STANDARD HELM COMMANDS

(Excerpts with modifications from http://www.boatswainsmate.net)

The following are some Standard Helm Commands.

The helmsman repeats each command back to the coxswain before executing the command. This is done to ensure that the helmsman fully understands the command. If the helmsman didn’t hear or understand the command, s/he shall call out, “Command?”.

The coxswain will repeat the given command. Upon repeating the command the helmsman shall execute the given command. After executing the command the helmsman shall advise the coxswain that the command was executed. The coxswain shall then respond with “Aye”.

All of the commands listed below will follow the procedure described above. Only the first command gives an example of the complete procedure. For the remaining commands only the command and execution will be described.

COXSWAIN’S COMMAND: “Come right (left) to ______.” (degrees stated in three single digits)
HELMSMAN’S RESPONSE: “Come right (left) to _____, aye aye.” (stated in three single digits)
EXECUTION: Put over the rudder right (left) and steady up on the specified course. Use the magnetic compass to complete this command.
HELMSMAN’S RESPONSE (after completion): “Steady on course ___”. (stated in three single digits)
COXSWAIN’S RESPONSE: “Aye”.

COMMAND: “Right (left) five (ten, etc.) degrees rudder.”
EXECUTION: Turn the wheel to the right (left) until the rudder is placed at the number of degrees ordered. Use the rudder angle indicator when executing this command.

COMMAND: “Hard right (left) rudder.”
EXECUTION: Fully turn the wheel to the right (left). This is normally about 35 degrees. (Puts the rudder over to the right (left) to the maximum number of degrees allowed for the vessel. This command is used only in emergency situations such as to avoid collision.)

COMMAND: “Rudder amidships.”
EXECUTION: Put the rudder on the zero (0) degree mark of the rudder angle indicator.

COMMAND: “Steady” or “Steady as you go”.
EXECUTION: Steer the course on which the boat is heading when the command is received. If the boat is swinging to the right (left) when the command is given, the heading must be noted, and the vessel brought back to that course.

COMMAND: “Mark your head”.
EXECUTION: Sound off to the coxswain the boat’s heading at the time the command was given. The heading number is read from the compass card at the lubber’s line. For example, “Mark ___ degrees” (stated in three digits).

COMMAND: “Mind your helm.”
EXECUTION: A warning that the boat is swinging off the course because of bad steering. It is also a command to steer exactly, using less rudder.
DEFINITIONS OF RESPONSES

HELMSMAN’S RESPONSE: “Aye aye.”
DEFINITION: This response means the order was understood and the helmsman will complete the action required to carry out (complete) the order. “Aye aye” is sounded off by the helmsman after repeating each and every command from the coxswain. This informs the coxswain that the helmsman fully understood the command and will carry it out.

HELMSMAN’S RESPONSE: “Command?”
DEFINITION Given by the helmsman when the command from the coxswain is unclear or misunderstood. Also, when the helmsman believes an improper command was given. For example, the coxswain orders left ten degrees rudder when a vessel is fifty yards off your boat’s port bow.

COXSWAIN’S RESPONSE: “Aye.”
DEFINITION Given after a report by the helmsman to let the helmsman know the coxswain understands the report.