Tactical Development 20 Years Later â€“ Part IV

Description

Part III left us hanging with lots and lots of engagements with simulated TASMs of simulated and constructive targets, and now we got around throught the Striats of Florida and parked south of Eglin AFB for the firing to two test rounds.

Not only was there tight OPSEC (operational security) around this because of the implication of the Soviets getting wind of the exercise and gathering data, but a family member of one of the staff at EGLIN was a member of Greenpeace and that organization had a plan, also. Something about finding out the time the Tomahawks would jet across the Flordia panhandle, overflying I-10, so they might park an 18 wheeler, equipped with barrage balloons to be sent aloft in a tethered configuration to try to stop the missiles.

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Iâ€™m not sure if they figured theyâ€™d work in a deterrent mode and weâ€™d just not launch, or if they thought theyâ€™d be able to â€œwingâ€• a 450kt, one ton flying machine and bring it down. If the latter, rather than the former, I think they hadnâ€™t thought out the negative pblicity that might come the way of Greenpeace if bits of high speed debris smacked into homes, vehicles or playgrounds along the ballistic path towards â€œthe scene of the crash.â€•

Be that as it was, no balloons were sighted on the day of the test firing. We were embarked aboard USS CONOLLY (DD-979), and the Joint Cruise Missile Project Office (JCMPO) officers accompanied us as well. As officers, we all demonstrated our concern by standing behind the well trained fire controlmen of CONOLLY. Many, many things were double, triple and quadruple checked, but the firing went as planned inthe late morning. The afternoon was scheduled for the IOWAâ€™s shot. Long story short (shortened because I donâ€™t recall all the details), problems arose and the decision was made to wait until the following morning to try again. We had heloed over to IOWA after CONOLLY fired and got the grand tour by Capt Larry Seachrist. She certainly was a magnificent ship and the crew very proud of their charge. Gun Plot was quite a highlight of the tour, with the WWII era computational equipment still in pristine order and able to put 2000 lb rounds on targets 23 miles away.

Back to CONOLLY for the night, then up for the shot. By mid-day, things had cleared up and the bird left the armored box launcher as planned. The rest of the flight was not a success. Part way along the flight path, the missile suddenly deployed the recovery chute, which, as one might expect, caught the chase pilots by surprise. The good part was the TLAM was over land and an unpopulated area. The standby explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) detachment scrambled from Eglin in an Navy SH-3 and secured the missile.

We packed up our cruise boxes on CONOLLY and heloed off to Eglin, where BOQ accomodations awaited. We anxiously awaited a chance to sleep, as we had pretty much had none over the last 6 days. We checked in and I got in my room, set my bag down and the phone rang: â€œGet down to the Commodoreâ€™s room so we can capture the lessons learned while they are fresh in our minds.â€• So much for sleep, but we did get some useful stuff on paper. The next day we flew back to Norfolk in a Navy 707 from Pax River, one equipped for data collection and had been used for the Tomahawk

shots. We got a little sleep then.

We were â€œbloodedâ€• now with Tomahawk experience and one of the reports we had committed to in our own Op Order was a lessons learned report to the chain of command in a few months. Part V will provide the interesting details of the â€œfalloutâ€• of the development of tactics for a notional battleship battle group (BBBG), in addtion to the value of digging up enough detail to know what youâ€™re talking about when you have to take some performance data forward.

Up for reading: Part V â€“ The Final Chapter!

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