Sailing Under False Colors

LCDR R. C. Richards
Command Chaplain

I enjoy reading a good story. Several years ago, I found a series of books that I enjoyed. They revolved around the character, Richard Bolitho, an officer in the British Navy at the turn of the 18th Century. The stories were well written, while at the same time, giving the reader an idea of what life was like serving aboard sailing vessels two centuries ago.

There are some phrases from our naval heritage that have been lost to common usage that were occasionally described in the books. I regularly use some of them in my everyday conversation. In fact, when I used one, the person I was talking to had no idea of my meaning, even though he had served in the Navy nearly as long as I had. I told him my schedule was two-blocked. This referred to when blocks and tackle were used to hoist the sails and rigging aboard the ship. To say that it was "two-blocked" meant that the tackle had been pulled until the two blocks were jammed together. It would go no further. As for my schedule, it meant that my calendar was full with one event jammed against another.

Another interesting term is "sailing under false colors." In centuries past, when ships fought each other on the open seas, when one ship chose to surrender rather than be lost with all hands, they struck their colors, or national ensign. They were then captured by the other ship and a prize crew placed aboard. It was not uncommon for ships of one Navy to be captured by their opponent and later be used against them. In fact, many times a ship could be recognized by her lines and look, but would be flying the colors of another country. This indicated the vessel had been captured.

Sometimes, as an act of deception, the Captain of a ship would fly the flag of another nation in hopes of getting close enough to an enemy vessel to be able to inflict damage upon them. As they drew close, hopefully the enemy has his guard down. At the last moment, the false colors were lowered and a ship would "show it's true colors" before opening fire.

I have sometimes flown false colors, so to speak. Some of my shirts have an eagle, globe and anchor embroidered on them. I wear this, not to claim to be a Marine, but because I gladly serve with my Marines. Sometimes, people will see the shirt and ask me if I am a Marine and I am very careful to choose my words. I do not claim a title I have not earned, but will either reply that I am a Navy Chaplain serving with Marines, but will usually say that I serve with the Marines.

The Bible teaches us that many people who attend church are actually "sailing under false colors." They call themselves Christian, Baptist, religious or any other variety of terms, but there behavior does not reflect the teachings of what they profess. Instead, by their behavior, they show their true colors. The Bible says you will know them by their fruits – how they live, how they treat others, the condition of their heart -- their true colors.

Do your actions reflect what you profess to be?

Semper Fi in the Lord and I hope to see you in Church on Sunday.