Ropeyarn Sunday â€œSea Storiesâ€• and Open Trackbacks

Description

Itâ€™s been pretty slim in terms of comments lately. I did fix the problem I injected into the system, soâ€¦.feel free to fact check me or add to any discussion. Post trackbacks here, also.

Sea stories. A serial story, today the first partâ€¦.

Back in â€œthe day,â€• one of the drills we had to complete on a periodic basis (I believe this one was quarterly), was the Intrusion Drill, know widely by the exercise nomenclature of â€œZ-5-Oâ€• from the list of exercises. This was spoken as â€œZulu Five Oscar.â€•

The general manner of running this drill was your parent squadron would notify one of the other ships in the squadron that they were being tasked to run the drill on you and they gave them a several day time span to do this and then file the grade sheets with the squadron. What were they to do? Send people to your quarterdeck with false/no identification and attempt to be allowed access to the ship without and escort and being properly recorded in the security log at the Quarterdeck. The idea was to see if the august trio of inport watch standers (the Officer of the Deck (OOD), Petty Officer of the Watch (POOW) and Messenger of the Watch (MOOW), would properly assess the person asking to come aboard was not to be allowed unhindered access to the vessel.

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The normal inport quarterdeck of any ship in that era was manned by these three men and, during the work day, were generally very busy with handling the ebb and flow of those coming and going, passing shipâ€™s standard routine, routing incoming phone calls (back in the 70â€™s most shipâ€™s had two, maybe three phone lines, the one to the quarterdeck was the published number and received calls from businesses, other commands, distraught girlfriends wanting to know if their boy friend had arrived yet, the supply center, and the command duty officer from the senior ship at the pier (Pier SOPA) to inform the OOD of a pallet on the pier, or that the man hoisting the Jack (the little flag flown on the jackstaff on the bow (the â€œflagâ€• in the Navy is called the â€œEnsignâ€• and it is hoisted on the staff at the stern) didnâ€™t have his hat on properly at morning colors, or some such complaint about a breach of good order and discipline or general military appearance. And then add the internal issues to the ship to the workload of concerns. Iâ€™m not making excuses, Iâ€™m just relating the mayhem that is the norm at this watch station on a moment to moment basis.

Being in the â€œFat Shipâ€• Navy, we didnâ€™t always seem so serious about things that seemed like purely warfighting issues. After all, we only had four converted from aircraft 20mm cannons as our main battery while at sea, mounted on tripods at the four upper level corners of the after superstructure, all manually aimed (think of the movies of the deck gunners in WWII firing at incoming kamikazesâ€¦that was us in the cruise missile and jet age), and inport, two armed men, one the POOW, the other a roving security watch were the combined defense force for 8M gallons of fuels and 600 tons of ordnance. They were equipped with the mighty 1911 .45 caliber pistol and two magazines of ammunition (14 rounds).

However, we were serious about our mission to keep the glamorous aviators and the greyhounds of the sea on task by supplying them with fuel, spare parts and chow.

The drills, and I had only been aboard a few months at this point, and it was my first ship, so I was still but an Ensign, without much understanding of the way things were at this point, were generally done by gentlemanâ€™s agreement, unspoken as it was within the fat ship fraternity, to not let your â€œshipmatesâ€• fail, unless they were literally sleepwalking at their duty, in which case, then it was fair to write them up as failing. Minimal effort to catch the â€œintrudersâ€• was sufficient to get a passing score submittedâ€¦Most drills ended with â€œOK, yes, I am. Here, sign the paperâ€• and life went back to â€œnormalâ€• at the Quarterdeck.

And then one day, you know it just had to happen, someone decided to shake things up a bitâ€¦.

I didnâ€™t have the watch, and it wasnâ€™t even my duty day, yet I did comprehend that when a sailor from the USS SEATTLE (AOE-3) made it past our quarterdeck and was allowed to wander freely, without a visitors badge, it was bad for us.

I donâ€™t recall the specifics, but somehow my division Chief Petty Officer, OSC Michael P. McCaffery , was tasked to do the honors of â€œcounterbattery fire.â€• For all I know, he may have, and it would have been in character, volunteered to formulate and execute the operation to show our appreciation with the breaking of the status quo at the piers.

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The â€œgame rulesâ€• for conducting a Z-5-O were roughly thus:

- Three attempts were to be made within the time frame in the tasking letter;
- Real military identification cards could not be used;
- If asked â€œAre you and intruder?â€•, the â€œintruderâ€• had to respond truthfully;
- Copies of military IDs could be used (meaning from the Xerox machine).

A long discussion could launch from this point about how agents of the KGB would never dare to use real stolen ID blanks to try to get access to a ship, that they, too, only had the technology of SAVIN or Xerox to make up false papers for doing their dirty work. On top of that, it was a well known fact that all foreign agents would tell you right away, when specifically questioned, that they were up to the business of stealing military secrets (If only Jack Bauer had known this, it would have saved several presidents lots of international embarrassment).

Soâ€¦one day, the Operations Officer, LCDR Frank Mueller, presented a letter from the squadron to me. Subject? Yes, you guessed it: Tasking to conduct a Z-5-O on the USS SEATTLE (AOE-3).

Youâ€™ll have to come back next Wednesday for more (and not the rest) of the storyâ€¦

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