A Journey into History Ã¢â‚¬â€œ Part V

Description

Part I, Part II, Part III,Part IV, Part V,
Part VII, Part VIII

Part IX

And then there were three CVBGs in the Mediterranean. Gathered for the purpose to â€œshow the flag,â€• we would specifically challenge QhadaffiÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s claim to sovereignty over the waters and air space in the Gulf of Sidra. Freedom of Navigation (â€œFONâ€•) operations at their finest.

To bring in a few important background details, we had conducted FON Ops in late January, twice in February (a third one was aborted and we stayed moored/anchored in Italian ports), and then again in March, we went to sea in force a few times. I figured weÃ¢â‚¬â„¢d send some surface ships (that, for the uninitiated, comprises all ships except aircraft carriers (which belong to AIRLANT/PAC) and submarine tenders (those belong to the submarine community) smartly into the Gulf, have them press south at best speed, and make a show of force. I was wrong. We actually tip-toed down there on a very nasty, cloud covered, windy, clod day, complete with sea so high, the Libyan Navy would have barely been able to make headway to meet and greet us. I know the USS YORKTOWN (CG-48) was one of the vessels tasked to go, and I recall the USS CARON (DD-970) might have been the other. As I sat listening to the situation/position reports coming back on the radio, it was obvious we could have made our show of force and been completely unopposed, yet it was equally clear the two powerful warships were not to cross the â€œLine of Deathâ€• without specific direction from â€œZulu Alphaâ€• (the call sign for the battle force commander.

default watermark

In the operations building up to the shoot Ã¢â‚¬Ëœem up, I subconsciously was schooled in the major factor that wins conflicts, a lesson I would learn later consciously at Naval War College: ItÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s all about logistics, logistics, and yep, you guessed itÃ¢â‚¬Â¦.more logistics. At the time, the force structure planned for a single CVBG in the Med, one in the Indian Ocean, and IÃ¢â‚¬â„¢m not sure how many the Pacific Fleet kept roving the seas on deployment. In any case, the shore support in the Med was designed and stocked for one CVBG, and here we were with three within a few weeks, arriving in theater. The names of the many ships escape me, but here are the ones I can recall:

USS CORAL SEA (CV-43), USS AMERICA (CV-), USS SARATOGA (CV-60), USS YORKTOWN (CG-48), USS BIDDLE (CG-34), USS WAINWRIGHT (CG-28), USS CARON (DD-970)*, USS SCOTT (DDG-996), USS JACK WILLIAMS (FFG-24), USS DEWERT (FFG-45), USS AINSWORTH (FF-10), USS JESSE L BROWN (FF-10), USS CAPADANNO (FF-10), USS GARCIA (FF-1040), USS MONOGHELA (AO-178), and USS IWO JIMA (LPH-7)*. (* indicates that these may not have been there, as this is being done from raw recollection on my part).

I do know that my staff, as â€œZULU XRAYâ€• (ASW Commander), had nine ships primarily under our command, which included all the FF units at least. We also had all ASW related resources for the entire theater under our control, which included the shore based VP squadrons with P-3C Orion Maritime

Patrol Aircraft (MPA). Those assets flew from NAS Rota, Spain and NAS Sigonella, Italy.

Anyhow, back at the ranch, the supply system was now having to provide beans, bullets, black oil and spare parts to three times the assets, which also were sailing/flying a very aggressive schedule. The warehouse ashore in the Med were emptying out quickly. The fuel stockpiles were taking a hit as well. Each day, in the early evening, each ship submitted a daily SITREP message to the chain of command. One of the paragraphs in the format listed the present percentage of fuel aboard. At our level, we had a standard figure of how many barrels (42 gallons) per day each type of ship would burn. This set of stats was further subdivided into a burn rate based on the type of ops the ship was engaged in. One rate for at sea steaming, another for import steaming (running the boilers to operate the electrical power generation and auxiliaries) and a third burn rate for Ã¢â‚¬Å“Cold IronÃ¢â‚¬Â• or with the main propulsion plant shut down. We totaled up the data and forwarded it to the battle force staff. Decisions on when and who would sail were based on the fuel calculations.

In between our jaunts to sea to demonstrate our resolve, we had to anchor/berth somewhere. Due to QhadffiÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s threats to the European countries, only Italy would allow us to enter their waters. They were a solid ally, even when SCUD missiles were lobbed at a small Italian island south west of Sicily, in retribution for their cooperation with us. I got to see a lot more of Naples than I wanted in those days.

default watermark

ASW operations for the force were a stretching experience. As a TACDESRON staff, we had the Commodore, the Chief Staff Officer, four watch officers (we stood the watch in pairs), then a radioman (RM) and operations specialist (OS) senior chiefs rounded out our normal compliment of tactical watchstanders. We had Ã¢â‚¬Å“borrowedÃ¢â‚¬Â• a few OS1s and 2s from the BROWN and CAPODANNO for the cruise, and they helped keep up with the radio comms and plotting. We stood watches in Ã¢â‚¬Å“Port and StarboardÃ¢â‚¬Â• (2 shifts), in six hour watch cycles.

Two HP-9020 JOTS computers, fed by Link-14 teletype from the SARATOGAÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s comm. Center allowed us to track our assigned unitÃ¢â‚¬â„¢s locations in near real time (a few minute time lag, when things worked, and the ships had their Link 14 systems properly patched). More often than not, things were not running as planned, due to the multitude of switches and components involved, so were tended to have the junior OSs on the radio circuits, calling for updated positions, so we had an accurate picture of force location.

In addition to the JOTS computers, we tracked the units on a piece of tracing paper, laid over a chart of the central Med. Due to the force dispersion from close to the entrance to the Suez Canal to west of Sicily at some times, it was the only way to be able to have a Ã¢â‚¬Å“big pictureÃ¢â‚¬Â• to scan and make decisions upon. It took constant attention, mostly from OSCS(SW) Jim Koch and RMCS(SW) Rumbaugh, to keep the Link 14 feed patched to us.

Stay tuned for more â€œsea storiesâ€•Ã¢â‚¬Â¦.

Category

1. Air Force
2. Geo-Political
3. History
4. Jointness
5. Military

6. Military History
7. Navy
8. Political

Date Created
March 24, 2006
Author
admin

default watermark