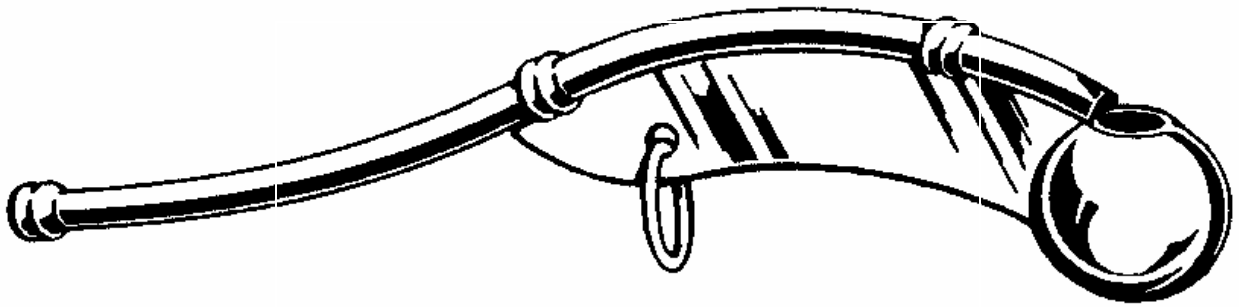




# **The Boatswains Call Handbook**



***ASCR T14***

***THE BOATSWAINS CALL***



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Piping is a naval method of passing Orders and information, and every Sea Cadet should know how to use a '**Boatswain's Call**' (**the Call**) and how to pipe an order. Verbal Orders passed are known as '**Pipes**'. The expression '**to pipe**' means to make the sound of the boatswain's call and to give the spoken order which may qualify it. Some pipes are orders in themselves and do not require any verbal addition.

## 2. THE HISTORY

The use of the Boatswains Call in English ships can be traced back with certainty to the days of the Crusades, AD 1248. In former days it was worn in English ships as an honoured badge of rank, probably because it had always been used for passing orders. As long ago as 1485 it was worn as the badge of the Lord High Admiral of England and was worn by his successor in office up to 1562. In those days it was known as a whistle and was worn on a silver chain. Thereafter it was used throughout the English fleets for passing Orders, and since 1671 it has always been known as the Boatswain's Call.

The sizes and designs of call has varied considerably; some were short and fat and others long and thin and often they had intricate designs on the metal work. They were usually silver up to the time of the last world war, sailors had the names of their ships engraved on them too. The silver call has a much clearer, shriller note than modern massed produced ones.

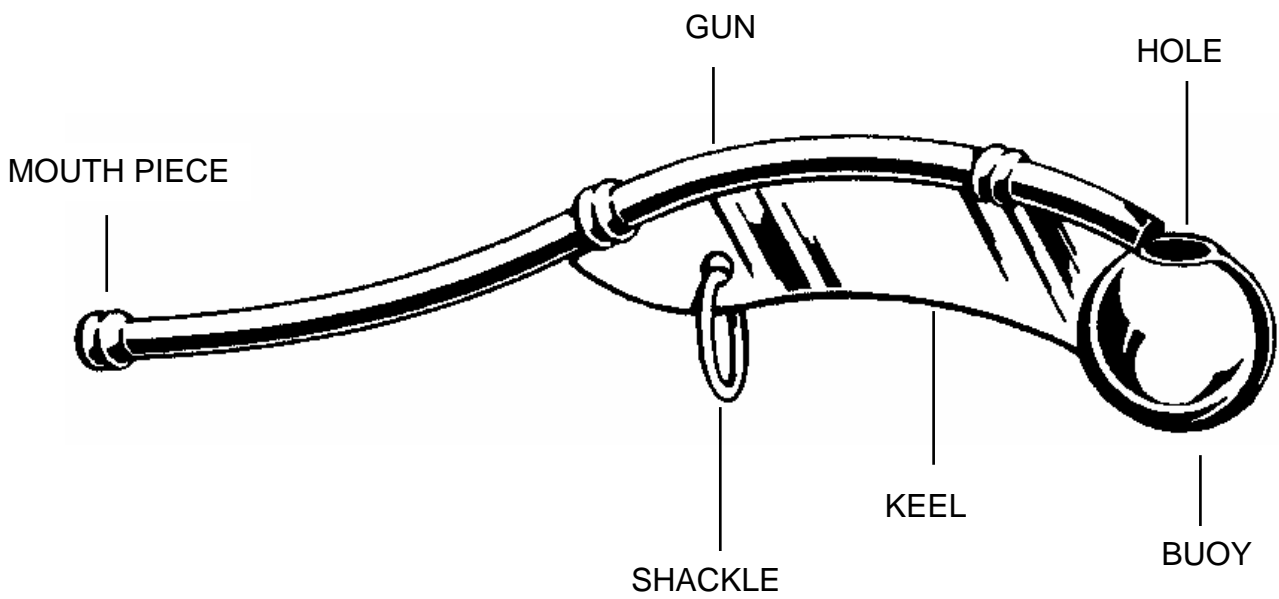
Nowadays the "**Boatswain's Call and Chain**" is the badge of office of "The Chief Boatswains Mate, Quartermaster and Boatswains Mates". In the Sea Cadet Corps, the office holder would be the "Quartermaster" and the "Boatswains Mate".

