Ropeyarn Sunday â€œSea Storiesâ€• and Open Trackbacks

Description

Open trackback free fire zoneâ€¦..

The â€œstoryâ€• will appear a little bit later todayâ€¦

Here â€œitâ€• is:

It was a dark and stormy night (no, really!) and I had very recently been graced with the much toiled after â€œOOD(F)â€• (Officer of the Deck, Fleet Operations) letter, which was the â€œupgradeâ€• from the prior check point in career development of the â€œOOD(I)â€• qualification. Now, I was placed in the watch rotation with the officers who were allowed to manage the moment to moment movements of the ship with other ships in formation. A big moment in a young surface warfare officerâ€™s career. With the authority also came the responsibility of that duty as well.

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We had been very busy unrepping (under way replenishing operations) most of the entire day light hours of that day out in the Atlantic, north of Puerto Rico somewhere. For a â€œfat ship,â€• that meant most of the crew was on deck, or at some attention mandating duty throughout the operations of passing â€œbeans, bullets and black oilâ€• to small (and big) boys alike. The Captain, at this time, Cecil Hawkins, spent most of his time in the port bridge wing chair and the XO, CDR David Martin, in the starboard bridge wing chair, watching the respective sides of the â€œmain batteryâ€• of the ship, coordinating with the OOD for ship handling, the rig captains for hooking up, the other ship for stuff they needed, the supply officer to make sure the ships got the stuff they needed, etc, etc, etc. Even during a clear, sunny day, itâ€™s a tough day, particularly mentally.

In the watch rotation, it was my turn to take OOD for normal steaming after we secured from UNREP stations, and late. The sky was almost black, for the cloud cover was solid and about 1000-1500 ft high. If the moon was full that night, it still mattered not, as we were stuck beneath the canopy of dense moisture. The CO and XO had departed the Bridge area and headed below to get some sleep, as time marched towards midnight.

We had been off to the side, with the designation as the formation guide (meaning everyone formed up on us, we just stayed on the ordered course and speed), so we had little maneuvering to worry about. Then the tactical radio crackled to life, giving us a coded message to take a station within the main formation of the aircraft carrier and the surrounding escorts. Guidance from the â€œstanding orders:â€• Call and notify the Captain. Once I was certain the order was received and understood by my watch team, I picked up the sound powered phone and called the CO. He had had time to get to sleep, so this call (obviously) woke him up. He acknowledged my notification of our change in status in the formation.

We dutifully computed our course to get to the ordered station, and had plotted the formation stations of the other vessels. We would have to weave between a few ships to get inside the protective screen. Not bad, even at night, when equipped with such modern conveniences as RADAR, and the visibility, at surface level being pretty unrestricted. Get the bearing by visual observation, then check the range via

RADAR and begin to move.

We were several miles out, so the move to station would take some time. Part way to the formation, the PRITAC (Primary Tactical, later TFTG TAC) spewed forth another message to the entire force in company: â€œExtinguish Navigation Lights.â€• OKâ€¦it was still a dark, but, the stormy part you could argue, and we had to now navigate by RADAR alone. Challenging, but not hair raising. Once more, call to inform the COâ€¦.Once more, in a sleepy voice, he responded that he understood we were now running in complete â€œdarken shipâ€• mode.

We steam on, a tired crew below, and the rest of us on watch. Again, the radio spoke: â€œEMCON ALPHA.â€• Emission control condition â€œA.â€• All electronics in the â€œoffâ€• positionâ€¦.on a dark, and maybe stormy nightâ€¦.still steaming in a 40,000 ton replenishment oiler towards an aircraft carrier, and her small boys in concentric rings about the capital ship.

Call the COâ€¦.

We got into station, no paint was scraped, no lives were lost, maybe some hair went gray (or grayer for the older watchstanders) and I was eventually relieved by the on coming ODD several hours later.

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The next work day, one of the lieutenants came to me and gently whispered to me, while standing close to me and out of earshot of anyone else and said: â€œIf the CO didnâ€™t trust you to make good decisions, he wouldnâ€™t have signed you OOD(F) letter.â€•

At one level good guidance, based on the long day the entire crew had had, but certainly OODs never really had free reign to do what they wished with the ship, even on some dark and stormy nights at sea.

Category

1. "Sea Stories"
2. Military
3. Navy
4. Open Trackbacks

Date Created
March 28, 2007
Author
admin