Life in the Fat Ship Navy

Description

Warning: I'm pulling the not completed novel over from the "jr" blog…so it will look ugly here for a while….

Life in the "Fat Ship" Navy – Part I

or: Moving Bullets, Beans and Black Oil – Part I

In the style of Neptunus Lex in his Rhythms series of posts

, here is an account of a "UNREPs" (Underway Replenishments) from the other side….If you're not familiar with his series of posts, chase his "previous" links back to the beginning of his series and read them all. They protray a very real picture of what happens "out there."

And, now on with the show…

Settled in on base course and speed, the USS MILWAUKEE (AOR-2) steamed at 12 knots on a southerly course in the North AFWTF (Atlantic Fleet Weapons Traing Facility) Operating Area north of Puerto Rico. Flying half way up on the outboard halyards, both port and starboard, are the "R" or "ROMEO" signal flags, signalling the crew is still making preparations to receive vessels alongside while moving.

OOD: "XO, the Replenishment at Sea Checklist is Complete.

OOD: "Request permission to receive ships alongside port and starboard."

XO: "Standby. Captain, the checklist in complete. Request permission to commence UNREP"

CO: "Granted!"

XO: "OOD, permission granted to commence UNREP. Pass the word."

OOD: "Boatswainâ€™s Mate of the Watch: Pass the word 'Standby to receive ships port and starboard, at stations 3, 4,

6, 7, 10, 11 and 12!'"

BMOW: "Aye, aye, Sir!"

The BMOW flips on all circuits and sounds "attention" followed by "all hands" on his bosâ€™n pipe, the verbatim announces the order into the General Announcing System (1MC) microphone. The crew all about the ship shift their attention to the detailed evolution that is to follow.

Standing half in, half out of the port bridge wing door, I glance aft at the starboard bow of the NIMITZ Class aircraft carrier. They are holding in â€œWaiting Stationâ€• astern of us, offset to our port side. Despite the safe distance, she seems very close. I look to the port bridgewing and see the Junior Officer of the Deck (JOOD) is standing with his left arm wrapped around the gyro repeater, his head tilted so he can quickly check the Shipâ€™s course, yet not take his glance from ahead of the Ship for more than a few almost immeasurable moments, certainly less than a second. His binoculars hang from his neck, a MC handset in his hand, feet planted firmly. Looking inside the bridge, the Helm Safety Officer is standing diligently behind the Helmsman and Lee Helmsman, a set of sound powered phones on his head, with one ear piece pushed back behind his ear. His right hand clutches the mouthpiece, holding the metal plate away from his chest, the rubber mouthpiece about an inch from his lips, with his index finger poised over the button he will push to talk to Main Control and After Steering, if the need arises in an emergency.

I step out fully onto the port wing of the Bridge and look up to the next deck. “Sigs, Close up ROMEO port and starboard!” “Aye, Sir!” comes back, as the petty officer at the flag bag gives a takes the line off the belaying pin for the outer halyard and smartly hand over hands the line until the ROMEO signal flag is raised to the yardarm.

“Sigs, stand by the restricted maneuvering signal.” “Aye, aye, Sir!” I scan between the UNREP rig posts, looking back to the area of the starboard quarter. The aft superstructure obscures my view of the waiting destroyer, but I know she is also patiently waiting her turn for a “drink.” I look at the halyards of the CV, her ROMEO is still “dipped.” The BMOW calls that the Aft Lookout reports the destroyer is commencing her approach to starboard.

“Pass the word ‘The SPRUANCE is Commencing her approach to starboard!'” “Captain, the SPRUANCE is coming along side.” “Very Well.” I see the CV is raising her ROMEO to her yardarm now. “Captain, the NIMITZ is beginning her approach.” “Roger!” â€œBoats, the NIMITZ is commencing her approach to port!â€• The announcements of each of these two events is passed and the crew heightens their alertness. The replenishment rig crews, wearing kapok inherently buoyant orange lifejackets, construction style hard hats, stand in a line at parade rest, facing outboard. Their bell bottom trouser legs have all been turned around their ankles and secured in their socks above the top of their â€œboondockers.â€• The adjustment straps of the life jackets are similarly secured, keeping the long, loose ends tucked away for safety. The color of the plastic helmets indicate the responsibility of the men at the rigs. Some also wear long sleeved flight deck jerseys under their life jackets to further identify them to our crew, and to the crews that will be facing them from about 160 feet away in just a few minutes. Messenger lines are snaked out on the deck near the crew, neatly â€œfakedâ€• for ease of use. The gunnerâ€™s mate in the red jersey holds an M-14 on his hip, a seemingly strange attachment, looking like a beer can with the end cut off is mounted on the barrel.

