Ropeyarn Sunday â€œSea Storiesâ€• and Open Trackbacks

Description

So, last Wednesday, there I had been, dangling over the deck of the USS JOHN KING (DDG-3), with the possibility of being bait for the helo pilots to go fishing, but it ended wellâ€¦They caught no sharks, and I got on deck with nothing more than some sea spray from the rotor wash getting me wet.

So, safely aboard, but still merely an Ensign and not yet qualified as a Surface Warfare Officer, I was to be an exercise observer for the KINGâ€™s missile shot. I was taken to the bridge and introduced to the Captain, then taken to Combat Information Center (CIC), from where I would observe the operation, in order to fill out the form and determine the grade to assign.

USS JOHN KING (DDG-3) was equipped with the TARTAR Guided Missile Fire Control System (GMFCS), using the AN/SPS-37 Air Search and AN/SPG-51C Fire Control RADARs and the Standard medium range missile. One of the SPG-51â€™s was fitted with a boresight black and white TV camera, so operators could validate targets.

So, armed with my checklist from FXP-3, the Fleetâ€™s exercise publication, I found a free spot in the forward end of CIC from where I could observe the crewâ€™s communications and coordination during the shot. I recall it was one of those almost cloudless days. A drone was to be the target, most likely a BQM-74 jet powered one, simulating an inbound aircraft. If you recall from my last discussion, I mentioned that the KING had a characteristic movement in those seas, where the roll and pitch were not distinct, but a combination move, which made it feel as thought one was riding a corkscrew. In all my years of riding ships, it was a unique form of reaction to the seas.

So, I sat, in the darkened room, where information was received, evaluated and disseminated, while many of the crew engaged in what was acceptable behavior back then, they were smoking in an inner space. Not only did the smoke hang visibly next to the overhead, the air conditioning wasnâ€™t

particularly effective, either. Dark, hot, smoky, corkscrewing through the Atlantic Ocean we went, enroute our INCHOP date at the Strait of Gibraltar. The drone was in the air, and once located on the search RADAR, the Tactical Action Officer (TAO) directed the Weapons Coordinator to engage the target. The missile fire control console operator synced his system to the search RADAR track and the AN/SPG-51 slewed to starboard, and the TV monitor conveyed this view to those of us trapped inside the skin of the ship.

This was the second and last time I almost got sea sick. My body told me, as I sat facing aft, that I was roll-pitching in time with a ship headed east. The TV picture now showed the horizon moving, not as a tilting left and right vista, but up and down. Within moments, my body was telling me the visual and the other sensory data wasnâ€™t jiving and it wanted to do something about it. I began taking frequent, and thankfully short walks to the bridge wings, which certainly was in concert with my observer duties for the exercise, as I awaited the target to get within the firing envelope of the missile. I managed to stave off my bodyâ€™s desires and did not embarrass myself by puking in the CIC of the KING.

In time, the shot went off, I collected the appropriate data, as required by the exercise sheet, and was soon repeating the helo transfer, back to USS MILWAUKEE (AOR-2), where I would draft the grading letter for my COâ€™s signature. On the return trip, the rescue hoist of the H-46 worked as designed, and I experienced no more visions of getting dunked into the prop wash of the twin screws of the KING.

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And in case you are curious, the USS JOHN KING (DDG-3) was able to engage the â€œhostileâ€• and received a passing score for her periodic demonstration of her mission area of Anti-Air Warfare (AAW).

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