Ropeyarn Sunday â€œSea Storiesâ€• and Open Trackbacks

Description

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Sea story of the week:

I first heard of, not by name, but by association, GSGS(SW) John â€œJCâ€• Weigman, USN in the summer of 1983. I was a student at Surface Warfare Officer Department Head course, nearing completion of the 6 month school. By now, I was in the Engineering Specialty portion of the curriculum, having been detailed to be the Engineer Officer on USS CONOLLY (DD-979). There were ten of us in the class, taught by LCDR Alex Watt, sitting in two rows of chairs, 5 abreast, all destined to be in charge of SPRUANCE Class destroyer engineering plants. It was the last day of this part of the school, and Alex had gathered the current status of our ships, so weâ€™d have an idea where they were in the training/inspection/deployment cycle. He began the class with some â€œgood newsâ€• for one of us (I canâ€™t recall what it was or who it was for) and â€œbad newsâ€• for one of us. He announced one of the ships rated several GS (Gas Turbine Specialist) Chief Petty Officers, but there was only one aboard.

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Alex worked his way across the front row and then got to me in the center of the back row. He began the status of my upcoming assignment by saying â€œItâ€™s you.â€• Great. Never wanted to be a â€œsnipe,â€• had asked to be anything but a snipe, but I got to be a snipe, and then I was going to be shorthandedâ€¦..Thereâ€™s about 2-3 more sea stories in that last comment, but laterâ€¦.

I arrive aboard the ship in Puerto Mont, Chile, having flown from Norfolk via Miami. GSMC(SW) Weigman is my leading enlisted man in the department. He began his career as an EN (Engineman) and had plenty of stories to tell, in particular, he was involved in the evaluation of the SeaFox SEAL patrol craft, which made for some good conversation late at night on watch. He converted to the GS rate when there was the massive build up of DDs and FFGs was at itâ€™s peak in the early 80s, which was a great career move.

Supporting JC were GSM1 Graham, GSE1 Denny Rohr, GSE2 Walter Hook, GSM2 Belcher, GSM2 Shipley, GSM2 Roberge, GSM2 Dewberry and more I canâ€™t recall right now, butâ€¦he was in fact the only Chief I had in the â€œMâ€• (Main Probulsion) Division, led by LT Al Curry.

JC was more than a match for the task. He was a sailor and not a snipe first. His goal was always to make sure the Ship was cared for and running well. If that meant playing second fiddle in the priorities for some â€œupper deckâ€• stuff, he was on board, and he was sending help as needed. He also instilled this in those in the entire Engineering Department. On the other hand, if there was a tie to be broken, heâ€™d make sure, in the â€œGoat Lockerâ€• or in talks with the CO (CDR Harry Maxiner) that the snipes would get the best deal.

One of the ways he was so successful, and the point of this sea story is: When someone told him something couldnâ€™t be done, or it had to be done some way that didnâ€™t make sense, heâ€™d

go and seek out the guidance and self-educate. I know he took both the PN (Personnelman) and YN (Yeoman) rate correspondence courses (required for advancement in those rates), and I believe he also sat down and worked his way through the DK (Disbursing Clerk) material as well. The entire point was to know as much of their jobs as they knew. On many occasions, he found out the people had told him something wrong, or contradictory to the way things were to be done. He wanted to know what was right, and if you wouldnâ€™t tell him, heâ€™d go to the book, your book, then come back and quote it to you.

He did this with everything he worked with. He was an incredibly capable amn, and even though I was short two more Chiefs in the Main Propulsion area, he outdid any ten other chiefs I worked with, except three, who were cut from the same cloth, and I ran into them years later.

One particular area, where he used this process of doing things right was with the â€œCritical Gaugeâ€• program. Aboard the ship were hundreds of gauges and sensing devices that required periodic calibration. There were established â€œMETCALâ€• teams of civil servants and contractors, who would come to the ship and go through and validate the accuracy (or repair/replace) every one of them. JC read the instruction and it said the critical gauge list was designated by the Commanding Officer, and the shore based support teams would check against the list of meter cards (one record for each gauge/sensor) listed by the Shipâ€™s Company. JC wnet about making sure that every gauge was covered. He listed gauges in the ASROC heating and cooling system, in the electronic chilled water piping system, etc, etc, etc. Hydraulic meters and gauges in the 5â€™/54 guns were also included.

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When we returned from the UNITAS deployment, the METCAL team paid us a call. The looked at this foot high stack of the meter card printouts and told JC (who was in charge of the program) that they only did engineering related gauges. He stared them down and told them the heating and cooling systems for the ordnance magazines were just as critical as the vibration transducers on the gas turbine engines andâ€¦.futhermore, this was the Commanding Officerâ€™s designated list, per the instruction and they were going to check them all. He was right on both counts. They left and started calling around. Net result, they did most of the work we handed them, but not all of it.

The net result of one man, shorthanded and all, was this: The METCAL team and their handlers successfully maneuvered to get the instruction changed, so the Squadron Commander would designate the â€œcritical gauges.â€• That wasnâ€™t the answer. The METCAL people needed to see he had a very valid point, and they needed to plus up their teams to cover more work aboard the ships during their visits.

So, the moral of the story is: If you do your homework, and learn what the other guy is supposed to be doing, you get a lot of work done, but sometimes, others will find an end around to keep from doing the work.

JC also took on the existing lube oil analysis program and if I recall correctly, he got them to change to a better method of detecting contaminants in the samples sent out to the labs, which helped in early detection of problems, and therefore ssaved taxpayer dollars.

By the time I departed CONOLLY, JC had made Senior Chief Petty Officer, and all of the other people I listed above added another paygrade to their sleeves/collars.

As far as not wanting the job? Well, it was one of the most rewarding tours I had. I credit a lot of sailors who didnâ€™t want me to screw up for making me look good in that job. They are subjects of future

sea stories, for they all have lessons and tales of their own.

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