

Roseate Views on a Dusty Ship

BY THOMAS PLETSCHE

Wind picked up strongly and the wave crests became foamy on the afternoon of February 27, 1995. The *JOIDES Resolution* steamed at full speed up the West African coast, heading northward for the Canary Islands. We had just finished operations on Ocean Drilling Program (ODP) Leg 159, the first drilling campaign devoted to a unique continental margin in the Gulf of Guinea. With fascinating science and intense work, this cruise was both a stimulating and challenging experience for a novice like me.

The cool winds were refreshing after seven weeks in calm equatorial waters. Many of us relaxed on deck, gazing at the curly sea. At night, we spent hours leaning over the railing, watching the dolphins play in the bow wash, all glowing from luminescent algae that seemed to be even more excited from the ship's motion than we were.

No one was idle, though. The science party continued to be busy with various analytical tasks, while the ship's crew kept busy with cleaning or maintenance. The ship's hands had spent days tidying the decks, stripping off old paint and refurbishing the entire freeboard. The vessel's blue hull now matched the blazing red decks and radiant white bulwarks.

The galley was crowded by 5 p.m. that evening. Night-shifters who were trying to readjust to their onshore schedules joined us for dinner. Others just wanted to have a meal before the sea got too rough.

By the time we returned on deck, the wind had picked up to storm strength, with 50-knot sustained winds. Rain immediately drenched us and the ship rolled strongly—this was not the moment to linger for conversation at the bow. Dusk had fallen, and most

of those not on duty retired to their berths. I could not sleep, so I strolled through the parts of the ship that were not within the reach of the waves. Eventually, I entered the bridge, all dark and silent.

Garry, the mate on watch, told me we were off Nouadhibou, Mauritania, where storms are common at this time of year. Garry was concerned that we were only making 7 knots and that this could compromise our schedule. His concern reassured me that the ship was in good hands, so I returned to my berth and went to sleep.

We met out on the deck after dawn. The sun burst through dark clouds and placed pink traces on the waves. The wind had slowed to a breeze and the swells were no longer breaking over the deck. The *JOIDES Resolution* had easily outlasted the ordeal that made us especially appreciate this new morning. Something was different, though. As I looked around, I realized that the vessel's sides, so carefully painted, now gleamed roseate—but not from for the early morning sun. The ship was now covered with dust, blown in from the Sahara desert and washed out by the rainstorm. We took samples of the Saharan dust on the upper decks. It felt great to be out here at sea studying dust deposition and experiencing this process first hand. I keep a vial of red dust on my desk. It reminds me that I had the chance to directly feel the fascinating processes that shape our planet. It also inspired me for my three ODP missions to come.

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