



# NDINGS

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Running the Navy  
Are We Deceiving Anyone?  
SSNs: Protect the Boomers

# PROCEEDINGS

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## 39 SSNs: Mounting An Offensive Defense

By Lieutenant Commander P. K. Peppe, USN

He who fires the first shot will write the patrol report.

## 42 Gorshkov's Navy—Part II

By Michael MccGwire

The future is murky, but defense of the homeland remains the core mission of the Soviet fleet.

## 48 Soviet Maritime Strategy

By Commander Daniel Conley, RN

We assume they'll concentrate on close-in defense. What if they don't?

## 53 Are We Deceiving Anyone?

By Major John D. LeHockey, USMC

... not until we pay more attention to cover and deception planning.

## 57 Pictorial: Rescue-1

By John Annerino

## 60 Controlling SLCMs: The Most Difficult Question

By David S. Yost

The Soviets say no START agreement without controls on sea-launched cruise missiles; but wait one minute . . .

## 71 Running the Navy

By Paul H. Nitze

In an organization of a million or more, every bad thing that has one chance in a million of going wrong will go wrong at least once every year.

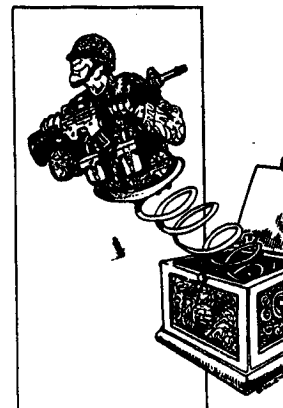
## 78 Dilemma: Coast Guard Women and Combat

By Lieutenant Commander Cynthia A. Nelson, USN

Will the Navy invite them to a come-as-you-are crisis?



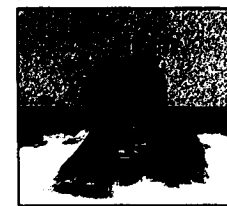
71



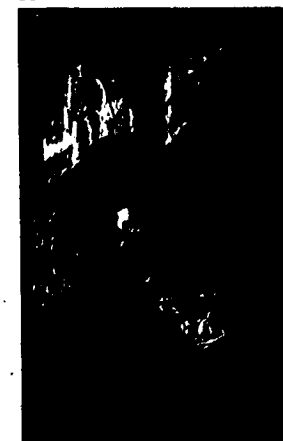
53



98



48



57

## Departments

Nobody asked me, but . . . . . 94

Confusion in the drug wars

Professional Notes . . . . . 98

Recruiting and Retaining

Minority Officers

Bridging the Attack Gap

Reserve P-3s Can Answer the

Forward C<sup>3</sup> Challenge

The Soviet Hunters of the

Komsomolets

Does the Navy Have a Plan?—

You Bet

The Quiet Battlefield

The Challenge of East-West  
Naval Dialogue

U. S. - Soviet Armed Forces  
Exchange Visits

Book Reviews . . . . . 121

The Pentagonists

The Defense Management  
Challenge

U. S. Navy Aircraft 1921—

1941, U. S. Marine Corps

Aircraft 1941—1959

Four Stars

Lethal Frontiers

Special . . . . . 132

Sharpening the Tip of the  
Spear

Other Departments

Secretary's Notes . . . . . 9

Where We Were . . . . . 10

Comment and

Discussion . . . . . 14,87

The Soviet View . . . . . 106

The Soviet Navy . . . . . 119

Books of Interest . . . . . 125

Puzzle . . . . . 128

World Naval

Developments . . . . . 137

Combat Fleets . . . . . 141

Notebook . . . . . 143

Index to Advertisers . . . . . 144

Cover: The Soviets use nuclear attack submarines to protect their strategic submarines. A U. S. Navy submariner suggests a variation on this theme for our SSNs in this month's lead article. (Photo of the USS Salt Lake City [SSN-716] by Steve Kaufman.)

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# Comment and Discussion

(Continued from page 37)

## “Is the Senior CAG a Good Idea”

(See P.D. Voss, pp. 59-65, July 1989 Proceedings)

Captain Vince Huth, U. S. Navy—Commander Voss’s article identifies at least two of the weaknesses in the Senior CAG system: “. . . what is the job of the Deputy CAG” and “. . . success . . . is directly attributable to the personalities of the key senior officers involved.”

