Oct 2, 1992: (Very) Shortly After Midnight â€“ USS SARATOGA â€“ Part I

Description

I missed the â€œanniversaryâ€• of this in posting days, as the incident discussed here happened on October 2nd, but come the beginning of next year, the same number of years ago, I became involved in the incident where the mid-watch (0000-0400) team on USS SARATOGA (CV-60) made a terrible mistake and launched two NATO Sea Sparrow RIM-7 missiles into the former US GEARING Class destroyer, then the TCG Mauvenet. Some of the details are here.

Three Admirals are named in the Wikipeida notes, two of which I personally worked with during my career, and the third I knew of. One of my shipmates from a training command was working for Admiral Dur that night, and was present earlier in the evening when the SARATOGA Operations Officer came into the Flag Watch Command Center and mentioned they were going to play in the exercise using their NATO Sea Sparrow system (NSSMS). The reported response from Admiral Dur was â€œYeah, right!â€•

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USS BADGER BPDMS Launch

RIM-7 Launch from USS BADGER (FF-1071)

The NSSMS was derived from the successful air-launched Sparrow AIM-7 series, brought â€œdownâ€• to serve on ships as a â€œpoint defenseâ€• system. This means it was designed to be used against threats coming at the platform where the missile system was located. It was by no means an â€œareaâ€• defense system, as it had a very limited capability against â€œcrossingâ€• (read headed for another target) threats. The first installations were Frankenstein like conglomerations of a F-4 Phantom II radar system, mounter on a stanchion for manual aiming and targeting by a sailor on the open deck, which would then fire a missile from an eight celled launcher, adapted from the Anti-Submarine Rocket (ASROC) system. The system, in this configuration, was the Basic Point Defense System (BPDMS â€“ pronounced Bee-Ped-EMus in verbal reference). It was a start, but the operator, strapped to the send and receive antennas mounted on the station on the open deck, had to be verbally pointed in the direction of the target, then he would sweep the area of sky where the target is supposed to be, while listening to the audible return signal of the radar, which would tell him when he had acquired the inbound target by a change in pitch. He also had the firing key for the system, as he was the only one who had the ability to judge if he was on target or not.

More later, but this will be presented in series, as once I get through the technology involved, then it will be on to the investigation.

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