## 3. THE BOATSWAINS CALL AND CHAIN

Cadets who are awarded the Boatswains Call Proficiency may wear **The Boatswain's Call and Chain** in Full Blue uniform, when **NOT** on duty, **with the Commanding Officer's permission**. The Boatswain's Call and Chain is not to be worn by cadets attending National Courses or Camps, or parading with cadets from other Units. The Boatswain's Call and Chain should be worn by Piping and Side parties. It may also be worn by Quartermasters, Boatswain's Mate and Gangway Sentries at the discretion of the Commanding Officer. The Call should be worn on the end of a chain at all times. The chain is worn round the neck, (under the collar) replacing the lanyard. The call is tucked into the inside uniform pocket where applicable, if there is no pocket the mouth piece should be tucked in behind the bow.

Cadets in No4s should wear the call with the chain around their neck and in the left breast pocket when not wearing a jumper.

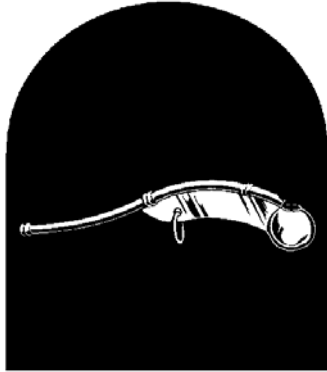
The Boatswains Call should only be worn whilst in accordance with their duty i.e. Side Party, Quartermaster or Bo'suns Mate. While under instruction and training, the calls should be stowed away on completion of each period and not worn around the unit to save confusion with those that are duty.



**The Boatswains Call should never be used or worn without a chain**



#### 4. THE BOATSWAIN'S CALL BASIC CERTIFICATE



1. The Boatswains Call Basic Certificate may be instructed by any instructor who the Commanding Officer considers Knowledgeable.
2. Assessment will be carried out by a Piping Instructor or above.
3. The Commanding Officer will present the basic badge and award 1 points after the "Boatswain's Call Basic Certificate" has been signed by the assessor.
4. The Boatswain's Call Basic assessment will include:
  - a. Naming the parts of the Boatswain's Call.
  - b. Brief history of the Boatswain's Call.
  - c. Correct Stowage and Carrying of the Boatswains Call.
  - d. Demonstrate to the assessor the following notes and pipes:
    - (1) Notes:
      - (a) Plain, high and low.
    - (2) Pipes:
      - (a) Still.
      - (b) Carry On.
      - (c) Pipe the Side (and an understanding of its origin).
      - (d) Hail.
      - (e) General Call (including an audible verbal Order).



## 5. THE BOATSWAIN'S CALL PROFICIENCY CERTIFICATE



1. The Boatswains Call Proficiency Certificate may be instructed by any instructor who the Commanding Officer considers knowledgeable.
2. Assessment must be carried out by an approved Piping Instructor or above.
3. The Commanding Officer will present the proficiency badge and award 2 points after the "Boatswain's Call Proficiency Certificate" has been signed by the assessor.
4. The Boatswain's Call Proficiency assessment will include:
  - a. Revision of Boatswain's Call Basic Certificate.
  - b. Cadet Demonstrates the ability to take charge of a Piping/Side Party.
  - c. Demonstrate to the assessor the following notes and pipes:
    - (1) Notes:
      - (a) Trill, high and low.
      - (b) Warble.
    - (2) Pipes:
      - (a) Lash up and Stow (including an audible verbal order).
      - (b) Dinner Call.
      - (c) Pipe Down.