Protruding from this â€œbeer canâ€• like arrangement is a large plastic projectile, the steel rod attached to it hidden in the barrel, and a small piece of orange line connects this contraption with a spool on the deck beside the gunnerâ€™s mate. Forklifts run down the center of the rolling deck delivering palletized material to the replenishment stations.

“Sir, Aft lookout reports the bow of the SPRUANCE has crossed our stern.” “Pass the word: The Ship is now in restricted maneuvering.” “Aye, Aye, Sir!” With this word being passed, pre-planned actions change. No longer are we a single entity in a big blue ocean. Our 40,000 tons of steel, fuel, bombs,

bullets, chow and spare parts is now caged in. The Engineer and his Engineering Officer of the Watch (EOOW), know if a casualty to the propulsion plant occurs, they are required to keep us moving, even if it means sacrificing some of the extremely costly machinery, until the Captain and the rest of the shipâ€™s control personnel can get the ship into a condition where the engineers are free to make decisions to save the plant. The radar operators and lookouts become more vigilant for traffic that may normally require the ship to maneuver, but now has the right of way. On hearing this word, the signalman briskly hoists the black “ball â€“ diamond â€“ ball” set of “day shapes” to the yard arm. Regardless, some civilian vessels are poorly manned and donâ€™t pay attention, so an early decision may have to be made to do an emergency breakaway from the replenishment in order to avoid a collision. “The NIMITZ has crossed our stern!” I look to the starboard side and can now see the bow of the SPRUANCE passing Station 7. “Boats: Pass the word on topside: On the SPRUANCE, Welcome alongside USS MILWAUKEE. Standby to receive shot lines fore and aft!” The XO, perched in the starboard bridge wing chair, passes orders to the starboard unrep stations via his bridge to station sound powered telephone talker. He is in control of the routine operation of that side of the ship. The Captain is busy scanning the starboard side to the NIMITZ as she moves forward at about 5 knots relative speed. 40K tons. His eyes are alert for seemingly minor shifts in the bow of the CV as she closes. As the bow of the NIMITZ came abeam our stern, there is a suction action that occurred. In this case, the our stern is more likely to be pulled in the direction of the CV, as they outweigh us by about 10K tons more than we displace. Our helmsman, supervised by two sets of eyes, will compensate for the interaction. The SPRUANCE, on the starboard side, will have her bow pulled towards us. Her helmsman and bridge watch team will adjust accordingly.

The whine of the SPRUANCEâ€™s LM-2500 engines slows, as she settles alongside, matching, within feet, the position of her fueling stations to ours. A shot rings out, followed by another as the forward and aft gunnerâ€™s mate fire the blanks that then propel the plastic tipped projectile, that trails the shot line. The small orange line arcs up and over to the destroyer, a mere 120 ft away. Station crews on both vessels break ranks and get to work. Line handlers tend the outgoing shot line and then attach it to the messenger. On the SPRUANCE, a group of line handlers heave around in unison, quickly getting the messenger aboard.

“Boats, welcome the NIMITZ. They will shoot to us.” “On the NIMITZ. Welcome alongside USS MILWAUKEE. We are ready to receive your shot lines fore and aft!” “Sigs, Strike ROMEO port and starboard!” “Aye, aye!” “Sir, Fuel Control Central wants to know how much JP NIMITZ needs.” “CIC, Bridge. Get out the RAS message, confirm the amount of JP from NIMITZ and then call Fuel Control.” “Roger.” More shots ring out, but this time the shot lines fly across our deck and the line handlers scramble to recover them. They find the end, and attach it to the messenger line. At Station 4, a fueling station, the rig captain tells his signalman to give the “heave around” signal to the NIMITZ. The signalman begins circling his green paddle in front of him. The CV crew hauls in the line.

