The Fleet's Combat Systems are a mess….go figure! Some history

Description

This began as a reply to a comment at CDR Salamander's place.Â In the past week, it has come to light that the Fleet has major problems keeping their maintenance up.Â Most disturbing is the remarks by VADM Phil Balisle's, USN (Ret) report on the lack of readiness of the AEGIS Radar Systems.

The sad part is things to have kept this on track were in place in the early 90s, and by the mid-90s, some senior officers, one in particular who had failed the examination, made sure the inspection mechanism was retired when he got to COMNAVSURFLANT Staff as the Combat Systems Readiness Officer.

I decided to leave part of the quote over there, and keep going here, to save space…and for those interested in the history behind this, and what, if anything, it may have prevented.

> Interesting.Â Back to the early 90's when ADM Kelso determined we're pursue TQM/TQL with a vengeance, the famous demo was the red bead/white bead input, and how, without TQM/TQL, you can't shoot the assembly line worked, it's management, who has not ensured a proper input resource is actually to blame.
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> Sounds to me like someone decided, at upper levels to reject such thinking and just wing it and…blame the COs.Â Wrong.Â And bad for the future.Â On another note, it was passed on to me, this sort of professional blood bath followed at the end of the Vietnam era, when, ships that had been run into the ground and had been denied maintenance, surprise, surprise…had major engineering accidents that killed many and wounded many more…Who's fault?Â The CO and CHENG, for not ensuring safe operations, while suffering from a paucity of parts.Â The outcome begat the PEBs, and…for a time, the crews also were hacked to death (figuratively speaking in the professional realm), because they couldn't get the plant safe…again without much help.Â Then the shore side began to come on line and provide support, and things improved, but not after much real and professional blood was shed.Â The beast grew to consume the lives of many.
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> Now, I have a personal peave:Â CAPT Balisle's first day @ CSMTT in 1992 (after his return from the Gulf War as the USN Rep to the air war) was spent in CNSL N5's office (Bob Crawshaw), as I laid out how to make the CSA an analog of the OPPE,…

And here's the rest of my addition to the discussion:

as it had been set up a few years earlier as a mini-INSURV by Pete Bulkeley. That was Feb. At a CSA Standardization Conference (at that time, the ISIC's staffs did some of the CSAs), CAPT Bob Crawshaw asked us how we might retool the process, for a few reasons:

1) To not have it overlap with what INSURV did.

2) To be able to assess readiness in the Combat System's arena and provide a method to modify the shore based training process based on measured results, in the same manner the Troubled Systems program, designed by CAPT Mort Kenyon and programmed/implemented by CAPT Bob Crawshaw, had done for equipment readiness.

I've got the full name of the program for the Combat Systems equipment not right, I'm thinking "Troubled Systems Program" (TSP), as I had the "TTP" (Troubled Training Program) concept tossed in my lap as a result of the discussion. I'll leave that evolution to another post for the details…

By August, the plan was signed out (actually on the day I first met CDR Joe Sestak…history!) We changed it because the current form was redundant with many material inspections, and had only a hint "are they capable of training?" That changed. we had some checks of material for safety, then we ran the crews in CSTT drills, and did a DTE, which was graded on the INSURV std for that event: "Did the system work to spec?" CSAs were done about annually, and we collected a mountain of info. The plan was to be able to ferret out what knowledge holes and peaks there were in the fleet, to be able to help the shore based system adjust the input training. Almost got there…but I rolled. At the next job, I was actually in Mayport running a trial for the first stages of BFTT on a AEGIS CG, when we heard the new N5 @ CNSL had convinced CNSL to cancel CSAs as worthless…oh…yeah…he was one of the few COs that ever tubed a CSA, but I'm sure there was no agenda behind that.

So, there we were, with teams of 13-20+, going aboard ships (They always said the were glad we were there!) and scouring first the administration and safety, then the capability of the Combat Systems Training Team (CSTT), and finally a "detect to engage" (DTE) to check all but live firing checks of the AAW weapons system aboard. To pass the DTE, the systems couldn't have any reported faults, then the detection systems had to be within 10% of max range, and simulated weapons had to be employed. Min-INSURV as noted above, but…all of this collected data for deeper analysis.

The point of the Combat Systems Assessment (CSA) was not to collect data, but to assess the ship's readiness to join up with their respective battle groups for team training at that level. The byproduct was the scores listed on the grading sheets. It was a 3 part, 100 point each part check, using "refined professional subjectivity (for we can never have people be really objective).

My follow on job was managing programs at FCDSSA Dam Neck, one of them being the Battle Force Tactical Training (BFTT) system. Because of my work at the CNSL CSMTT/ATG CSTG, I regularly went to meetings about how to automate training and also what metrics the system could collect. That type of meetings led to me leading a team of very experienced Combat Systems trainers/evaluators from the AEGIS and other communities, to be able to compare the fledging software of BFTT to help in the grading of the training exercises. We did the human thing and the many civil service and contractor "experts" took their readings. It was a great opportunity to look at human reactions in a simulated battle problems, but what's important in this history: The CSA inspections were canceled the very day we were aboard the TICONDEROGA Class CG conducting this test run.

So, after that person insight, we have VADM Balisle, who literally walked into check in and then rode with CDR Davis and myself to show CAPT Crawshaw my single page PPT Slide (yes, PPT did exist in the early 90s…but Harvard Graphics had been used not long before) about how we could meet his two requirements for a re-organized CSA process, ala the Total Quality Leadership/Management philosophy: Know what you know because you know it!

Consider what information may have been to short stop the horrific degradation of the ability of our ships to execute their missions as warships, if we had been as invested in the combat systems readiness, as we had and have in engineering excellence.

VADM Balisle was a key player in getting this in place, even though it was my staff of an LDO LT (Now CAPT Russ Wycoff, USN (Ret)) and room command full of excellent E-8s and -9s, who all were the team who made it happen.

Because one CO got ripped for failing, then…after a major failure in the combat systems world, got assigned to CNSL Combat Systems Readiness post and got the ear of the new CNSL (after VADM Paul Reason, who ever that was) to cancel what might have been a firewall against future failure.

I have no input now, being out of uniform for over a decade, but it pains me to hear it has gotten like this.

Comments?

And it you were one of those many Division Officers who had to sit with me and discuss PQS, I'd like to hear from you. And CSOs/OPS Bosses who also got to sit and discuss qualifiactions and training…drop me a line.

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