## 6. THE POSITION OF ATTENTION

When making a pipe, the piper will stand to attention, pipe at the ready in the right hand, the left hand at the side of the body. No salutes are ever given by the individual Piper or Piping Party.

## 7. TIMING

Whilst it is important to maintain the correct timing of the pipe, particularly when piping as a team or as a piping party, it is recognised that in some cases breathing control and lung capacity in the smaller cadets cannot be maintained. It is important however, that the correct sequence and spacing between the notes of the pipe are accurate and the sound clear and distinctive.

## 8. TUNING THE BOATSWAIN'S CALL

A Boatswain's Call can be tuned by scraping away and enlarging the wind edge of the hole on the buoy, until the note sounds sharp and clear. This can be achieved with a fine grade emery cloth. A shriller note can be achieved by closing the top of the lip of the hole a little, on the buoy. **CARE MUST BE TAKEN WHEN TUNING A CALL** and should **NOT** be attempted without supervision.

## 9. CLEANING THE BOATSWAIN'S CALL

A boatswains call will not play properly if it is not clean, this can be done with warm soapy water and a pipe cleaner to clean the gun and a cotton bud to clean out the buoy. **Never use sterilising agents**, and where possible never share the call, if you have to, then clean between users.

## 10. TRAINING ENVIRONMENT

For health and safety reasons all training should take place in the largest open space available i.e. the main deck, the instructor should be at least ten feet or three metres away from the pipers at all times. The training period actually playing the call should last no longer than ten minutes then take the same time fault finding and correcting the cadets before returning to playing the call again. Remember it is the instructor that is most at risk. Never be tempted to train in a small room.

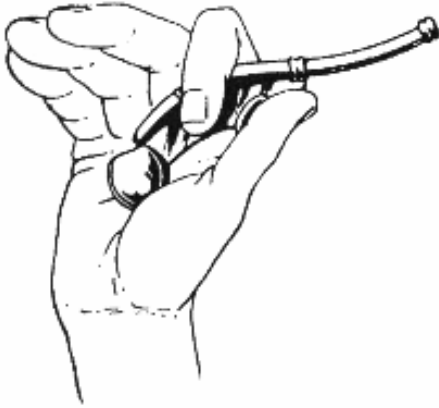
Do not teach the actual playing of the call while the cadet is sitting down and always warm up the call and do some simple breathing exercises before you start.

## 11. HOLDING THE BOATSWAIN'S CALL

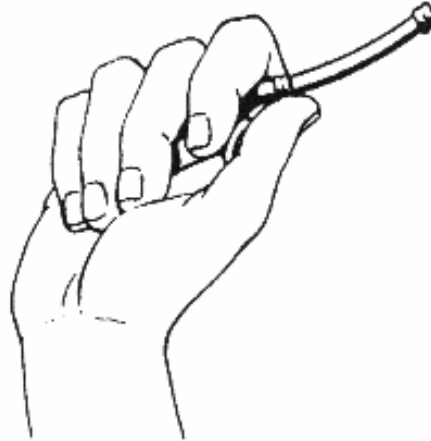
The Boatswain's Call is held in the right hand between the index finger and the thumb. The buoy lies in the hollow of the right hand, the keel braced against the fleshy pad of the thumb with the hole of the buoy looking upwards. The thumb should press upwards against the keel, usually just by the shackle, but not wedged in the shackle, the index finger crooked over the top of the gun. The other three fingers are used to create the notes by closing and opening the airway of the hole of the gun over the hole of the buoy.



*Diagram 1*



*Diagram 2*



## **12. BEFORE YOU START TO BLOW**

The Boatswains Call is held securely and firmly between the thumb and index finger of the right hand. Diagram 1 shows how to make a low note. To make a high note the other three fingers should be bent curling over but not blocking the hole as shown in Diagram 2. You will only know when you have got it right when you start blowing the call.

