Tactical Development â€“ 20 Years Later â€“ Part II

Description

In Part I, I laid the foundation for the rest of this recitation of events now twenty years in the past. Catch up if you need to.

SH-60 Launching Penguin ASM

Armed with antecdotal understanding of the next generation of anit-surface missiles, new RADAR capabilites, a little more understanding of the SH-60B sensor and weapons suite, our staff began many meetings around the table in the conference room in the front of Building W-5, first deck. How would a notional battle group, with a BB as the central unit, be able to project power? Implied, and how can it keep itself knowledgable of the local tactical environment? A big challenge, since we were used to just calling for aircraft from the CV to help us paint the picture of who was who in the briny blue neighborhood. Out of the question. Some land based VP assets, or possibly AWACS, may be available, but just grabbing the secure phone to AREC (air resource coordinator) wasnâ€™t going to cut it. Tasking (to use staff weenies): Solve the problem. No option to report that all options were investigated and it was a bone headed idea. Anyhow, we â€œappreciatedâ€• a challenge.

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Along the way to a proposed plan, we began casting nets in various directions, soliciting help. This led to us getting to know the commander at CINCLANTFLT (CLF) in charge of the Tomahawk mission planners. We corraled the crypto guys and, flashed our clearances and demanded details on what info they could provide us. That was good for most, but our Commodore demanded that we find out how it worked, which came to be a major factor in not only the planning, but the follow on analysis of the days at sea. Being insistent paid off. We sat down with the Joint Cruise Missile Project Office (JCMPO) guys and picked their brains. In retrospect, their job was to nudge the system to a fully successful set of conditions, so sometimes, the data seemed useful, but, we found out, sometimes wasnâ€™t the tactical truth to make the rubber meet the road.

The master plan was not only to have the real cooperative mobile target of the WILLIAM V PRATT for four days, the SPRU Can for about two, but CLF was happy to build a pile of â€œvirtualâ€• tracks. At the time, we called them â€œconstructiveâ€• tracks, but in todayâ€™s market, virtual is a better descriptor. We also had CLF arrange priority tasking for assets to provide long range intel and warning â€œtippers.â€•

Delving into the â€œgutsâ€• of the Tomahawk Anti-Ship Missile (TASM), we analyzed, in great detail, just how much area the TASM would see with itâ€™s RADAR. We wrestled with seemingly insignificant details of time, speed and distance, gaming out how we could help position the missile to ensure the highest probability of impact on the intended target. The missile had a few selectable patterns, that could have some modification, but they were pretty rudimentary for the square milage it could see. The constant was the concern for â€œbackground shipping.â€• In this case, the issue was how not to hit it in order to not spend about $1.2M, and still have an international relations issue to deal with. If we were going to shoot, the only purpose was to hit the target of interest (TOI). We settled on only two patterns

for selection. We had read and re-read the SWDG produced TACNOTE many, many, many times and thought we â€œgot itâ€• on TASM employment.

As our compensatory tactics to replace CV aircraft resources, we decided to use the SH-60Bs of the task group as poor manâ€™s E-2s, to develop our surface picture. The SH-2F SeaSprite (embarked on CONOLLY), would be our on the deck eyeballs, if visual confirmation was necessary. Even employing the two airframes like that, the main challenge was how to keep an ability to see far enough out to be able to get the TASM on target at itâ€™s max advertized range. No matter what, that was a tough nut to crack. The best way we cold use our resources was to rely on â€œtipperâ€• info from off-board sensors to detect and identify targets of interest. Weâ€™d begin plotting the targets, and then launch the LAMPS MK III on the axis of the threat. In order to do that, we alos had to put the MK III platform well ahead on the same axis. The chain of data would flow from the helo, to the FFG, then back to the BBBG shooters.

This required us to stay well ahead of the problem, due to the low speed of the air units, let alone the time it may take to swing the picket ship on an arc to get in position to make this all happen.

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On top of those decisions, we had some very interesting â€œprofessionalâ€• discussions with the SH-60 detachment OIC. He wanted to provide a capability to conduct â€œVIDâ€• (visual indentification) of targets, and then be able to engage them with Penguin missiles. I recall telling him directly his only purpose in this scenario was to fly to max data link range from â€œMother,â€• fire up his APS-142 and sit back and read a good book. For one thing, to get the maximum surveillance distances, he had to park at about 10K ft and to drop down to the deck would put him in the dark, as well as when he made a high speed, low altitude run at a Soviet combatant worth a TASM expenditure, he would be way slower than the SAMs headed towards himâ€¦and worst of all, weâ€™d get our â€œeyesâ€• poked out. He seemed a little miffed I wasnâ€™t more concerned that heâ€™d be taking a swim or be fish food. The object was to keep his aircraft viable for surveillance. We could send the SH-2F in if we really thought it was necessary.

LCDR (then) Steve Nerheim began the ardous task of assembling the info and putting it into tasking for the ships of the notional BBBG, and the target vessels. He was the ablative shield between the Commodore and the rest of us. Then, some twenty years ago this month (I forgot the actual dates), we embarked on USS CONOLLY (DD-979) and headed out of Norfolk, enroute rendezvous with USS DOYLE (FFG-39) at sea.

(to be continued in Part III)

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