I walk between the two sides of the ship, usually through the pilot house. My eyes scan a myriad of places, ones I donâ€™t even have to consciously think about much anymore. My ears are tuned to the sound of the radio and internal circuit. The scan is both to ensure the normal operation of so many things, and primed to react to anything out of the ordinary. A quick conscious glance at the chart. Our UNREP course is pointing us at Puerto Rico, but it is still a ways off just now. Dropping my face to look into the hood over the AN/SPA-4 radar repeater, as my hand grasps for the ever present yellow or white grease pencil tucked in between the bezel of the repeater and the intensity control knobs. Then my hand pushes into the hood through the flap and I place a small dot of grease over the current

position of each contact, our formation ships, and the â€œskunks.â€• I then connect the new dots with the prior dots for each contact. Most of the formation ships are in the same relative spot. Other unidentified, assumed friendly, contacts are tracking so as to be well clear of us at their “CPAs” (closest point of approach). I then deliberately, but quickly concentrate on the overall picture, focusing on the place right behind the sweep of the AN/SPS-10 surface search radar, looking for new contacts. My ears remain scanning the many audio signals around me. Things are normal. Standing upright from my hunched over position, I look forward, out the windows and ahead of the ship. Our escorts patrol ahead of us. A LAMPS Mk I SH-2F helo skims low over the water on our starboard bow, heading parallel, and opposite to our course, offset about 500 feet.

From the starboard wing, I hear the XOâ€™s phone talker, one of the shipâ€™s yeoman, say to the Exec: “Request permission to tension the span wire forward on SPRUANCE.” The XO raises his voice against the moderate wind and says: “OOD, tensioning forward!” “Permission granted to tension forward.” He says to his talker. Announce, loud enough to be heard in the entire pilot house: “Tensioning forward, starboard side!” The helm safety officer repeats the message verbatim into his sound powered phones, informing both main control and aftersteering of the current conditions. The helmsman focuses closely on his gyro repeater, and notices a slight course change to the right. He compensates with a well practiced hand on the large shipâ€™s wheel. This cycle for the after connected fueling station on SPRUANCE repeats in quick succession.

I walk to the port wing, and stand next to the JOOD, looking at the massive ship alongside us, having to look slightly up to the flight deck level. We are almost completely full of the 6 million gallons of F-76 diesel fuel, and 2 millions gallons of JP-5 jet fuel. We are drawing every bit of our designed 40â€™ of draft. “Sir, request permission to commence pumping to SPRUANCE.” “Standby. Captain, weâ€™re ready to pump to SPRUANCE.” “Commence pumping to SPRUANCE.” “Permission granted to commence pumping to SPRUANCE.”

Dolphins are riding the bow wave of the NIMITZ. About 180 feet from me, a pod of these mammals are not only keeping pace with the ship, they burst ahead, leaping clear of the water. Sometimes they barrel roll while airborne. Using the hydrodynamics of the water pushed ahead of the bulbous bow of the CV, they donâ€™t appear to be using much energy, unless they are launching themselves into the air. Thatâ€™s when you see the exaggerated movements of their tails, otherwise, they are just cruising. I look inboard and up. One of the signalmen is doing semaphore without flags to the signal bridge on the NIMITZ. He breaks into a big smile and chuckles. Sometimes, you just didnâ€™t want to ask what that was about.

PRITAC comes to life with the screen commander sending a delayed executive coded message to CONYNGHAM from her screening station to lifeguard station on us, flowed with direction to JOHN KING to prepare to move to waiting station starboard on us. Both ships roger for the messages. SPRUANCE doesnâ€™t need much fuel today, and we are only passing one pallet of 5?/54 caliber BLP projectiles (Blank load and plugged non-explosive rounds, used for practice shoots) to her. She should be alongside only about 30 minutes. The â€œskunksâ€• are still tracking safely away from us. The sky is clear, the seas low, and the breeze across the decks fresh smelling. So far, just another day at the office.

“OOD, the helo tower requests permission to roll out zero â€“ 6.” “Captain, CO of NIMITZ is on the line for you.”

“Request permission to tension Station 4 and 10!”