## **13. HOW TO MAKE THE VARIOUS NOTES ON THE CALL**

To make the high and low notes you need to control the breathing as much as the curling of the fingers. To produce a high note you must squeeze the air out as a tight steady stream whilst the fingers are curled down over the buoy (diagram 2), you also have to blow harder to produce a high note. To produce a low note the air must be gently and relaxingly blown out with your three fingers in the raised position (diagram 1).

A good way of describing this is by drawing bubbles, a lot of small bubbles to represent the high note and a few very big bubbles for the low note.

Some calls require a sharp finish, this can be achieved by putting your tongue over the end of the mouth piece. This practice should not be used for natural breaks in calls (where a breath is taken) as the result will be a popping sound at each break.



**14. THE TRILL AND THE WARBLE**

a. **The TRILL** – To obtain a Trill, put your tongue to the front of your mouth, the tip curled up behind the teeth and “role your R’s”. Try it without a Call. With the Call at the ready, at the same time as you blow into the Call, “roll your R’s”, the result will be a **TRILL**.

b. **The WARBLE** – The Warble is produced by flicking the tongue slowly up and down or from side to side over the mouthpiece. Not too slowly though and not as fast as you roll your R’s, with practice this results in a warble similar to that of a canary. It can also be achieved by a jerky blowing action into the mouth piece. The results in both cases will be a **WARBLE**.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Before you continue to learn the various pipes, it is important to master all these exercises. These are the basic sounds necessary to play a Boatswain’s Call. Good piping is achieved by good posture, good breathing and a good sense of timing.

**15. THE PIPES**

**The “Still”**

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

HIGH



LOW

Fingers closed over the hole, blow as hard as you can for eight seconds, the whole note must be on the same high note and stop blowing abruptly at the end of the eight seconds. The note must be the highest you can get, a high pitched piercing note.

**Reason for the pipe** - The “Still” is used to call all hands to attention as a mark of respect, to order silence, to give an instruction. It is **ALWAYS** followed, after an interval, by the “Carry On”.

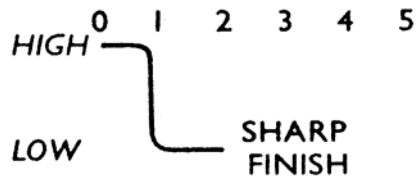
**NOTES:** Four occasions which the “Still” is or might be used.

1. Can be used in the vicinity of work to avert an accident.
2. At Colours and Evening Colours before the Ensign is hoisted and lowered.
3. As a mark of respect on the arrival or departure of a visitor who it is wished to honour but is not entitled to be piped over the side.
4. When it is necessary to give detailed Orders which requires absolute quiet.





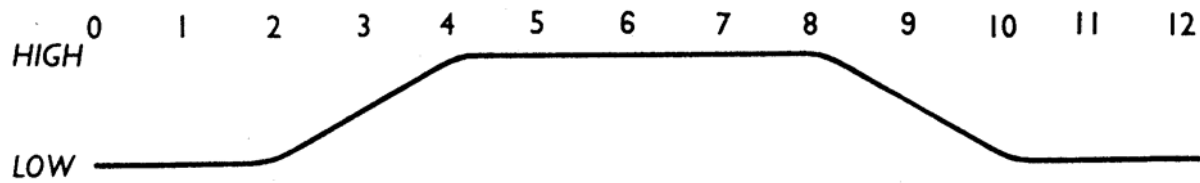
### The "Carry On"



Blow the high note for one second then drop to the low note for one second and finish abruptly. Do not let it trail away.

**Reason for the pipe** The "Carry On" is used in conjunction with the still and may follow a verbal order.

### "Piping the Side"

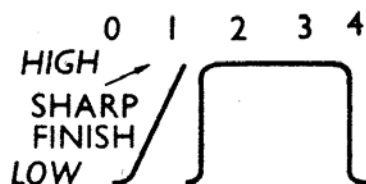


Start low and work up to the high note gradually, continue the high note for four seconds and gradually return to the low note.

