Ropeyarn Sunday "Sea Stories" and Open Trackbacks

Description

Open trackbacks, anyone?

So, there I wasâ€¦the afternoon of a day in January, 1979, on the bridge of the USS MILWAUKEE (AOR-2), moored portside to at the NATO fueling pier at Gaeta, Italy. That morning had been the Change of Command, where CAPT Arthur Page, USN, relieved CAPT Cecil Hawkins, USN. Both men aviators, both holding the position because the Navyâ€™s leadership had confidence they would be bigger players in the organization, both men with VA (attack) communities in their past. CAPT Hawkins and A-7 Corsair II guy, CAPT Page an A-6 â€œbubba.â€• Both with real time, enemy shooting at you with bad intent experience.

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CAPT Hawkins was the kind of man who was all around the shipâ€¦out of a genuine curiosity of what made it go, in terms of men, equipment and procedures developed for at-sea logistics delivery. CAPT Page, well, we were still getting a read on him that day, but a strikingly similar method of leading us was emerging.

CAPT Hawkins loved to be involved in the ship handling process. He was out on the bridge wing, looking at the goings on below forward and midships, with an ear towards the phone talkers for news from way back aft. He spoke the desired actions for line handling, tug work and engine speeds/rudder angles, but in the sense of being one of the minds engaged, and open to supporting commentary, especially from the â€œBlack Shoeâ€• XO, CDR Dave Martin, in matters of precision in the seamanship world. It was an easy interaction, with no feeling of oppression by the ultimate authority aboard the vessel. I had been assigned as the Conning Officer for the detail this day. LCDR Mike Hunt, aka â€œThe Grey Fox,â€• a â€œmustangâ€• officer, the Shipâ€™s 1st Lieutenant, with a life at sea in the world of the Deck department was the Officer of the Deck.

CAPT Hawkins had been sent ashore with appropriate honors, we ate lunch and were called to our Sea and Anchor Detail stations by the 1MC shortly thereafter. On to the bridge we went, and Mike and I had a plan. We stood on the Bridge Wing and felt the direction of the wind on our face. With tide and current data, we continued the rest of the preparations.

CAPT Page arrived on the Bridge, a stack of messages in his hand. Transiting to the starboard side of the Bridge, he climbed into his chair, looked my direction and asked â€œWhatâ€™s the plan?â€• That question set me back, but only because I was so used to CAPT Hawkins being pretty involved in all such evolutions. Nonetheless, Mike and I briefed the new Skipper with â€œThe Plan.â€•

As the preparations progressed and it was about time to move, I shifted to the starboard bridge wing, with Mike dutifully monitoring the events and my actions. The time and conditions of readiness and pilot onboard, tugs made up arrvied and we were granted permission by the CO to get underway.

Within seconds of taking in the last line, it was apparent that the effects of the currents and wind had us going the opposite of the movement we had surmised. We were not moving fast, but to the trained eye,

the motion was easily recognizedâ€¦and it would lead to, if not countered, taking us somewhere a 30 foot draft vessel should not be, if all concerned wanted to keep the service record free from letters recording errors of judgment and an accounting of unfunded/unplanned expenditures of taxpayers dollars.

CAPT Page, still in the Pilot House, attentive to the evolution, as, as I would learn, a quite experienced ship handler in his own right, was doing what he did. Different from CAPT Hawkins, but eminently worthwhile, he was being â€œthe head safety observer.â€•

Mike stood over my shoulder, quietly using his refined â€œseamanâ€™s eyeâ€• to assess the situation, then said: â€œIt is a foolish man who sticks with a plan, just because it is the plan.â€• Wise words, indeed. We quickly reformulated, he went and briefed â€œthe new guyâ€• and got the nod.

Off we sailed, safely, with no reports other than the routine and expected, into the Med, to continue our support of US and NATO ships plying the seas in defense of the Free World.

Personal lessons learned were at a high water mark, so being â€œprocessedâ€• years later, but many being quite memorable that very day.

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Category

1. Open Trackbacks

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