we were heading in for lunch,

Speaking of lunch, the Italians here at the Academy do it right. Multiple courses of good Italian food, much better than the Italian food made by King Hall. They even serve wine and good bread with lunch.

In the evening, Frederico and John-Luc drove us all out to Pisa for dinner. We walked around town and saw the famous leaning tower. We all took cheesy tourist pictures of us holding up the tower. We found a great little café that made the most tantalizing waffles. Smothered with whipped cream and chocolate they melted in your mouth. Despite having our dessert first, our appetites were not lessened before dinner. Our Italian hosts introduced us to Italian Pizza. At this particular restaurant you have to order pizza by the meter, and the Italians will put anything on a pizza. There was eggplant, tuna, lettuce, and other surprises waiting for us. John-Paul challenged us to an international drinking contest, but considering that we were racing the next day we politely declined. We wandered around Pisa for a while after dinner before heading back to the Academy to hit the sack. After a hair raising drive back, we found out that Frederico races cars on the weekends, we went to bed to charge our drained batteries for the first day of racing on the morrow.

Day Three: First Day of Racing – Saturday 28 April

Today was the first day of racing. We had breakfast at 0730 and headed down to the boat after that. We left the harbor at 0845 for a start at 1100, only to find that there was no wind. We waited for the sea breeze that started around 1200. The wind picked up to a steady 6- 8 knots. The first start was an interesting experience. There were a total of 52 J-24's in the race and the starting line was not very long. The first start had an "I" flag posted in order to discourage people from being over early. The first race was a general recall as most of the fleet was over early anyways. It was an experience as most of the fleet was yelling in many different languages. The race committee posted a Black flag for the second start, which meant that if anyone was over from the one-minute gun till the start, they were disqualified. The second start was the same as the first with a general recall because most of the fleet was again over early. The race was finally started with the third start. We had a mediocre start but rounded the first mark in the top 20. It was a 6-leg course with a reach to the finish. The race was extremely interesting with all the different languages. Everyone was yelling "aqua" for "room" or just "HEY!" We started to realize that the rules were not as important in Italy as they are in the USA. We improved our position on most legs and finished the first race in 14th place.

The second race started immediately after the first as the wind picked up to 10 – 12 knots. Our start was a little worse than the first race and we rounded the first mark in the top 30. Again we improved our position and finished the race in 28th. The mark roundings were insane. There were 5- 10 boats coming into the mark, while everyone thought they had rights. There was mass confusion everywhere. We finished the day as the 5th Academy boat and 17th overall. This was reasonable for us since we were still adjusting to the culture and the slightly different type of racing.

Immediately after the racing we headed back to the Academy for the opening ceremonies of the regatta at 1730. That night we went to a local restaurant "The Barge". It was supposed to be like a British restaurant. There was no written menu; it was only

what the waiter told you. We ate dinner and headed back to the Academy for sleep after a long day.

Day Four: Second Day of Racing – Sunday 29 April

Today there were 3 races. As usual, the wind did not fill in until 12:30. We always had to wait for the sea breeze. On the first race, we had a bad start. We paid for this for the rest of the race finishing 28. As we were going upwind, we noticed why we were lapping the Lybians. The Lybians had their main trimmed for close hauled going downwind. We were concerned about our position coming up to the windward mark. Luckily, the British created a cluster around the mark taking out a number of boats.

On the next race, we were over early at the start at the pin end. With the “I” flag up we circled around the pin and took off on port crossing the majority of the fleet. This turned out to be the best start of the day. The race went well. We finished 17th.

By the third race we had an understanding that most of the Italian boats chose to ignore the rules. The most common rule ignored was the port/starboard rule. During this race the Russians offered to duck us even though we were on port. We finished this race in 28th place.

Due to a miscalculation we ran out of gas before entering the “Italian Santee Basin”. So we set our main and spin and sailed all the way into the basin. Then we doused our spin and practiced our Mediterranean docking.

As soon as we arrived on shore, our Italian escorts, John Paul, John Luke, and Fredericko were ready to take us out for the night. We ended up spending time with the Swedish team. At this point, we went over our observations on the water. There were two teams of Italian civilian women who most of the International crews had come in contact with...boat to boat contact that is. It appeared these women sailed by brail. The women who sailed “General Cargo” had a standard approach to the windward mark. They came in on port at the mark and stuck their bow in no matter what boat was there. Using the approach they continually hit the mark, did a 360 and kept going. The 360 was for hitting the mark, not the 2 or 3 boats they hit.

Day Five: Meeting Italian Women! – Monday 30 April

Andiamo Dove Il Viento Si Diece Andare- We go where the wind takes us!

Today we met the “General Cargo” Girls. As usual, the start was postponed till the sea breeze filled in. When the RC finally got everything ready, the pin end was favored by 10-15 degrees. Already relying on the faithful port approach we decided to act upon the virtues of King Neptune himself and use our annual port start. This actually turned out to be the right call cause as the starboard lanes were closed up at the start. We rounded the windward mark in 10th. That’s when all the fun started. We had just finished setting the chute on starboard tack when our eyes got the logo of “General Cargo” bearing down on us on port. Unfortunately, we had a boat right to leeward of us and our area of movement was limited. The Italian women finally sent a leeward look out, after the incessant screaming of the five American Mids. There was no time. The women slammed into our bow, after Midn Fisher made a valiant attempt to avoid the collision.

We did however notice the Italians doing a 360 after the collision...there is more of that to follow. ...This very same leg, the mime look-a-like Bulgarians brought back the mast abeam rule out of retirement (two rule books ago!). We jibed out... well cause they weren't worth the effort. You might think this is one exciting leg...but the fun doesn't stop here. We still had to take the chute down. Coming in on starboard jibe we were doing fine. However the Argentineans definitely wanted to change that. With about 5 boat lengths of NON-OVERLAP, midn Pete "Lungs" Firenze started yelling "NO AQUA." With only a nod of recognition, we thought the threat had ceased.

Unfortunately the Italian CDR's speech at the beginning of the day had no effect and the South Americans plowed their bow into our aft quarter. Luckily John "coerced" their boat into hitting the mark and we flushed them out the back along with the Bulgarians and representatives of other former Soviet satellite nations. We took an 18th in the race.

Now the fun really starts. During intermission...the stunned Italian women wanted to know why we were still protesting them. They kindly informed us that they had exonerated themselves by saying... "We do 360 for hitting you. Then we do 360 for hitting mark". We really didn't know they hit the mark. Pete kindly informed them they couldn't exonerate themselves after a collision with damage.

Day Six: No Wind – Tuesday 01 May

The last day of racing started like any other. There was no wind to start. By the schedule, the race committee was not permitted to start a race after 1300 so they were trying everything they could to squeeze one in. They waited for the sea breeze to fill in but it was just not coming. Finally after a few small chances to start a race, the race committee gave up, and we headed back for the closing ceremonies

The closing ceremonies were long and elaborate. We were informed that we finished 6th out of the Naval Academies and we decided that it was time to start packing. We had a fun time in Italy but we had a train to catch at 0330 in the morning. We went to a local Italian restaurant and headed back to the academy to gather our things to leave.

Day Seven: Heading Home – Wednesday 02 May

Well, it's good to be back in the States. After almost dying on a backwoods Italian highway and surviving near collisions with other boats, I feel that the trip was definitely worthwhile. It's right now 1600 in Philadelphia, but most of us are still feeling it as 2200 (Italian time). We get back to the Academy later tonight and will now have to tackle our exams and final projects which have been put off for a couple of days. I am tired of prosciutto, artichoke hearts, and stinky cheese.... ready to get back to good ole American greasy burgers and fries.