**Reason for the pipe** – In years gone by, when gangways were much more cumbersome and "wooden" ships' decks were high above the water-line, the only method of coming aboard when the ship was not alongside, was to climb ropes or a rope ladder. This was not considered suitable for Captains and Senior Officers, many of whom were portly and generally unfit. It was therefore necessary to hoist these personages in-board into a boat or a special chair. The first call gave the order for the lowering of the chair over the side so that the Senior Officer was not kept waiting but could get into the chair immediately the boat was alongside. The second call was given to hoist the chair. Orders were passed to the seamen manning the falls (ropes for hoisting or lowering the chair) by the "Boatswain" on his Call. The low note indicated to the men on the falls that they were to hoist or lower away slowly and carefully, (until the chair was well clear of obstructions) and the high note told them to work faster. Nowadays, ships carry gangways which can easily be rigged, so the need to hoist has ceased but the custom of piping still remains.



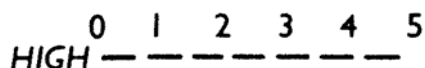
**The “General Call” or “General Orders”**



Start Low and work quickly up to the highest note, then break off abruptly, which will take a second, again start at the Low note, work up quickly to the high note which should be continued for two seconds, then come down quickly to the low note and finish abruptly.

**Reason for the pipe** - This pipe will require a verbal order. This is known as “passing the pipe”, literally the word pipe refers to the spoken word. This pipe is NOT followed by the Carry On.

**“The Hail”**

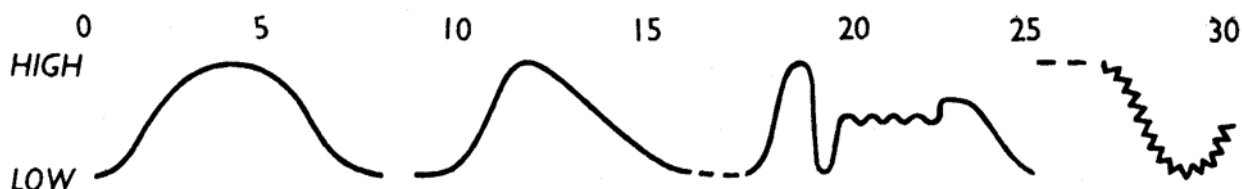


LOW

Sound between five and seven short sharp high notes, or until the pipe is acknowledged.

**Reason for the pipe** – Used in Sea Cadet units to call the Boatswain’s Mate, it may be used to attract the attention of a particular person in an unobtrusive manner, for example the coxswain of a boat, other members of the gangway staff or to call the Officer of the Day (OOD).

**The “Dinner Call”**

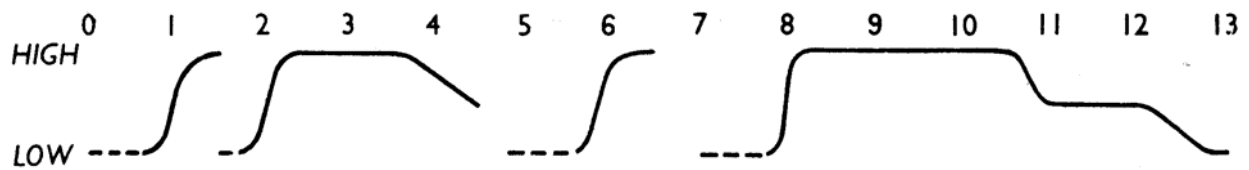


This pipe is for the experts. It is long and requires plenty of practice and breathing control if it is to be piped well.



**Reason for the pipe** - The pipe is sounded for Officers Dinner. It is NOT Followed by a verbal pipe. For the lower deck, for breakfast, tea and supper times, the “**General Call**” will be piped followed by a verbal pipe such as “**Hands to Breakfast, Tea or Supper**”.

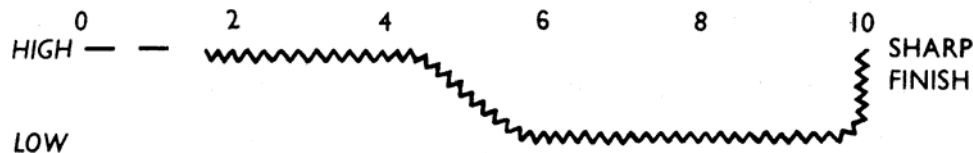
**The “Stow” or “Special Call”**



This pipe is also for the experts. It is long and requires plenty of practise and breathing control if it is to be piped well.

