Monday Maritime Matters

Description

Required reading: Eagle1 on aiming the shipâ€™s guns

and Fred Fryâ€™s Maritime Monday 112!
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Memorial Day, 2008. Iâ€™m going to take a moment to talk about a man who never had a ship named after him, but he is someone I knew, no longer with us, who served, so this is my memorial to him.

CDR David Martin, USN. I met CDR Martin 4/4/1977 as part of my check in process aboard my first command assigned as shipâ€™s company. He was the Executive Officer of USS MILWAUKEE (AOR-2). He was an 1110 (Surface Warfare Officer) working for a captain who was a submariner.Ã, As we sat in his stateroom/office in the after superstructure and he scanned my service record (it was pretty thin back then), he said â€œGreat! Youâ€™ve been to Legal School!â€•Ã, I donâ€™t recall a lot more of the conversation, but it was a Monday, I had sort of dropped into their lap on short notice, but, they had a need for a Combat Information Officer (CICO), as ENS Ralston was leaving soon, and I was it.

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Dave was tall and thin. Bald on top, a smoker, and a seeming no nonsense guy. I recall is that in the about 18 months I served with him, I never heard him raise his voice. What he directed to be done just was. The one time I did see him upset was when the â€œtrollsâ€• (his term for the shore establishment) had screwed us over. I donâ€™t recall what it was they did, but, given his temperament it had to have been something of great significance. That lesson stays with me, as a model of leadership that did not have to be shrill, profane or abusive to have a well run organization.

He got things done, with out directing. He took everything in stride and flexed to keep the organization running. To add to this story, the MILWAUKEE being what she was, was manned with a significant number of experienced crew members, to include many limited duty officers and warrant officers. That made his job easier, but he certainly was a major element in setting the command attitude.

I think the second week I was aboard, we went underway in the VACAPES OPAREA to conduct replenishment operations with a CVN. CDR Martin had indicated I would be assigned to the collateral position as Helicopter Control Officer (HCO), which, in this case, meant I was the â€œairport supervisor.â€• I worked from the control tower, located between the two helo hangers. It was an interior spaces, equipped with the controls for the traffic light to indicate deck status, radios and internal communications circuits and room for three people comfortably. It was about 3AM one morning when Dave knocked on my door and told me it was time to start learning. We headed up to the helo tower and it was so dark, all that you cold see was the scene on the flight deck, illuminated by red flood lights. There was no moon and it was overcast, so everything else around us was pitch black. That began my time as the person sitting in the tower and coordinating the movement of the twin rotored CH-46 SeaKnights for two years. I assume, and I never thought to ask, Dave had been responsible before that, but I might be mistaken. Hours later, well after the sun had risen and the clouds had cleared, I had

seen my first of many major ammo moving evolutions of my career. I was on my way to being the person responsible for ensuring the safe and efficient execution of many more event such as this.

As Public Affairs Officer and Legal Officer, I spent many hours in CDR Martinâ€™s office going over issues from Courts Martial proceeding, administrative separations, Captainâ€™s Mast (Article 15) and Hometown News Release stories. He was fair minded and through, but not a micromanager. He had a dry sense of humor and did regularly refer to the trolls on the beach. Along with just business came much subtle career counseling.

Being but a young married Ensign, and having one car, Dave indicated he would be happy to pick me up and bring me home. In my inexperience, I certainly noted the economy, but failed to understand, before saying yes to the offer, that I would be working the XOâ€™s hours. That, actually, didnâ€™t come to be a conscious thought until much later on. Anyway, Daveâ€™s house was in the Princess Anne Plaza area of Virginia Beach, and I was in the Pembroke vicinity, not far from the mall in an apartment. The other car pooler, who always rode shotgun, was LCDR Leo Pivonka, the Shipâ€™s First LT. I was relegated to the rear seat, and was able to listen in on the many discussions between two very experienced officers had regarding a variety of topics, mostly dealing with the operation of the ship. That was an education you couldnâ€™t have paid for, then or now.

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The XO and First LT always worked beyond the end of the work day, but the advantage was more work got done, and you still got home about the same time. If you left around 4PM, you sat on I-64 and/or the Virginia Beach â€œExpresswayâ€• in traffic, and you got home in about an hour. If you waited until about 4:45 to 5PM to leave the Norfolk Base, you pretty much drove straight home in about 30 minutes (it was 18 miles to my door). Dave taught me that, not by telling me, but showing me during our time inport.

Dave left during our Med Cruise and was relieved by CDR Al Leightly. I recall he left and went to the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV), but he may have gone to the Propulsion Examination Board (PEB) first. After he departed, he continued to mentor me along, now in a more obvious format, via letters, providing guidance in response to my questions.

As Dave approached his retirement, he went for his final physical exam. While having and EKG, they noted he had a minor heart attack. A few days later, three days from retirement, CDR Martin passed away in his sleep. He left behind his wonderful wife, Mame and two teenage sons.

CDR Martin also left an indelible mark on me. How to lead was the deepest one, and throughout my career, I constantly would consider the model he presented for me as to how to approach the next challenge, particularly while I was in my XO job.

The only other piece of Daveâ€™s career I can remember is him telling me he had been the Navigator for the USS NORTHHAMPTON (CC-1). I thought he was a graduate of Kingâ€™s Point, but a check with them doesnâ€™t show him as a student at the Merchant Marine Academy.

Not all those who served have shipâ€™s named after them, yet they all are part of the engine of freedom. CDR Dave Martin is one of them.

Category

1. Navy

Date Created
May 26, 2008
Author
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