A Date with Destiny â€“ Part IV

Description

Itâ€™s Monday morning, 1988. Location: Charleston Naval Station. Assignment: Underway to support USS JOHN F KENNEDY (CV-67) exercises in the JAX OPAREAS.

Before the sun is up, the crew is busy taking care of the multitude of things required to get a ship away from a pier, down a narrow channel, past the sea buoy near Ft Sumter, and to a rendezvous with an aircraft carrier off the Georgia/Florida border. The Operations Officer, LT Franz Ritt has tow major areas of concern: Operations and also deck seamanship. While his title has been changed from â€œShip Control Officer,â€• the original billet title for the FFG-7 OLIVER HAZARD PERRY Class FFGs, to Operations Officer, he retains the responsibility for the Deck Force and all that comes with it. He makes sure the tugs and pilots are on track, that LTJG Scott Brown has the communications up and operating in accordance with the COMM PLAN for the exercise, that LTJG John Jenkins and OSC(SW) Mike Bennett have the Combat Information Center (CIC) online, ready to provide support tot he CO and the bridge by collecting, analyzing, evaluating and disseminating information. Thatâ€™s fancy words to say they are the center of the plan and make sure everyone keeps on task.

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LT Robert â€œBobâ€• Threlkeld and his engineering team have the gas turbine powered plant, and the supporting diesel powered electrical generators on line, with shore power disconnected. The â€œSnipesâ€• have been laboring for a few days now, making sure all services they provide, from electricity of two types to chilled water and conditioned air, to fresh water and sewage removal are working, not only for the comfort of the crew, but more importantly for the support of the shipâ€™s combat systems equipment.

LT Robert â€œBobâ€• Powers, as the Combat Systems Officer makes sure the MK 92 Fire Control System, and the Mk 75 gun and MK 13 missile launcher are ready, along with the SQS-56 Sonar, which will used in the exercises to help locate the submarine. STGC(SW) Hatherly and his division officer are in charge of this.

LCDR Thomas â€œTomâ€• Brown, the Executive Officer, has made his rounds of the ship, as a second set of eyes, and takes his station on the bridge to receive the readiness reports for getting underway and to keep the Captain, CDR Wade C. Johnson, advised of the status of getting to sea. In addition to being the XO and thereby second in command, Tom Brown is also assigned duties as Shipâ€™s Navigator, in accordance with a COMNAVSURFLANT directive all ships will have at least a LCDR assigned as XO, and if there is not a LCDR in the billet, then the XO of the ship will be assigned those duties. This requirement was the fallout of a few too many groundings occurring aboard SURFLANT ships. The Admiral decreed the assignment of XOs to this duty to get greater experience behind this important job on the vessels. So Tom was monitoring the laying out of the charts on the bridge and, at some point prior to this morning, had also checked the work of CIC to make sure their charts were updated and had the exact same planned track for departing the harbor laid out and understood. As Navigator, all navigational responsibilities in other parts of the ship where part of his purview.

The Officer of the Deck would directly manage the Getting Underway Checklist, which he would have received from the Quarterdeck Officer of the Deck. The Junior Officer of the Deck (JOOD) would be on station, focusing on the tides, currents, prospective track away from the pier, then down the channel, as well as stepping to the bridge wing periodically and looking for and aft to survey the state of the mooring lines. Affixed to the pier by six standard mooring lines, doubled up, all twelve lines would have to be removed from the pierâ€™s bollards and hauled aboard the ship at some point.

The Captain, the XO, and the Officer of the Deck make frequent trips to the outboard bridge wing, checking for other ship movements in the vicinity, looking for the tugs, and scanning for any thing in the water next to the ship that may pose a hazard in leaving the pier.

Are the APU (auxiliary power units) deployed? Is the CHT line disconnected from the pier? Are the phone lines disconnected? Have the Bridge-to-Bridge radio comm check been run? Is the pilot on his way? How many tugs are coming? Whatâ€™s the state of the current and tides?

Things are checked and re-checked, eyeballs are used to check other eyeballs. Itâ€™s not taken personally, itâ€™s become a practice adopted to prevent failure points based on the failure points that men going down to the sea have learned over centuries. The â€œIâ€™d rather be told twice than not at allâ€• philosophy is in place. The crew functions as one, sometimes verbally, but the critical items are placed on the checklist, just to make sure.

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The pilot arrives, the tugs pull up along side, Code Hotel is hoisted on the signal halyards, the Officer of the deck reports to the XO: â€œUnderway Checklist is complete.â€• The XO approaches the CO and says â€• The underway checklist is complete. Request permission to get underway.â€• â€œVery Wellâ€• comes as the response.

â€œOOD, permission to get underway!â€• are the next words heard, which are followed by â€œTake in all lines. Boatswainâ€™s Mate of the Watch: Standby the 1MC!â€•

With several key things happening next, the general announcing system (1MC) blasts out a sharp whistle and the words â€œUNDERWAY! SHIFT COLORS!â€•

To be continuedâ€¦

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