The Senior CAG system will probably work, as did the more efficient functional CAG in previous battle group structures. But I’m not sure the Senior CAG system is necessary or a good idea. The Department of Defense and Department of the Navy love to reorganize and as a result seem to get bigger, but not better, staffs. With the Senior CAG we mandated a personality-driven, layered, and more-senior management system to replace a lean war-fighting team. Moreover, do any two Senior CAGs operate alike? Surveys say “no.” The composite warfare commander doctrines are equally compatible to both systems, yet the Senior CAG adds unnecessary staff and dilutes the organizational effectiveness of a competent battle group team.

Unless restrained by budgets, new organizations tend to gain momentum. However, with the Senior CAG, it seems we are building a larger dinosaur.

## “The Vincennes Incident”

(See N. Friedman, pp. 72-79, May 1989 Proceedings)

Commander David R. Carlson, U. S. Navy, Commanding Officer, USS Sides (FFG-14)—I cannot bear to read yet another apologia for the Vincennes (CG-49) incident without commenting. Nearly a year after the incident we have learned little. Many people still believe that the entire affair was precipitated by the Iranians themselves, or that the Vincennes defended herself against an attack. Almost immediately after the event, the

media were full of stories speculating about the number of naked bodies in the water, conjuring up visions of an Iranian F-14 using an airliner as cover for an attack, insinuating that the plane that was shot down was too small to be an Airbus, or . . . . The number of gunboats actually involved in the surface action grew, like Pinocchio’s nose, to a record of 13 or so. Contents of a Sides’s message sent only to the Vincennes, USS Elmer Montgomery (FF-1082), and Commander Joint Task Force Middle East on 3 July began to appear, in bits and pieces, in the news within a few days. (The Sides remained at sea until the investigation team arrived in Bahrain.) Information began to blur. A New York Times article reported falsely that the Sides was “not in the electronic link.” This was not true, but no one ever bothered to ask us about it. In fact, despite the numerous articles written on the subject, to date, not one request for information has come our way.

A review of the facts is in order. When the decision was made to shoot down the Airbus, the airliner was climbing, not diving; it was showing the proper identification friend or foe—IFF (Mode III); and it was in the correct flight corridor from Bandar Abbas to Dubai. The Vincennes was never under attack by Iranian aircraft. There was no targeting being done by the Iranian P-3. There was no coordinated attack involving the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) boats and Iranian military forces. Iran Air Flight 655, also known as track number (TN) 4131, was mistakenly classified by the Vincennes as an Iranian F-14 diving at the ship. This “incomplete” information, as Dr. Friedman chooses to call it, was responsible for the regrettable decision which led to the needless loss of hundreds of lives. Captain Will Rogers III, no doubt, did what he thought he had to do, but he was wrong.

Dr. Friedman attempts to show that events in the Gulf leading up to the incident combined with the misinformation generated in the “fog of war” somehow made the killing inevitable. I don’t buy it. Central to his reasoning is the assumption

that an attack on U. S. forces was likely, and to support this contention he states

“The attack on the USS Stark (FFG-31) in May 1987 had demonstrated that Gulf War combatants would not necessarily make unusual efforts to identify large naval targets before attacking. Moreover, if the Iraqis, who were benefitting from U. S. friendliness, had attacked—accidentally or not—a U. S. warship, the Iranians, who blamed the ‘Great Satan’ for their problems (and who had already lost a major battle to U. S. naval forces in April), were certainly much more likely to attack.”

I respectfully disagree. If the attack on the Stark was truly inadvertent, it proved only that the Iraqis were sloppy in their targeting and that an unalerted U. S. ship could be hit. If the attack was intentional, then it was a successful ploy to get us involved in sorting out their surface picture through the process of elimination that would be made possible by greater cooperation. Neither case would make Iran more or less likely to attack. Further, I see no logic in the assertion that the defeat of Iranian naval forces in April would increase the probability of an attack. To the contrary, if Operation Praying Mantis was their reward for the mining damage done to the USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG-58), the Iranians could only dream what agony might come their way for a blatant attack on the Vincennes.

