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Frigid New England waters tough foe for Mexican Navy

Brian Dowling Thursday, March 16, 2017



Credit: Angela Rowlings

'BEAUTIFUL SHIP': Mexican Navy Capt. Rafael Antonio Lagunes Arteaga, above, docked his tall ship Cuauhtemoc, at Fan Pier on Tuesday before the storm, giving his crew, a chance to see snow for the first time.

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The Mexican Navy's tall ship felt a world away from its balmy home port of Acapulco when it slipped into Boston Harbor and docked at Fan Pier hours before Tuesday's nor'easter.

But the 270-foot Cuauhtemoc, on the second leg of its nine-month trip around the world, was left in the lurch with no shovels aboard to clear its snow-blanketed deck. Many of its sailors lacked coats, and much of the ship was without heat, the ship's officers told the Herald yesterday.

"We have never seen snow on the deck of the ship," said Capt. Rafael Antonio Lagunes Arteaga, the commanding officer of the Cuauhtemoc (pronounced kwau-temok) — the name of the last Aztec emperor that means "an eagle descending over its prey."

Fan Pier's owner, the Fallon Co., offered its help, welcoming the crew to land Tuesday morning with boxes of doughnuts, space heaters, winter clothing and snow shovels to clear the decks.

"This is the coldest weather they have had in the history the boat has been on water," said Richard Martini, Fallon's chief operating officer. "They were literally chopping ice off the deck with sledge hammers as they came from Cape Cod into Boston. Only three or four had ever witnessed snow."

Martini said he treated 80 sailors to pizza and beer on Tuesday at nearby Babbo, where they waited out the worst of the storm's wintry blast for six hours, many documenting the fierce weather with iPhones to show family back home.

The ship spent 21 days sailing from Panama to Boston, and it plans to leave Monday for Spain, then Italy, Greece, Egypt, India, Singapore, the Philippines, China, South Korea, Japan, Hawaii, Los Angeles and home to Acapulco by November. The ship is open to the public from today until Sunday.

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The final stretch into Boston tested the crew's mettle.

The Cuauhtemoc battled 15-foot seas and 40 mph winds off Cape Cod, forcing sailors to secure flapping sails by climbing the ship's masts. "When they returned to the decks they were totally out; very, very frozen," Arteaga said.

Freezing winds and snow taught a lesson to the crew of the navy's training vessel.

"They are very surprised, very amazed, very respectful for what nature can do, how in danger we can all the sudden be," Arteaga said, later congratulating his crew on the challenging leg of the journey.

"We have a beautiful ship as the way the ship behaves with the winds and rough seas," Arteaga said. "We need to keep training to become really worthy of this ship."