



Nautical Slang That Stuck

From Pooped To Scuttlebutt

Sailing Was the Internet Before the Internet

For centuries, sailors were the only link between distant worlds. They carried goods, news, songs, and language across oceans.

Their salty slang was colorful, crude, and wildly expressive—so it stuck.

When they came to port, they didn't just unload cargo—they uploaded culture.

And somehow, their phrases sailed right into our everyday speech... and never left.



Three Sheets to the Wind



Sheets are ropes that control the sails. On old sailing ships, if three were loose, the ship lost control—veering and flailing in the wind.

Translation: not just tipsy—totally directionless.

Modern equivalent? Slurring through a toast and texting your ex from the coat check

Pooped

The poop deck was the high perch at the back of the ship where officers steered and watched the sea.

When a rogue wave slammed over the stern, it could soak the crew, flood the deck, and even knock sailors clean off their feet.

To be pooped meant you were hit hard, drenched, and momentarily useless.

Now? It means you need a nap and a formal apology from your to-do list.

Scuttlebutt

Every ship had a scuttlebutt—a barrel of drinking water with a hole (a "scuttle") cut in it.

Thirsty sailors gathered round, passed the ladle... and spilled the tea.

It became the ship's unofficial gossip HQ—where hydration met hearsay.

Today? Still the place for juicy updates—only now it's Slack threads and hallway whispers.

Son of a Gun

Warships weren't supposed to have women aboard—but reality said otherwise.

Lovers, laundresses, and rule-breakers sometimes snuck on.

And when a baby was born at sea, it happened between the cannons on the gun deck—the only space with room to lie down.

No known father? The log read: "son of a gun."

Translation: born of chaos, cannon smoke, and questionable decisions..

Flogging a Dead Horse

Sailors were often paid one month's wages in advance. So during that first month at sea, they were technically working off a debt, earning money they'd already spent.

They called that first month "working off the dead horse."

When the month was finally over, they held an actual ceremony: they'd build a fake horse out of junk, drag it across the deck, and then flog it before tossing it overboard.

Meaning now: Doing something pointless, hopeless, or long past saving.