(to be continued)

Life in the “Fat Ship” Navy – Part II

A nod from the Captain lets me know, as he points at the stations a few decks below, that he is granting permission to tension the rigs, as he begins speaking to the CO of NIMITZ on a handset. I tell the Conning Officer to pass the word on tensioning to the Bridge watch team. The JOOD lifts the handset to his mouth, holding it jauntily with the ear piece pointing down, he keys the push to talk switch and parrots my direction. Hearing the acknowledgement of the tensioning on the amplified speaker on the bridge wing bulwark, I then turn to the bridge-to-station sound powered phone talker standing near the COâ€™s chair on the bridge wing. He is a Yeoman 3rd class. I simply say to him: “Permission granted to tension stations 4 and 10.” He repeats my words. His job is to just be a mouthpiece and not a thinker. He passes requests and directions verbatim. Itâ€™s certainly not because he is unintelligent, for he is an excellent sailor, but in this assignment for UNREP Detail, it is the responsibility of the officers and rig captains to control and manage all that occurs. The YN3 is therefore protected from any responsibility for anything that goes wrong, provided he does not “edit” the communications flowing from three decks below to the command station of the Bridge and back.

The Captain greets the CO of NIMITZ, as the two are now able to talk on a sound powered telephone circuit line that is part of the phone and distance line. The phone and distance line is stretched between the ships, with canvas markers spaced every 20 feet. There is a specific color sequence for the distance flags hanging down, as well as each of them having the measurement labeled on them. GRYBWG is the sequence. Green, red, yellow, blue, white and green indicate 0, 20, 40, 60, 80 and 100 feet respectively, then the pattern of colors repeats. At night, chemlights are rigged for visibility, but in days gone by, single celled flashlights were attached to the markers.

On the focâ€™sle, the phone and distance line is hand tended by line handlers, never being attached to one of the deck edge cleats. They heave in or pay out the line to keep the first green marker over the lifeline. The first discussion the two COâ€™s have is an important safety briefing. My Captain reads the pre-planned actions in the event that an emergency breakaway needs to be done. “We de-tension the span wires, then you trip the pelican hooksâ€¦” is heard. The CV CO acknowledges the reading of the checklist. Then the two get to making sure we are providing everything they need while alongside. Customer service is an inherent skill developed by our shipâ€™s company. Our job is to keep them steaming. Carrying 6 million gallons of Diesel Fuel, Marine (DFM), also designated as F-76 in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) supply system, 2 million gallons of JP-5 jet fuel (F-44 in NATO terms), 600 tons of ordnance, a mountain of spare parts, and equipped with two cargo refrigerators and a cargo chill box, thereâ€™s plenty of chow and “FFV” (fresh fruits and vegetables) the fleet relies on us to deliver.

The Supply Department is headed by a middle grade “Chop,” which is short for “Pork Chop,” a routine nickname for any supply officer, but particularly for us, the Supply Officer himself. His assistant is the â€œLamb Chop,â€• and then the guy who handles the disbursing, Shipâ€™s Store, barber shop and

laundry is just the “DISBO,” short for Disbursing Officer. These three officers keep the internal and external customers loaded out, fed and in clean clothes, and also have the tremendous responsibility of the accountability for millions of dollars of inventory items. The Chop and Lamb Chop are fully involved on the weather decks with the deck crews handling lines and running the winches.

Dressed out in their bulky orange kapoks life jackets and hard hats, they wander the decks, checking the pallets for the proper spray painted striping they use to keep the deliveries separated. Consulting their papers on their clipboards, they communicate with each other and the storekeepers with walkie-talkies. I step into the bridge, reach around the bulkhead near the COâ€™s inside chair, then punch the button in on the 21MC â€œbitch boxâ€• for the Helo Control Tower. “Roll out 06.”

In the helo tower, one of the HC-6 helo detachment pilots is perched on a high stool in the small glassed in tower. He wonâ€™t be flying today. With 6 pilots assigned for the two CH-46D logistics helos, one gets a break, one gets the tower and four of them get to fly from the deck of a moving vessel.