My experience was that the conduct of Iranian military forces in the month preceding the incident was pointedly non-threatening. They were direct and professional in their communications, and in each instance left no doubt concerning their intentions. Yes, there had been an alert concerning a possible attack during the 4th of July weekend—and every other day—by every conceivable method (or so it seemed). The briefings that I received from two other commanding officers in the Gulf before taking command of the Sides in early June were invaluable. They essentially advised that I read the message traffic, absorb the contents,

then go on deck and look around. Their message was clearly aimed at emphasizing the fact that—war or no war—life in the Gulf went on: fishermen fished; commerce continued; airliners flew. Caution was required, but the mission was to reduce tension when possible, to show by our presence that we were resolved to protect U. S. interests, and to demonstrate prejudice against any unnecessary conflict.

All of us were done grave disservice by an intelligence system that covered its six by forecasting every possible worst-case scenario. Combined with heightened safety concerns (and not a few career concerns as well) in the wake of the *Stark's* and *Samuel B. Roberts's* experiences, this aided in creating an undercurrent of tension and a sense of imminent danger. Crews of ships reporting to the Middle East Force in the summer months were noticeably on edge. Numerous "mines" were spotted that later proved to be bags of trash. One ship felt it necessary to fire at a dhow that refused to alter course to open the distance between it and one of our mobile sea bases despite

repeated radio warnings. This, of course, presumed that the dhow's skipper had a radio and spoke English. Not miraculously, the warning shots did the trick. The dhow departed the area. Was I caught up in any of this? Yes. To a certain extent I believe that everyone was. Who among us did not feel just a little cheated at having missed out on a chance to have been a part of Praying Mantis? I suspect that in the *Vincennes* these feelings ran very strong.

Having watched the performance of the *Vincennes* for a month before the incident, my impression was clearly that an atmosphere of restraint was not her long suit. Her actions appeared to be consistently aggressive, and had become a topic of wardroom conversation. "Who's driving the problem in *Vincennes*?" was a question asked on numerous occasions prior to 3 July. "Robo Cruiser" was the unamusing nickname that someone jokingly came up with for her, and it stuck. My guess was that the crew of the *Vincennes* felt a need to prove the viability of Aegis in the Persian Gulf, and that they hankered for an opportunity to show their

stuff. This, I believe, was the climate that aided in generating the "fog."

Dr. Friedman's attempt to make a plausible case for the "coordinated attack" theory does not pass a reasonableness test. He says, "All the pieces seemed to be present: the speedboats deployed to disrupt AAW [antiair warfare]; the targeting P-3; and the attacking F-14, which was clearly not transmitting so as to avoid alerting the target and which was flying along an airline corridor so that its intentions would be discovered only at the last possible moment." I suppose this could have been remotely possible. But think about it for a second: Why would the F-14 have the IFF energized? Dr. Friedman further tells us that the decision to shoot would have been justified even if Captain Rogers had known that TN 4131 was an Airbus, but he concedes that the altitude information (TN 4131 climbing) "might have helped Captain Rogers decide not to shoot when he did." Spare us more fog. I'd be willing to bet that either the correct identification of TN 4131 as a commercial airliner or the accurate altitude information would have caused

## "Righting the Rules of Engagement"

(See W. P. Parks, pp. 83-93, May 1989 Proceedings)

Colonel W. Hays Parks, U. S. Marine Corps Reserve— Sometimes minor changes can have a major impact on an article. So it was when the editor (with my consent) changed the title of my article to "Righting the Rules of Engagement." Rather than merely providing a list of ingredients that may go into creating rules of engagement (ROE), the new title suggested more of a solution to the ROE dilemma than the article offered. The following postscript is intended to align the article with the title.

Notwithstanding the narrow Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Publication 1 definition, ROE permit an operational commander to integrate his mission authority with equally important concerns about minimizing risk to friendly forces (blue-on-blue) and neutral aircraft and shipping (blue-on-white). To accomplish this, those preparing ROE should ask certain basic questions.

