Comment and Discussion

Contents

"What I Learned in Command at Sea"

(*See* C. M. Gaouette, pp. 32-36, January 2007 *Proceedings*)

Command Master Chief Petty Officer R. Mark Cummings, U.S. Navy—I thoroughly enjoyed reading Captain Gaouette's article. His remarks were well thought out and accurate in my experience relating to commanding officers at sea. I only noticed one omission that troubled me and that was the lack of mention of the important relationship between the commanding officer and the command master chief.

The CO/CMC leg of the command triad is critical to functional command operation just as is the CO/XO leg and the XO/CMC leg. If dysfunction exists in any of these relationships, command effectiveness will suffer. Recognizing this fact, the Navy places special emphasis on the CO/XO/CMC relationship through dedicated training time during the prospective CO/XO/CMC courses in Newport, Rhode Island. Stress is placed on the critical significance of this three-way association as it applies to overall command leadership.

U.S. NAVY (JEFFREY S. KEENEY)

New or veteran commanding officers should never forget that the command master chief not only provides the vital leadership link to the Chiefs' Mess but also keeps his or her fingers on the pulse of the crew, able to provide invaluable advice regarding morale and Sailor matters as they pertain to operational readiness. Any commanding officer who wants to fully succeed during command at sea would be making a fatal error by not fully using the command master chief and recognizing him or her as an essential partner in command leadership. This point should be considered with the other outstanding advice presented in the article.

"LCS: A Step, Not an End"

(*See* W. J. Holland, pp. 50-54, January 2007 *Proceedings*)

Craig Hooper—If Mark Twain is any guide, it seems Rear Admiral W. J. Holland Jr. holds the same "mortal hatred" for "small-fry craft" that Mississippi River steamboat captains once reserved for rafts and barges!

If, as Rear Admiral Holland claims, small World War II-era escorts were so fragile that all were retired after a few years of operation, why, then, did some remain in active service for decades? A handful of tiny 850-ton patrol craft escorts, 1,400 ton *Buckley*-class destroyer escorts, and the *Rudderow* destroyer escort/*Crosley*-class high-speed transport conversions served throughout World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, enjoying a longer life than many 8,000-ton *Spruance*-class destroyers. Just as funding shortfalls made the bulky *Spruance* class redundant, economics, rather than structural defect, forced the wholesale retirement of small craft after World War II.

Displacement is no cure-all. How many modern warships, after a hard hit, are able to retain their status as a combat asset? The USS *Princeton* (CG-59), after striking Iraqi mines, had to be towed out of the minefield and, ultimately, dragged off to Bahrain. Though the vessel retained some combat capability, the disabled *Princeton* was a battlefield liability, forcing a reallocation of combat assets (HMCS *Athabaskan* among others) and endangering the vessels required for rescue, USS *Adroit* (MSO-509) and USS *Beaufort* (ATS-2). Nobody at the time considered the battered *Princeton* a true combat asset.

Though the information from the USS *America* (CV-66) sinking exercise remains classified, the structural resiliency of large ships in the face of present-day weaponry appears to leave something to be desired. Even the commanding officer of the USS *Tripoli* (LPH-10), in the U.S. Naval Institute's own treatment of the Persian Gulf War (*Shield and Sword* by Marolda and Schneller, p. 265), believed that, had the seas been rougher, the *Tripoli*, a robustly constructed, 19,000-ton product of 1950s shipbuilding technology, would likely have sunk.

Enter the Forum

We welcome brief comments (500 words or less) on material published in *Proceedings*.

Submit items by mail, fax, or e-mail to: commentanddiscussion@usni.org.

Please include your return address and a daytime phone number.

Readiness does much more for a ship than displacement. The 4,100-ton HMS *Sheffield*, sunk by an Exocet missile, was unprepared and allowed the missile to hit vital areas. In contrast, the 6,200-ton HMS *Glamorgan* survived an Exocet strike, but fast maneuvering minimized the missile's impact. In this case, displacement had nothing to do with survival, and, in fact, the extra bulk likely made the hit unavoidable. A prepared small ship, the 3,600-ton Type 21 frigate HMS *Avenger*, armed with nothing more than guts, good weapons intelligence, and a ready crew, was able to out-maneuver and completely avoid a seemingly inevitable hit by a locked-on Exocet.

Displacement, no matter how strongly argued, will not change the fact that modern, thin-skinned warships are fragile things. Good seamanship, when coupled with imaginative and ready officers, contributes far more to ship survivability than the capacity inherent in a few thousand added tons. Rather than become indignant over the prospect of "small-fry" naval assets, it is time to devote serious thought to the idea that extra weight may make warships more vulnerable, both in terms of perceived value and in actual fact.

Robert A. Lynch—Rear Admiral Holland reminds us of proven design factors that limit the utility of small Navy ships. However, one major feature could salvage the LCS concept. Air availability is a major concern for most operations. If this capability must be provided by a carrier task force to support an LCS, the reduced cost goals of the vessel suddenly disappear.

The LCS is designed to carry an H-60 helicopter for self-contained support, but sending a manned helicopter to survey a land target for ships' guns or missiles could be a suicide mission. The LCS is an ideal platform for an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). This would not be an overgrown model airplane (hand-launched), an unmanned helicopter, or a jet fighter with the pilot seat removed. The UAV system would use a vehicle resembling the size and capability of the U.S. Air Force's Predator. Such a vehicle is technically available. This system would have a major impact on LCS requirements and capabilities.

The unnecessary requirement for a maximum speed of 40 knots seems to drive the design in many regards. The LCS could launch a UAV up to 500 nautical miles from the area of interest and reach it at a speed of 500 knots. The fact that the ship could make 40 knots is not significant. If that speed is required to escape a threat, Rear Admiral Holland points out that the relative closing speed of missile and ship would not be much different at any ship speed. Increased standoff range provided by the UAV would be more valuable.

The article points out that the current littoral combat ships are limited in the aperture size of antennas, limiting data and communication performance. Relay from UAV-carried antennas orbiting continuously over the ship at 10,000 feet would tend to eliminate this restriction.

The UAV can increase the ship's weapon payload compared to ship-launched weapons. A 500-pound warhead does not need a long-range booster when it is delivered by a reusable UAV. True, the UAV system takes up space but probably no more than the H-60 helicopters, which could then be eliminated.

Operating a UAV, including automated safe launch and recovery from a small ship day and night and in high sea state, is technically achievable and concepts have been suggested to the Navy and ship contractors.

The size and displacement of the *Oliver Hazard Perry*-class frigate with a robust

(continued on page 73)

Another View