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Life in the “Fat Ship” Navy â€“ Part III

The activity is fast paced, yet controlled chaos. The myriad of issues that are arising, are being handled almost subconsciously at this point. Most of the Shipâ€™s organization are at their maximum output, while others are doing what they always do. Deep in the bowels of the ship, just about half way between the bow and the stern, and several decks below the Main Deck is Fuel Control Central. Here engineers work for a seasoned warrant officer, who manages the flow of cargo fuel to the shipâ€™s alongside. Not only does he have to select the tanks to pump from, it is crucial that he balances where he takes fuel from. Despite how gracefully the ship appears to handle itâ€™s load of about 8.5M gallons of fuel, poor decisions could possibly cause the Ship to “hog” or “sag,” putting dangerous stresses on the keel. Hogging is when there is little fuel in the midships area, with the remaining liquid distributed in the forward and aft tanks. The stress of hogging cause the bow and stern to settle lower in the water, bending the keel up in the center. Sagging is the opposite. Little liquid is forward or aft, so the weight is concentrated in the center area of the keel. Both conditions are to be avoided. Even if they donâ€™t cause a catastrophic failure this day, extended period of this type of shifting to flex the keel reduces the life of the hull.

The corpsmen wander the deck of the ship, wearing white “float coats” with large red crosses. White plastic hardhats and green medical bags adorn them. The Shipâ€™s doctor is also wandering about, just in case of an accident. In the cargo magazines below, Gunnerâ€™s Mates and Boatswainâ€™s Mates, with Storekeepers, located the cargo ammo to transfer it, inventory the projectiles, powders, missiles and small arms ammo by production lots. They segregate the items by the unit they are to be delivered to. Itâ€™s hot, itâ€™s loud and they are handling pallets and â€œcoffinsâ€• of explosives. The accounting is critical for two main reasons, one obvious, and one more subtle. The first is to account for this expensive and dangerous material, the second is to be able to find specific items, inthe case of a safety issue, or a need to send your ammo to some place that needs it. It wasnâ€™tunusual to receive messages indicating lots of ammo had gone out of date, or determined to beunsuitable for use. You have to be able to track down all that hasnâ€™t been expended and mark it tomake sure itâ€™s not set out for use. The ammo if forklifted onto the ammo elevators and sent up tothe cargo deck for staging.

In After Steering, a space, like Fuel Control Central, deep in the bowels of the ship, except it is deep in the stern, in the space right above the massive two rudders that protrude into the sea to provide directional control for the Ship. Under normal operation, the bridge helm as direct control of the rudders via electro-mechanical connections to After Steering. There are large cables that run almost the length of the ship for this purpose, one on the port side of the ship, the other to starboard. This provides redundancy in the event of battle damage.

Large switches on the forward bulkhead of After Steering control which one is being used. In After Steering, a pair of hydraulic motors are mounted to each rudder. This provides another layer of redundancy for this critical function of steering. The space is manned by an After Steering Safety Officer, a quartermaster, who is a qualified helmsman, and an electrician. Under normal circumstances, they have nothing to do. In an emergency, they immediately must take control of the rudders and steer the ship safely, without the benefit of being able to see where they are going. Rudder orders can be relayed by “pointer,” a small arrow head that indicates on a degree scale how to place the rudder. â€œfter Steering, take control of both rudders, steer by pointer” would be passed on the sound powered circuit. A gyro repeater is also provided in this space, where a helmsman could watch I, so the Bridge has the option of telling them to take control and to steer by gyro. The hope nothing too exciting happens.

The “rudder horns,” the large round tube that penetrates the hull and is the attachment point for the steering engines have access plates, held in place by studs and nuts. The labeling on each of them reads “Contaminated Dead Storage.” It is a grim reminder of the world we exist in. It would provide a very isolated area to store those who may have died as a result of radiation sickness and couldnâ€™t be decontaminated, or those who may have been exposed to bio agents and might still be infectious.

(to be continued)

Life in the â€œFat Shipâ€• Navy â€“ Part IV

“Captain, request permission to set Flight Quarters.” The CO looks my way, the sound powered telephone handset still held to his ear, as the NIMITZâ€™s CO and he catch up on how things are going over on the carrier. You know the old A-7 pilot would rather be there, but by being where he is, there is a high likelihood he will be a CV commanding officer, with all the prestige, and responsibility

that goes along with it, once more able to be closely connected with the crews of aircraft, and the â€œsound of freedomâ€• that the aircraft generate. “Granted” he says, as he gives a redundant thumbs up hand signal. I hike back into the Pilot House to tell the Boatswain Mate of the Watch to set flight quarters. He knows the drill. “On the MILWAUKEE, Flight Quarters, Flight Quarters. All hands man your Flight Quarters Stations to launch helicopters!” The preface is so as to not confuse the crew of the ships alongside, as the loudness of the 1MC is sufficient to be heard across the 160 and 120 ft to the ships alongside.