1. *What is my mission?* The authority and limitations ROE place on the use of force depend on a command's mission. The mission assigned to each task force commander in the 1981 and 1986 freedom of navigation (FON) exercises in the Gulf of Sidra was limited. It mandated concomitant ROE regarding delineation of the exercise area, responses to hostile intent or hostile acts, and permissible actions by Libyan forces (such as a legitimate search-and-rescue [SAR] mission for Libyan personnel) if it became necessary for U. S. units to respond with force to a Libyan threat or hostile act. In the Persian Gulf, U. S. forces had a neutral role: to enforce freedom of the high seas. This role carried with it a more limited mission than those attributable to a combatant. Rather than rattling sabers or "bashing" either belligerent, the United States and its conneutral partners were to speak softly—albeit with a strong presence—while carrying a big enough stick to prevent certain actions by either belligerent.

The ROE recognized the mission's limited objectives by restricting certain acts by U. S. forces such as hot pursuit; preventing an attack was the mission. In contrast, certain missions authorized the selective use of force to dissuade Iran from specific actions that the National Command Authorities (NCA) regarded as illegal; although the operations may have been offensive, the U. S. resort to force pursued limited objectives. Hence examining the mission statement should be the foundation for ROE preparation.

In looking at the mission, it is important to determine *when* the mission is to be executed. This not only concerns the amount of time allowed for the planning and coordination/deconfliction purposes, but the time of day. Awareness of the situation is affected demonstrably at night or by adverse weather, when deconfliction becomes all the more important to minimize blue-on-blue risks. *Where* the mission is to occur also is important, so that the mission commander and staff can determine the proximity of the mission area to international trade routes to minimize blue-on-white risks.

2. *In peacetime, what is the NCA endeavoring to accomplish by this mission?* Libyan operations over the past eight years illustrate the importance of this question, as they have ranged from a transit and/or presence mission, to a FON exercise, to an attack on terrorist-related targets. The spectrum of military action ranged from minimum force in self-defense to maximum destruction of military targets. Understanding the purpose for a mission will significantly affect the ROE.

3. *Whom should I assign to prepare ROE?* While everyone seems to agree that ROE are important, no one is trained as a ROE expert; lamentably the service staff and war colleges spend minimal time, if any, addressing the topic.<sup>1</sup>

Frequently a commander's automatic response is to assign ROE responsibility to the intelligence officer or judge advocate. Neither should be given principal responsibility for this task be-

question enough for reassessment of the threat. Both pieces of information would certainly be sufficient to justify a decision not to shoot. The information was available in the *Vincennes* and was mishandled. It was also mishandled in the *Sides*.

During the incident, the *Sides* was less than 20 nautical miles from the *Vincennes* and under the *Vincennes's* tactical command. The *Sides* went to general quarters moments after the *Vincennes* obtained permission to take the IRGC boats under fire with guns, presumably in retaliation for the reported firing on the *Vincennes's* helicopter. My tactical action officer (TAO) brought TN 4131 to my attention and advised me that the *Vincennes* had classified it as an Iranian F-14. My major concern at that point was the growing possibility of surface action as a result of the goings-on with the *Vincennes* and the speedboats. I was also prepared to deal with an air threat, but in all honesty did not perceive one. Regardless, we followed what had become standard procedure. We locked up and illuminated TN 4131 with our missile fire control radar. The aircraft continued climbing on a

southwesterly course that would take it directly over the *Vincennes's* position. Based on closest point of approach to the *Sides* (range and altitude), lack of any significant known F-14 antisurface warfare (ASUW) capability (speculation about Harpoon aside), lack of detected radar emissions, and precedent, I evaluated the track as a nonthreat. I continued to press my TAO for information concerning attempts to warn off TN 4131 and was advised that numerous attempts had been made without success, and that the effort was continuing. TN 4131 did not appear to react to the illumination with fire control radar, and this was most unusual. The *Vincennes* announced her intentions to take TN 4131 with missiles at 20 miles. I wondered aloud in disbelief, but I did not do the one thing that might have helped. I did not think to push for a reevaluation of IFF. Had I done so, the information might have come forward quickly enough to allow me to attempt to dissuade the *Vincennes* from shooting. I had mistrusted my own feelings and presumed that the quality of information in the *Vincennes* had to justify her decision.

