



Marine Watch System & Ships Bells

Watchstanding, or watchkeeping, in nautical terms concerns the division of qualified personnel to operate a ship continuously around the clock. On a typical sea going vessel, be it naval or merchant, personnel keep watch on the bridge and over the running machinery.

Traditional Watch System

The watches kept on sailing ships—the square-rigged barques or windjammers of the late 19th century consisted of 5 four-hour periods and 2 two-hour periods. Those members of the crew whose work must be done at all times of the day were assigned to one of two divisions: the Starboard or the Port division. These two groups of personnel alternated in working the following watches:

Name	Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
First watch	2000-0000	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1
Middle watch	0000-0400	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2
Morning watch	0400-0800	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1
Forenoon watch	0800-1200	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2
Afternoon watch	1200-1600	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1
First dog watch	1600-1800	Team 2	Team 1	Team 2
Last dog watch	1800-2000	Team 1	Team 2	Team 1

This pattern allowed the two watches, known as the 'port' and 'starboard' watches, to alternate from day to day, so that the port watch had the night watch one night and the starboard watch had it the next night.

Watches and ship's bells

Ship's bells are a system to indicate the hour by means of bells, used aboard a ship to regulate the sailors' duty watches. There are eight bells, one for each half-hour of a four-hour watch. Bells would be struck every half-hour, and in a pattern of pairs for easier counting, with any odd bells at the end of the sequence.

Traditional System

Number of bells	Bell Pattern	Middle watch	Morning watch	Forenoon watch	Afternoon watch	First dog watch	Last dog watch	First watch
One bell	.	00:30	04:30	08:30	12:30	16:30	18:30	20:30
Two bells	..	01:00	05:00	09:00	13:00	17:00	19:00	21:00
Three bells	...	01:30	05:30	09:30	13:30	17:30	19:30	21:30
Four bells	02:00	06:00	10:00	14:00	18:00		22:00
Five bells	02:30	06:30	10:30	14:30			22:30
Six bells	03:00	07:00	11:00	15:00			23:00
Seven bells	03:30	07:30	11:30	15:30			23:30
Eight bells	04:00	08:00	12:00	16:00		20:00	00:00

Most of the crew of a ship would be divided up into between two and four groups called watches. Each watch would take its turn with the essential activities of manning the helm, navigating, trimming sails, and keeping a lookout.

The hours between 16:00 and 20:00 are so arranged because the "dog watch", is divided into two. The odd number of watches aimed to give each sailor a different watch each day. It also allows the entire crew of a vessel to eat an evening meal, the normal time being at 1700 with First Dog watchmen eating at 1800.

Some "ship's bell" use a simpler system of six watches as below in the table.

Simple System

Number of bells	Bell Pattern	First watch	Second watch	Third watch	Fourth watch	Fifth watch	Sixth watch
One bell	.	12:30	04:30	08:30	12:30	16:30	20:30
Two bells	..	01:00	05:00	09:00	13:00	17:00	21:00
Three bells	...	01:30	05:30	09:30	13:30	17:30	21:30
Four bells	02:00	06:00	10:00	14:00	18:00	22:00
Five bells	02:30	06:30	10:30	14:30	18:30	22:30
Six bells	03:00	07:00	11:00	15:00	19:00	23:00
Seven bells	03:30	07:30	11:30	15:30	19:30	23:30
Eight bells	04:00	08:00	12:00	16:00	20:00	00:00

Ref: *Wikipedia*

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