



0. CAPTAIN POLLARD MAKES MISTAKES - Story Preface

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The *Charles W. Morgan*, from New Bedford, was one of around 2,700 ships which made up the U.S. whaling fleet in 1841. The last whaler to survive, she has been carefully restored by a team at Mystic Seaport. In this image, online courtesy Mystic Seaport, she has a smaller whaleboat in place on her starboard side. Click on the image for a better view.

The crew of the *Essex*, mostly inexperienced young men, learned something interesting from their disastrous knock-down experience in the Atlantic Ocean.

When a ship gets knocked down, her hull begins to serve a very different purpose. It acts like a barrier which blocks the ferocious wind and pelting rain.

This brief moment, of apparent calm, also occurred on the *Essex*. It helped George Pollard to regroup with his crew. Tom Nickerson describes the moment:

[T]he cool and undismayed countenance of the captain soon brought all to their sober senses.
(Philbrick, quoting Nickerson, at page 41 of *In the Heart of the Sea*.)

Calming the crew, however, did little for the whaleboats which were hanging on the port side of the ship. Two of them were irretrievably separated from the *Essex*.

An extra whaleboat, stored at the back of the ship (on its stern), had been crushed by the powerful waves.

On the fourth day of her anticipated two-year voyage, the *Essex* was now massively crippled. She was left with two whaleboats (when she needed at least three, preferably four) and no spare (even though her crushed stern boat could be repaired).

Still close-enough to Nantucket, so they could turn back for repairs, Captain Pollard announced that is what the men would do.

Owen Chase (the first mate) and Matthew Joy (the second mate) disagreed with the captain. They both thought they should keep sailing toward the Azores, where they could repair the *Essex* and buy replacement whaleboats.

The junior officers must have forgotten—or disregarded—a fundamental rule of life at sea. On a ship, the captain's decisions are the law of the ship.

George Pollard, four days into his first command at sea, reversed himself. Instead of following his own counsel, and returning to Nantucket, he instructed the crew to keep sailing.

Unfortunately, when the *Essex* reached port there were no solid whaleboats to buy. All Pollard could find, at the Cape Verde Islands, was an old and leaky replacement. By then, however, the men were too far from Nantucket to turn back with nothing to show for their efforts.

Nothing to show for their efforts mattered, a great deal, to these men. If they returned without oil, not a single crew member would be paid for his work. That was the deal crew members made with ship owners. They would split the profits of the voyage, in predetermined shares (minus their individual expenses).

If there were no profits, there was no payday ... even for the Captain. Even if the voyage lasted three or four years.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CAPTAIN-POLLARD-MAKES-MISTAKES-In-the-Heart-of-the-Sea-The-Tragedy-of-the-Whaleship-Essex>

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