**Reason for the pipe** – Precedes the “Calling of the Hands” and is followed by the order “Heave Ho, Heave Ho, Lash up and stow, All Hands turn out”.

**“Pipe Down”**



Although the two notes before the long trill are only short notes, they should be sounded with great emphasis to attract attention to the rest of the pipe.

**16. PERSONAGES ENTITLED TO BE PIPED OVER THE SIDE**

- a. **Her Majesty the Queen**
- b. **The following when in Royal Navy or Royal Marines Uniform:**
  - Members of the Royal Family
  - Royal Navy Officers of Flag Rank
  - Royal Navy Officer in Command of HM Ships and Shore Establishments
  - Foreign Naval Officers



The President of the Sea Cadet Association

The Commodore of the Sea Cadet Corps (CSC)

The Director of Training Policy & Plans (DoP)

The Area Officer (AO) (or Deputy Area Officer (DAO) )

Staff Royal Marines Officer (SRMO) (as an Inspecting Officer)

c. **Sea Cadet Officers when in uniform:**

District officers (DO) (or Assistant District Officers (ADO) when representing the District Officer)

Commanding Officers (when arriving and leaving their own Unit or when calling on another Unit at pre-arranged times)

## 17. OCCASIONS AND METHOD OF PIPING THE SIDE

a. **Afloat** – The pipe is sounded twice as follows:

(1) **First Pipe**

As the bow oar is brought inboard or as the boat comes alongside. In either case the pipe should have ended by the time there is no “way” on the boat. Do not wait until the boat is actually alongside.

(2) **Second Pipe**

As the personage ascends the accommodation ladder, the pipe should end the moment the person being piped aboard steps onto the deck.

**NOTE:** Piping the Side is NOT used in Naval Establishments, except on very rare occasions. Sea Cadet Units however, continue with the tradition.

b. **Ashore (in Units)** – The pipe is sounded twice and depending on the method of arrival of the personage, should be piped as follows:

(1) **First Pipe**

(a) If by car – as it draws alongside the Unit and comes to a stand still.

(b) If on foot – as the personage draws near to the Unit , normally at a pre-determined point adjacent of the building.



(2) **Second Pipe**

As the personage approaches the gangway of the Unit. The last part of the pipe should coincide with the personage over the gangway (i.e. unit entrance).

c. **Positioning of the Piping Party** - The Piping Party should be stationed so that they are side by side at right angles to the gangway with the senior Piper nearest the gangway, in order to allow him/her to see the personage arriving and time the piping correctly. They may stand on either side of the gangway, whichever is the better angle of the senior Piper to see the arrival of the personage.

All movements and piping should be carried out in unison. When passing the boatswains call from left to right hand or right to left hand, the order "Transfer Calls" is used, the call is then passed across the front of the body changing hands in front of the bow of the uniform, the arms are not stretched out but kept in close to the body to do this.

d. **Going Ashore** - The procedure is reversed.

18. **TIPS FOR PIPING TEAMS IN COMPETITIONS**

Once they have marched on dressed and reported there should be no more verbal orders unless the call that they are making requires one. All timings can easily be taken from a simple nod of the head or hand movement by the lead cadet to ensure unison when making the call. Tuning the calls (see page six) so that they all sound the same will result in better clarity.

Good overall timing does not necessarily mean good precision; this is achieved by making breaks where they should be made i.e. the last part of the Dinner Call should start on the 25th second of the 30 seconds that it should last. (See Timings page 10). All of the team should have good bearing and be smart at all times. If you are not sure about something ask before the competition starts

19. **DEFINITIONS**

**Piping Instructor**:- Someone who has been assessed by a piping examiner or assessor, they may teach and assess cadets only, for both basic and proficiency badges. Preferably not teaching and examining the same cadets.

**Piping Assessor**:- Teach where necessary and assess adult instructors and cadets. They are selected by the piping examiner, usually ASO (piping). It is recommended that there are a limited number of assessors in each area to keep control of the standards. One per district is more than ample.

**Piping Examiner**:- To train the assessors, where required, to a standard needed to progress the subject into the future without losing traditions on the way. To assess adults and cadets at all levels if required.

