

## Peril on the Sea (Part 1)

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Source:

War Stories Collections, Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas

The following document has been reformatted from its original version and partially edited.

It began as a normal day aboard my ship. A Navy mine sweeper operating in hostile Persian Gulf waters. Earlier that morning and well into the afternoon, we had been running the last remaining plot-lines of the minefield grid assigned to us. No underwater mines or “mine-like” objects had been detected, so we plotted a new course to the minefields farther north. The day was fast turning into evening as the sun was just a few degrees above the horizon.

I was CIC (Combat Information Center) watch supervisor of the minesweeper *USS Dextrous*, MCM 13, now steaming through the calm waters of the Persian Gulf. CIC was tasked with monitoring the ships’ course, as-well-as manning the radar screen. We were also tasked with communicating with the aircraft carrier *USS Kitty Hawk*, and other U.S. warships in the area.

The radar screen showed no contacts and the current status reports confirmed that the *USS Kitty Hawk* and her escorts were approximately 70 miles away. Radio traffic was routine, so we were confident that all conditions were normal and the ship was cleared for open steaming. The gulf was ours for the night.

My CIC watch crew had just taken over the evening watch behind the radar screens. As they settled in, they began listening to reports from the various watch posts throughout the ship, while reviewing the pass-down log and checking the charts to confirm the ships’ position. After a while they began their usual conversations about sports, girl friends and family.

Just like clockwork, the roving patrol watch entered CIC through the main hatchway while making his appointed rounds around the ship. And just like the name of his watch “Sounding and

Security” he checked all spaces throughout the ship, performing soundings for water leaks as well as checking for fire and other hazards.

After being assured that all was secure in CIC, he continued down into the bowels of the ship to check the lower compartments. If all was well, he would return after a full round of the ship, in about an hour.

Except for the occasional reports from the look-out watch on the 03 level, located on the upper deck of the ship, everything was quiet and normal. The ships’ speed was a modest 14 knots, on a course 010, just a few points off due north. All was well for the crew of the *USS Dextrous* as everyone settled in for a long six-hour watch.

All of a sudden, the Sounding and Security watch came over the headset with a report that the pump room was taking on water. He immediately requested the assistance of a repair team. His voice was very excited, which gave us pause to consider the seriousness of his report. The repair crew came on the scene, within a few minutes, As SITREPs (Situation Reports) came in from the repair team, faster and with greater urgency, the bridge summoned the Captain to the bridge. From the time of the rover’s first report of flooding, until the time “General Quarters” was sounded, it was approximately ten minutes.

The klaxon sounded over and over, as the quartermaster’s voice shouted on the 1MC, (the ships’ loud speaker). “GENERAL QUARTERS, GENERAL QUARTERS; ALL HANDS MAN YOUR BATTLE STATIONS; . . . REASON FOR GENERAL QUARTERS, FLOODING IN

THE PUMP ROOM.” And then he said the words that no sailor ever wants to hear: “THIS IS NOT A DRILL.”

As I ran the short distance to my battle station from CIC to the bridge, I busied myself by rolling down and buttoning the long sleeves of my coveralls. With an occasional skip and hop, I also pulled my socks up and over my pants cuffs, and buttoned my coveralls up to my neck. All this while simultaneously donning my fire-proof hood and gloves, required just in case I had to fight a fire; heaven forbid.

My mind was racing a-mile-a-minute as I continued to run and listen for further reports from the quartermaster over the 1MC. My battle station was on the bridge where I was the Damage Control plotter. I would listen on the headset for information from the repair teams, as-well-as from Damage Control Central located in the main engine control room. As I would gather current status concerning battle damage and/or repair status, I would mark (plot) these areas on a board that had the ships’ layout, for the skipper to see.

As I entered the bridge, I pulled down the plotting board and donned my headset. My ears were immediately subjected to the shouts and screams of the chaos from the repair parties below as they relayed the seriousness of the situation.

My heart sank as I barely caught the last part of a frantic report saying, “I repeat; the pump room is flooded solid. Water gushing in!! Water gushing in!! The hatch has been sealed!! Repair crew

“Four” reports water in AMR (the Auxiliary Machinery Room)!! Two feet and rising!! Repair crew “Three” reports water in MMR (the Main Machinery room)!! One foot and rising”!!

The skipper’s eyes met mine about the same time as I turned from drawing the plot on the board. I had a feeling that we both had the same thoughts, simultaneously. We were sinking. We were all alone. And the sun was going down.

To be continued.