

## **Eight Bells for CDR, George C. Knies (USN Ret)**

***Eight Bells is the traditional way of saying that a sailor's watch is over***

### ***The History of Eight Bells***

**The sounding of a ship's bells is well rooted in the history and tradition of the maritime industry.**



Onboard timekeeping has been an integral part of shipboard life since the earliest days of long distance navigation.

Sometime during the 1500s, shipboard crews saw their duty periods organized into four hour watches. This split the crews into two groups, one on duty and the other free to rest. Since navigation placed an emphasis on timekeeping, a signal bell would be sounded aboard every thirty minutes. This period reflects the common use of a double-bubble sand half hour watch glass to track shipboard time. After 1915, US merchant ships' crews were divided into three watches, working four hours on and having eight hours off to allow for rest. Two, half –watches, called Dog Watches (from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.) were combined into a single evening watch.

That watch, was split into two parts to allow taking of an evening meal. The resulting number of uneven watches insured both crews shared the graveyard shift of 0000-0400 (midnight to four a.m.) equally.



There is a poem written by **Henry Van Dyke** that I would like to read. It is entitled, *Gone From My Sight*

*"I am standing upon the seashore.  
A ship at my side spreads her white  
sails to the morning breeze and starts  
for the blue ocean.*

*She is an object of beauty and strength.  
I stand and watch her until at length  
she hangs like a speck of white cloud  
just where the sea and sky come  
to mingle with each other.  
Then, someone at my side says;  
"There, she is gone!"*

*"Gone where?"  
Gone from my sight. That is all.  
She is just as large in mast and hull  
and spar as she was when she left my side  
and she is just as able to bear her  
load of living freight to her destined port.  
Her diminished size is in me, not in her.*

*And just at the moment when someone  
at my side says, "There, she is gone!"  
There are other eyes watching her coming,  
and other voices ready to take up the glad  
shout;  
"Here she comes!"."*

George wanted us to know, on the passing of friends and loved ones, that, "You must hold fast to the people you love by gently letting them go." Although it will be hard for us who remain, it is now time to do as he has asked us to do in the past.

As a club whose roots are solidly planted with the US Navy and as a Branch Member of the US Naval Sailing Association it is fitting that we close with words from the "Navy Hymn"

The "Navy Hymn" is *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*. The original words were written as a poem in 1860 by [William Whiting](#) of Winchester, England, for a student who was about to sail for the United States. The melody, published in 1861, was composed by fellow Englishman, [Rev. John Bacchus Dykes](#), an Episcopalian clergyman.

*Eternal Father* was the favorite hymn of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and was sung at his funeral in Hyde Park, New York, in April 1945. It was also played by the Navy Band in 1963 as President John F. Kennedy's body was carried up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to lie in state. Roosevelt had served as Secretary of the Navy and Kennedy was a PT boat commander in World War II.

The original words from Verse 1 are:

Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep;  
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,  
For those in peril on the sea!

There have been alternate verses some of which are quite appropriate for a Naval Aviator and Coast Guard Auxiliarist which I would like to share with you on this occasion:

- For the Naval Aviator -

Lord, guard and guide the men who fly  
Through the great spaces in the sky.  
Be with them always in the air,  
In darkening storms or sunlight fair;  
Oh, hear us when we lift our prayer,  
For those in peril in the air!

Mary C. D. Hamilton (1915)

Oh, Watchful Father who dost keep  
Eternal vigil while we sleep  
Guide those who navigate on high  
Who through grave unknown perils fly,  
Receive our oft-repeated prayer  
For those in peril in the air.

Emma Mayhew Whiting (1943)

- For the Coast Guard Auxiliarist -

Eternal Father, Lord of hosts,  
Watch o'er the men who guard our coasts.  
Protect them from the raging seas  
And give them light and life and peace.  
Grant them from thy great throne above  
The shield and shelter of thy love.

Author unknown

- As a Final Hymn Verse -

And when at length [his] course is run,  
[His] work for home and country done,  
Of all the souls that [with him] sailed  
Let not one life in thee have failed;  
But hear from heaven our sailor's cry,  
And grant eternal life on high!

Author/date Unknown

Then, at the end of the last shift, the end of the last watch,  
eight bells rang out



**[SOUND EIGHT BELLS]**

< PAUSE >

Eight bells and all is well.

< PAUSE >

May our friend George Knies rest in peace.

Please join us outside for the lowering of George's Flags. and a  
three-volley cannon salute.

[http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav\\_legacy.asp?id=172](http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=172)

(Information from *The Presbyterian Hymnal Companion*  
by LindaJo H. McKim, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Ky. 1993)

**The hymn, found in most hymnals, is known as the "Navy hymn"** because it is sung at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. It is also sung on ships of the Royal Navy (U.K.).

**William Whiting** (1825-1878) was born in Kensington, England, and educated at Chapham and Winchester. Because of his musical ability, he became master of Winchester College Choristers' School. While best known for *Eternal Father*, Whiting also published two poetry collections: *Rural Thoughts* (1851) and *Edgar Thorpe, or the Warfare of Life* (1867). He died at Winchester.

**John Bacchus Dykes** (1823-1876) was born in Hull, England, and by age 10 was the assistant organist at St. John's Church, Hull, where his grandfather was vicar. He studied at Wakefield and St. Catherine's College, earning a B.A. in Classics in 1847. He cofounded the Cambridge University Musical Society. He was ordained as curate of Malton in 1847. For a short time, he was canon of Durham Cathedral, then precentor (1849-1862). In 1862 he became vicar of St. Oswald's, Durham. He published sermons and articles on religion but is best known for over 300 hymn tunes he composed. He died in Sussex at age 53.