I prop myself in the port bridge wing door, holding onto the upper knife edge of this watertight fitting. I lean against the frame, having been on watch for several hours before the unrep started, it will be a long haul before weâ€™ve passed gas and supplies to the other ship for the task force. I can count on my chief petty officer to come up and check on me periodically. He comes equipped with an extra cup of coffee from the coffee mess that is an almost 24/7 operation one deck below on the starboard aft side of Combat Information Center. He comes up when itâ€™s calmer, while the two ships alongside are settled in and there shouldnâ€™t be any significant passing of tactical signals that he or I need to monitor, or act on. While I donâ€™t comprehend it at the time, he scoping out how Iâ€™m handling things, and using the time to inject more “training” into my still developing mind.

Across the generally 160 ft to the carrier, Iâ€™m not quite eye level with the flight deck, as we still have a good
load of cargo fuel. At other times, we are at the same level as the flight deck, later on operations, when the cargo tanks are much less. The CV rig crews are staged at the level of the massive aircraft elevators. They are fully outfitted in the same personal safety gear as is our crew. Plastic hard hats and bulky orange kapok life vests, bell bottom trouser legs tucked into their socks to prevent them from being caught in a running line. Safety is paramount around the rigs on any ship. The span wire that trolleyed the massive fuel probe across the small expanse between us is tensioned to thousands of pounds per square inch of air and hydraulically generated pressure. If it comes loose while under tension, itâ€™s highly likely there will be accident reports that include personnel casualties.

In contrast to the rig area, there are men in PT gear, jogging on the dark grey non-skid painted surface that is one of the mobile airfields of the nation. They seem no more concerned with the going ons around them than if they were running the track at the local high school. Other people on the catwalks around the flight deck edge lean on the life rails and visually survey the operations in progress. At sea, most ships donâ€™t require the wearing of hats, and for the most part, no one I can see on the carrier has them on. Gazing up to the bridge of the CV, there is a mass of khaki clad people on the small starboard bridge wing. Itâ€™s easy to pick out the CO, as he is in the large chair, his chair, the one no one else dares to sit in (except those who do it in port, when no one is around, or sometimes at night, just to say they have violated the seat of sanctuary of the commanding officer). In front of him is the officer who is conning the ship. I lift my binoculars from where they hang on my chest, a symbol of current authority as an officer on watch, as well as a very practical tool. I smirk as I get an enlarged view of the â€œgaggleâ€• of aviators over there. There are plenty of oak leaves on the collars, and two sets of eagles. I donâ€™t know if Iâ€™m looking at the CO and XO, or the CO and the operations officer, but I can almost conceive of the background conversations. Aviators, reluctantly or not, need their ticket punched, saying they have the skills to conn the ship alongside a replenishment vessel. They love to fly, but most see the development of seamanship skills as no more than a distasteful exercise in order to hopefully ascend to being the one sitting in the hallowed high backed, swiveling chair, kibitzing over the shoulder of some younger aviator one day. I consider the single silver bar on

the open collar of my shirt and bask in a prideful moment, realizing Iâ€™m the Officer of the Deck, in control of a myriad of intricate operations, yet only 24 years old and just beginning my â€œadventure.â€•

“Bunny on the hop, OBOE!” comes out of the 21MC box next to the XOâ€™s chair inside the port bridge wing door, as I marvel at the pained and frantic looks of those steering the CV alongside. Not more than a second later, the brass tube at the rear of the pilot house announcing the impending arrival of an aluminum tube with leather gasketed ends with the rushing sound of compressed air. From three decks below, a naval message has begun itâ€™s journey to the bridge. I walk back near the centerline near the helmsman, glancing as the “bunny” drops into the box below the pneumatic tube. The helm safety officer picks up the tube and opens it, then shakes the single sheet of paper out, handing it to me.