It was, after all the *Vincennes's* track, and I was not in the classification business at the time. This was bad reasoning. TN 4131 was destroyed before I was made aware that it was not an F-14.

How information is processed (and by whom) is at the heart of the problem, and Dr. Friedman hits one nail on the head when he suggests a requirement for more readable displays. He is way off, however, when he states that we really cannot do that much better. We must. Nothing is served by saying otherwise. No gain is made by ducking the issues. No profit has come from the pathetic postincident attempts to place the blame on the victims. View it as you will, Iran Air Flight 655 was shot down for no good reason. Dr. Friedman states: "Almost certainly the airport at Bandar Abbas was entirely unaware that the airliner was being sent over an ongoing surface battle, since the IRGC seems to have had little or no detailed instruction from the top." If this is true, then Dr. Friedman is telling us that the IRGC speedboats were most likely working alone—without the assistance of the "badly disorganized" Iranian command

cause doing so would place a no-risk officer in charge of a high-risk task. While each may be able to contribute to preparing ROE, principal responsibility should be placed in the hands of individuals directly involved in executing the mission.<sup>2</sup>

Representatives of the communities participating in the mission, such as surface warfare, aviation (fighter, attack, etc.), special operations, combat SAR, or electronic warfare should be entrusted with preparing ROE. This means all will understand the drafted ROE, and deconfliction will be facilitated.

Once the ROE have been approved, it is the commander's responsibility to ensure that higher authority and subordinate commands and elements have a clear, common understanding of the ROE in the context of the operation being planned.

4. *What is the threat?* In ROE preparation, one must ask this question in a larger context than the usual numbers and capabilities of any potential threat. The answer may depend largely on the track record of the threat. The situation resembles a credit check before obtaining a loan; one may have little money in one's checking account at the moment, but the controlling factor will be the record for payment of bills on time. Whether a nation is operating at a credit or debit in the threat category influences the ROE for operations in that area.

Enemy aircraft frequently meet U. S. naval forces transiting their area, during which time they may engage in some air combat maneuvering against U. S. aircraft. U. S. units are likely to restrict their resort to force where the challenge historically has been "friendly;" the 4 January 1989 downing of two Libyan MiG-23 Floggers by F-14 Tomcats from the USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67) illustrates the importance of greater caution where a nation's track record is not so benign.

5. *Who is involved?* A mission may include other armed services, as in the 1986 Libyan airstrike, or other nations, as was contemplated in considering options off Beirut in November

1983; both other services and other nations were actively involved in Persian Gulf operations. Either or both compound the risk to friendly forces, requiring emphasis on deconfliction and ROE to minimize that risk.

6. *Are there any unique NCA concerns?* An example provided in the original article is the concern frequently expressed by the NCA, JCS, and others regarding the potential risk of capture of U. S. personnel. Such concerns will affect force and target selection, as well as the ROE *per se*.

7. *What are my ROE sources?* A basic planning document is the JCS Worldwide Peacetime Rules of Engagement. The boilerplate on self-defense is fundamental to any peacetime operation. If further guidance is required, the supplemental rules should be reviewed to determine which, if any, are appropriate to the mission at hand. If none fit exactly, some may be appropriate after amendment. They are not etched in stone. The supplemental rules are tools to assist a planner, and should be viewed as such.

The final tool—and an important one—is common sense. An ultimate test should be whether each participant in ROE preparation would be willing to strap on a F/A-18, kick the tires, light the fires, and fly the mission with the ROE that he or she has prepared.

<sup>1</sup>During the author's year (1984-85) at the Naval War College, he offered to teach an elective course on ROE. The students expressed interest, but the faculty resistance was greater—on the grounds that ROE was not germane to the college's mission.

<sup>2</sup>A qualified judge advocate can be of immense value in ROE preparation. Thus the naval judge advocate at U. S. European Command performed journeyman work in conjunction with the 1986 Libyan operations. But most judge advocates lack the background knowledge, training, and experience in their client's business to be of value in ROE preparation. Most certainly they should not be entrusted with the principal or sole responsibility for ROE preparation, as has happened.

