A Journey into History â€“ Part III

Description

Part I, Part II, Part IV, Part V, Part VI, Part VII, Part VIII Part IX

I recall the weather was exceptional. Clear skies and gentle low swells, as we forged our way north, communicating â€œthe old fashioned way,â€• semaphore, flashing light (Morse Code) and flag hoists. The stuff a WWII movie is made of. When tactical manuvering is done this way, and the crews do that well, itâ€™s pretty impressive to see many thousands of tons of steel dance across the waves in unison, or planned staging of their movements in an aquatic ripple effect.

Traffic was light and we came across one ship of significance, a Soviet merchant ship. â€œBack in the day,â€• every Soviet vessel that sailed was a mobile intelligence gathering platform. This encouter became a point of focus for our boring, but important transit. The BIDDLE was dispatched out ahead to keep tabs on her, and the SARATOGA and thge other ships were maneuvered to stay a good distance away, but if you can see a ship, then it can see you. Thatâ€™s a good rule to aply in such situations, especially bright sunny days with no clouds at all.

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Back to the background:

The BIDDLE fell behind out Battle Group, much to the chargrin of our CSO, CDR Nurthen. The rest of us had kept small bags with a few days worth of clothes and our toothbrushesâ€¦

To close this line of the story, we all entered the Med, the BIDDLE late, and a few days later, my staff moved to our flagship, the BIDDLE. The CO of the BIDDLE was under the operational command of the Commodore, even though he had a higher â€œlineal number.â€• Friction became a part of life, as each man tried to fence off their territory.

Upon our embarkation on the cruiser, which was tasked as the anti-air warfare commander (AAWC) for the Battle Group, we found ourselves, as the ASWC, routinelt in EMCON â€œA,â€• as the cruiser would be dispatched down a threat axis in radar and radio silence to ambush the incoming enemy aircraft. We had normally ridden aboard destroyers before, and this didnâ€™t impact us much, except to lose a SONAR from the inner ASW screen. As a side note, one of the normal duties of the ASWC was to also be assigned to be the Screen Commander (SC), responsible for planning and executing the screen of these big deck ships with the destroyers and frigates assigned. Now the problem is we are our on station, only able to listen to the radio circuits, but could not respond. Needless to say, it really put a crimp in our style. It didnâ€™t help any that the BG Watch Officers would try to get ahold of us, and get angry when we didnâ€™t answer there calls.

The â€œINCHOPâ€• reports were filed, briefings from the 6th Fleet and supporting staffs were made. We then joined up with the SARATOGA BG and â€œswappedâ€• escorts. It was an odd cruise, for the CORAL SEA would remain in the Med and show off the new thingy I understood to be (possibly) affectionately termed â€œThe Lawn Dart.â€• It was the first operational deployment of the F/A-18, and therefore a good time to parade the new birds around the shores of our allies, more than likely to let

them know we were going to use it, so they should get on board and buy some, too. I found out later, foreign navies (and Iâ€™m sure other services) donâ€™t take it too well when you try to sell them something you arenâ€™t planning on using yourself. The F-20 Tigershark aricraft comes to mind in this example.

Anyhow, we â€œworked upâ€• with one carrier, then swapped out on deployment. We didnâ€™t move the escorts exactly between battle groups, and some discussion followed, ending with a decision to leave BIDDLE with the CORAL SEA in the Med, and the SCOTT (DDG-995) coming with us to the North Arabian Sea (NAS)/Indian Ocean. It sort of balanced the firepower overall. That decision was crucial at another level. Here were two crews, with gear packed for deployment. Once for a winter Med cruise, the other for the Indian Ocean climes. It wasnâ€™t just a bite for the operational issues, but also for the â€œciviesâ€• loaded by the crews for liberty, as well.

And back at the 20 years ago coral:

The Soviet ship didnâ€™t seem to take any interest in us, as they should have. It steamed on itâ€™s way, with out deviating from itâ€™s course. Not unusual for a regular merchant vessel, but definitely strange for a Soviet flagged ship of any category.

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A few days after we sailed from DGAR, towards a point in the ocaen south of the Arabian Penninsula, were were given orders to head to the Red Sea and prepare for a northen transit of the Suez Canalâ€¦.

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Author