

'What you see is not always what you get – CHIRP Maritime'

➔ More than 30 members and guests gathered on 15 March 2018 for this presentation by Capt Jeff Parfitt FNI, Director of CHIRP Maritime.

Capt Parfitt looked at recent work involving research into eyesight and mistaken perception, which led CHIRP Maritime to join with University College London to try to understand more about the interaction between eye and brain. He introduced CHIRP's new publication, *Perception, Decision Making and Fatigue at Sea*, and described the initial findings plus some of the questions CHIRP hopes to answer in future research. He also showed an excellent video on the topic. Booklet and the video are both available on the CHIRP Maritime website.

We learned that different parts of the eye are used depending on the available light, and that it takes 30 minutes to establish night vision. Every time a watchkeeper looks at the ECDIS screen they effectively destroy their night vision.

One frightening fact is that the human brain can only cope with four moving targets at one time. This has serious implications for any watchkeeper in the English Channel or the Singapore Strait, for example, and may explain some navigational accidents.

Another interesting snippet is that it is quite difficult for the human eye to distinguish grey objects in the peripheral vision – which explains why many sports teams use a grey-coloured away strip (although it does not seem to have done the England football team much good).

In a thought-provoking case study, Capt Parfitt discussed the recent report into the loss of *El Faro*, which places all the blame for the loss of the ship on her Captain, despite making around 50 recommendations aimed at the US Coast Guard. He discussed the Captain's perception that his ship was well-found and fit for purpose, and considered whether this perception informed his actions.

It was an interesting and stimulating presentation. One talking point emerged from the video, where the UCL students unanimously assert that decisions made by groups are almost always more reliable than decisions made by an individual. They feel that a discussion by the bridge team before any action is taken will result in fewer accidents. Sadly, they may be right, but it is unlikely to happen. In any case, imagine the following exchange on the bridge:

Master: 'Starboard 30.'

Helmsman: 'Are you sure, Captain? We might discuss an alteration to port.'

We must conclude that such democratic procedures are unlikely to emerge in the foreseeable future.

Alan Loynd FNI