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structure. It follows then that the possibility of a planned surface attack by the IRGC with Iranian military sponsorship was as remote as the possibility of a coordinated attack.

Dr. Friedman tells us that on the morning of 3 July the *Vincennes* launched her helicopter to investigate a report of small Iranian gunboats, and that the helicopter had been fired at. In fact, a report was made by the *Vincennes* claiming that shots had been seen passing in front of her LAMPS III's canopy. Considering the range of the automatic weapons available in the speedboats, one can reason that the *Vincennes*'s helicopter was just too damned close to the boats for its own good. The helicopter was not hit—even at a range close enough for the tracers to pass in front of the canopy. Was the helicopter "attacked," or was it more likely that the IRGC boats were simply trying to chase it off? The Iranians had been known to fire warning shots at news helicopters to keep them away. Next, Dr. Friedman explains that the *Vincennes* "moved into a position" to "drive off" the boats, and at that point the helicopter returned to the ship. We are further told that the boats "did not leave the area even after the cruiser began to fire." I'll grant that the boats may have been faster than the *Vincennes*, but the LAMPS III was no doubt out of the speedboats' weapons range (or close to it) before the report was made. I would then seriously question the need for assuming the "driving-off" position. The *Vincennes* asked for permission to shoot (a time-consuming request that was passed through two levels of the chain of command and required the answering of several questions)—permission as I understand it that would not be necessary if the action was required for self-defense. According to Dr. Friedman, the helicopter was back on board the *Vincennes* before the surface action started, so the shots were not apparently being fired in defense of the helicopter either.

Was the firing on the *Vincennes*'s helicopter planned? Did the IRGC boats lure the LAMPS III in to stir up a battle? Was this to be the beginning of the hotly anticipated major attack on the "Great Satan"? To say that this appeared to be unlikely would be an understatement. Was the *Vincennes* incapable of opening the boats during or after recovery of the helicopter, or was she hell-bent for action? In fact, after she took tactical command of the *Elmer Montgomery*, both ships proceeded to close the position of the small boats at high speed. When

two of those boats were observed turning toward the *Vincennes* and the *Elmer Montgomery*, the action was apparently believed to be a demonstration of hostile intent. From this point on, details of the surface action are somewhat unclear. It appears, however, that the *Vincennes* was first to open fire and that she was actively involved in the surface engagement throughout the entire flight of the Iranian Airbus. How did this great surface battle end? We are told only that the *Elmer Montgomery* and the *Vincennes* disengaged the small boats when they ceased presenting a threat to U. S. ships—a condition that I suggest also existed before the decision was made to close the boats' position at high speed some 50 minutes earlier.

Was the *Vincennes* attacked? Stating that the speedboats did not leave the area after the cruiser began to fire is a curious way indeed to describe an attack. It just does not add up. The harder you look at it, the more absurd the concept seems that a few speedboats would be taking on the *Vincennes* and the *Elmer Montgomery* with any notion of success. In any event, they would surely not want to alert the *Vincennes* by shooting at the helicopter. I hold a minority view: The helicopter drew fire because it was a nuisance to the IRGC boats. The *Vincennes* saw an opportunity for action, and pressed hard for Commander Middle East Force to give permission to fire. Deescalation went out the window. Equipment failed. The "fog" rolled in. . . .

At the time of the disaster the rush to put a happy face on the entire affair did not serve us well. It may have been politically correct in view of the many high-level official U. S. government statements immediately after the incident endorsing the *Vincennes*'s action. As military professionals, however, we owe ourselves more. We need to examine the issues, ask the hard questions, and get on with improvements in training and information processing. We need to stress the requirement for the quality of personnel as well as systems, and to divorce tactical thought—as much as possible—from political influence. We need to get smart about which systems to employ in various scenarios.

The main lesson here is not, and should not be, that "wars beget accidents." That is axiomatic, but we were not at war. Above all, we must not concede that "accidents—terrible accidents like this one—are unavoidable." That is a cop-out. This tragedy was avoidable, and we must learn from it.