My eyes scan the top line for the “OOO” in the header of the message, indicating an operationally immediate communications. First I look to see who is sending the message and note itâ€™s the USS BIDDLE (CG-34). Next, I quickly review the many addressees, looking intently for any of the many “titles” that make this communiquÃ© addressed to us. In the “To:” section, there we are, “CTU TWO FOUR PT SIX PT ONE.” This means there is an action required of us as task unit commander. I focus my attention to the message classification line just below the multitude of “Info:” addees, then the subject line just below that. Itâ€™s a “RAS REQ” (replenishment request) change for one of the units in the task force. The cruiser needs us to change the amount of milk they want delivered from their original tasking request. I take the message to the starboard bridge wing and hand it off to the XO, who has a Motorola walkie-talkie on which he can contact the Supply Officer. Ask the XO how itâ€™s going, and he tells me the SPRUANCE is having a little trouble seating the refueling probe at their after station. The seated “flags” are popping out of the body of the probe, even when it looks like itâ€™s seated in the receiving coupling. I look aft and see the probe is being pulled back up the angled span wire by our winch operator, then see it released to freefall about 10 feet to the “basket” on SPRUANCE. The blue helmeted sailors on the destroyer, under the watchful eye and skilled guidance of a petty officer heave back on the messenger line hard to help the process of seating the large probe securely in the bell housing. The metal parts slam together and a cheer, muted only slightly by the relative wind, is heard as the experienced men on the rig see the three metal tabs extend from the outside of the bell of the receiver. The probe is seated properly.

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Life in the “Fat Ship” Navy – Part V

I canâ€™t see the flight deck from the bridge, as it is obscured by the after superstructure. That castle of steel plating houses two hangers capable of holding the CH-46 helos, the wardroom, the officerâ€™s staterooms, with the exception of those of the Operations Officer and the Navigator, which are in the forward superstructure two deck below me, along wit the Captainâ€™s Cabin and Office. The Helo Control Tower in on the aft side of the after superstructure, with itâ€™s miniature greenhouse set so as to oversee just about every square inch of the flight deck area. This view is important, so a second set of eyes might watch over every action that occurs on this non-skid coated danger area.

While the flight deck crew, similarly adorned as the CV deck crews, wander about the dark olive glossy painted twin rotor helicopter, where there are no underwing mounted jet turbine intakes poised to suck

in a careless crew member, there are still many things available to cause serious injury or death to one, or a team, who would let their guard down. As the aircraft was pushed manually out onto the gently rolling deck, a helo detachment member sat in the pilotâ€™s seat of the “bird” as the brake rider as blueshirted men with a set of chocks and chains alongside the main mounts, ready to shove the yellow painted chocks on the tires if things start to get out of control, or when the aircraft gets into position. Things go well, and “06” is carefully eased to the center of the large white lined circle on the dark grey deck.

Pallets of cargo are stacked near the deck edge, and towards the place where the helo has been chained down, wrapped in cargo nets and equipped with a pendant. While an outsider may look upon scene and see danger. To those who “work” here, itâ€™s a well orchestrated positioning of ordnance, food, spare parts and mail, stacked no higher on the pallet than is safe to avoid the lowest possible arc of the rotor blades. More pallets are being brought up by elevator to the staging area forward of the hanger doors on each side of the ship. Once the material begins to move from the flight deck by “VERTEP” to the customers ships, the storekeepers will shuttle more loads with standup electric forklifts out onto the deck to replace those ones lifted skyward.

I hear the whine of the auxiliary power unit (APU) of the helo start up begin and rapidly increase in pitch. â€œRequest permission to spread 06â€• comes from the “bitch box.” I walk to the centerline deck at the front of the bridge and pull out a 1 inch notebook labeled “HELO OPS” from the customized aluminum pocket on the left of the desk. I flip the pages in document protectors, looking for the one labeled “Daytime H-46.” Finding the extracted page from NWP-42G, I glance up at the twin dials of anemometer display above the window and note the relative winds are coming from 20 degree to port at 20 knots. I consult the circle with the safe to operate wind envelope area indicated. The winds are well within the acceptable limits. I punch the helo tower button in on the 21MC and grant permission to spread the folded rotors. I punch the release button on the bitch box to clear the connection to the helo tower. I know soon, they will call to start the main engines upâ€¦

(to be continued)

Category

1. Uncategorized

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