Lex is Busy So Why Did We Shelve TASMs?

Description

Capt Lex, enroute a permanent appointment with CIVPAC/LANT/Wherever, is up to his eyeballs in real world work (building resume entries).

He issues this tasking:

> Insanely busy. Irrationally so. Firing on all synapses. Every sinew a-twitch.
>
> Busy.
>
> So. Talk amongst yourselves. As though you needed any encouragement from me.
>
> Suggested topic: Close Air Support. How very hard it can be to deliver warheads on foreheads when those forehead are in close proximity to other foreheads whom you are actually trying to protect. And who need it bad, or else they wouldnÃ¢â‚¬â„¢t be asking for you to drop 500 pound bombs over the top of them, because really, who needs the stress?
>
> But only theyÃ¢â‚¬â„¢re locked in mortal combat, like. In the beatinÃ¢â‚¬â„¢ zone, but with the roles of beater and beatee not yet clearly defined. But whose situation is not improved if in fact you mid-ID the target or otherwise drop short.

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It made me connect two stories of my life from 20 years ago and almost 20 years ago now. Lots of details, but at the end of the real world operations in 86 off Libya, and as a result of playing out tactics later the same year, we (my staff) forwarded our report up the chain in early â€™87. I know now, in the aftermath of all of that, the Tomahawk Anti-Ship Missile (TASM) began a fairly quick exit from bag of weaponry for the Surface Warfare community.

It revolved around the same points as Lex asked us to discuss in his moment of high focus regarding Close Air Support during a â€œDanger Closeâ€• (more like â€œDanger â€˜Coz Weâ€™re Grappling with Each Otherâ€•).

If you need to catch up, I talked about the operations in the vicinity of Libya (an how I never got to have a beer on DGAR) back in â€œA Journey Into Historyâ€• series. Part I is here, and it has links to walk you to the end of the posts on the subject.

That group of posts highlighted a particular incident in March â€™86, which was the outcome of the volumes of civilian (â€œWhiteâ€•) shipping that cluttered our surface picture. We didnâ€™t have any TASM equipped units in any of the three battle groups that made up Battle Force â€œZ,â€• but we often talked among ourselves in the staff watch space, of how wonderful it would be to have the new â€œwonder weaponâ€• at our disposal, how more mighty we would be on the bounding mainâ€¦.

This, too, was at the time I first met Adm Harry Harris, now of Guantanamo Bay and Detainee fame. I came to know LCDR Harry Harris, of the USS SARATOGA (CV-60) Operations Department, when he stopped a briefing to Adm David Jerimiah I was giving and said: â€œWe canâ€™t do that!â€• Me: Why not? Him: â€œWe canâ€™t have aircraft flying on an alerted target!â€• Me:â€¦ That, readers, is fodder for tomorrowâ€™s Ropeyarn Sunday â€œSea Storiesâ€• and Open Trackbacks. Now, back to my regularly scheduled ramblings:

I have to admit, Iâ€™m not done with the second set of posts, which discuss taking a jaunt from Norfolk to the Gulf of Mexico. In Tactical Development â€“ 20 Years Later,â€• I discuss the trip where we shot many, many virtual TASMs and two actual Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles (TLAMs). I havenâ€™t yet gotten the entire story reported, as the discussion to the generation of the report, isnâ€™t completed. The report, forwarded to CINCLANTFLT, was finally done sometime in early â€™87 and it was incredible lesson in military procurement politics, as well as illuminating Black vs Brown shoe tactical thinking differences. After 35 major rewrites (I quit counting the corrections), it was signed and forwarded. At the time, I didnâ€™t comprehend the entire effect of the report, but it seemed the TASM began to fade from the inventory in the next few years.

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One of the issues with chucking a radar guided, autonomous almost Mach weapon into the wild blue to cover a great distance over the bounding main was: Will it strike the correct target? From a weaponeering standpoint, the state of the art were the armored box launchers (ABLs), which housed 4 weapons apiece, and the majority of the vessels configured, would carry two ABLs. In those ABLs would also be some TLAMs, so one had to be judicious with the expenditures of the weapons. Later the MK 41 vertical launcher systems (VLS) would become prolific, yet there still would be competing load plans, between vertical launch anti-submarine rockets (VLA), TLAMs, and, in the case of the DDG/CG vessels, the significant SM-2 anti-aircraft weaponry.

All that being said, you needed to figure out how to avoid, from a clinical, tactical viewpoint, putting your $1.2M birds into the other â€œtargets,â€• also referred to as â€œmissile sumpsâ€• or â€œmagnets.â€• If the plan was to take out a KIROV, it was less than optimum to have the missile penetrate the shell plating of a KASHIN or SOVREMMNY DDG, then dismantle it from the inside with the 1000 lb warhead and the extra bonus fuel-air explosive (FAE) effect, courtesy of the extra turbine fuel and the delayed firing of the explosives train for the warhead. Besides not getting the right target, the intended target would then be â€œalerted,â€• if not already, to the presence of a threat and most likely bring up defenses to a high state of readiness, and radically change their intended track, there by reducing to about zip the chances of hitting them.

So, from a clinical, tactical, breed into the great Mahanian sea battle outlook of warfare at sea, this was a partial positive, but you could get you whacked by the shooters from the â€œotherâ€• guys, thus defeating your purpose or striking first and striking hard.

Butâ€¦not all missile magnets come in some shade of haze greyâ€¦some are â€œwhiteâ€• shipping, which cold be something like a very large crude carrier (VLCC), or a container ship, who, manned with a small crew, with no interest in the conflict, happen to be in the vicinity (and therefore the radar â€œfootprintâ€•) of the big, bad, Soviet ensign flying vessels with said TASMs hurtling towards them. If one of those looks overly attractive to the TASM, it commits after consulting with itâ€™s computer, that is looking at the programmed search pattern parameters, and, not only have you wasted a bird (and the taxpayerâ€™s million dollars plus, you have created what is well described as an â€œinternational

incident.â€• Mark checklist of career in block â€œWill not see another promotionâ€• now. Consider consulting Yellow Pages for former JAG lawyer, now practicing on the â€œoutside,â€• to add to assigned defense counsel. As time progressed, and due to this detailed experience and analysis I did, I watched the tanker wars of the late â€™80s in the Persian Gulf, and noted that even when Lloydâ€™s of London listed the Gulf as a war zone (therefore negating insurance coverage), the tankers and other â€œwhiteâ€• shipping continued to ply the waters, as the profit margins were sufficient for the owners of the vessels to take the risk of attack and loss. The same effect was seen, when I thought back to the Jan-April 86 operations in the vicinity of Libya. Merchant shipping continued as it had, not even changing their tracks to the northern edges of the Med, to clear the locations of three US carrier battle groups, and the tag along Soviet surface combatants.

The reality of not only war on land, such has it become, but we saw at sea, no longer to the non-combatants seem to feel the urge to pack up their belongings and head out of the area of conflict, to family, friends, or anyone who will take in refugees, well away from the sound of the guns/bombs/cruise missiles, hence the tie into to Neptunus Lexâ€™s assignment. The TASM was removed from the arsenal partially due to this very type of issue. Short of the seas being cleared when war was declared, it actually was a detriment in the tactical environment, taking up space that could be used for more practically applied weapons, and markedly reducing the chances of international incidents occurring. Certainly, with the demise of the Soviet Navy, and no others filling the gap (yet) of a large surface Navy countering the US fleets, it was obsolete by the 90s. The airframes were converted to TLAMs, which has been an effective use of the procured inventory.

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